

Work Engagement among Secondary School English Teachers in Nigeria

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Abstract: Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption. Research suggests that it is one indicator of achievement. This study investigates the work engagement among a sample of 162 secondary school English teachers in Osun, Nigeria, sampled from a list of junior secondary schools in 5 LGAS. Data were collected using the short form of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Reliability in the Nigerian context was high ($\alpha = 0.91$ overall; $\alpha = 0.76, 0.83, 0.79$, respectively for component vigour, dedication and absorption subscales). Results suggest that teachers work engagement is generally high (overall $M = 5.04$ on the 7-point scale; $M_s = 4.99, 5.44, 4.71$, respectively for component vigour, dedication and absorption subscales). Findings are interesting in the context of low student English achievement in this LGAS and implications are suggested in relation to teachers continuing professional development and enhancement of student achievement.

Key words: Work engagement, teachers work engagement, achievement, component vigour, secondary school, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Research in work engagement has been done in various professions including teaching. Many have come to suggest that work engagement or some times also referred to as job engagement has been identified as having correlation with both positive and negative aspects of work achievement (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Mauno *et al.*, 2007; Milner and Hoy, 2002). Work engagement might be influenced by factors like job resources (Bakker *et al.*, 2007) personal factors and other factors like student behaviour, collegial and administrative supports and parental demands and government policy. In terms of teaching profession, issues in work engagement have also received important responses nowadays due to the worldwide high attrition and turnover among teachers. In the USA, for example, Ingersoll (2001) has reported that up to 50% of teachers leave the teaching profession in the first 10 years of their career. Feng (2005) emphasizes that among those who stayed, only a quarter retired while half of them left for other careers. Teacher turnover and attrition also happen other western countries with an estimated 25-40% of beginning teachers leaving their job (Ewing and Smith, 2003). This is also due to the beliefs that teachers' work engagement is a factor of students achievement.

The Nigerian context: Compared to the number from other countries like USA and other western countries, cases of teachers switching career or teachers leaving their jobs in Nigeria is not very high. primary and

secondary school teacher education programmes even though start as soon as one graduates from senior secondary school, many that ended up being a teacher did not plan it out from the onset. Thus, while many of the present crop of teachers plunged themselves into the profession very early by attending a teacher training college, college of education or read education related courses in the universities for so many other ones especially in the secondary schools, the decision came later in the day after not being able to gain good employment in their earlier chosen fields. However, such gatecrashers are required to professionalise their stay in the profession by enrolling for postgraduate diploma in education.

In addition, teacher retention is not a relevant issue when for teachers in Nigeria. This is because there are only few cases of teacher quitting teaching except as a result of death or retirement. Once recruitment is made, cases of quitting teaching due to bad evaluation results are very rare. Although the teaching profession might be as stressful as in other countries, it seems that not many people talk about teacher stress and further effects of the stress on the job of teachers in Nigeria. In most cases, teachers will remain in teaching until retirement day no matter how stressful their work becomes. Unlike teacher attrition and turnover which do not seem to be a significant issue in Nigeria, teachers work engagement is an important aspect of teachers and worth investigating. This is due to the fact that quality teachers are viewed to be important assets in the context of education in Nigeria. Furthermore, although the teacher profession traditionally

has a high social status in Nigeria, it provides for neither high financial satisfaction nor high academic recognition. The term traditionally here is meant to refer to the value in the society where teachers are considered know everything and have social wisdom so that people come to seek for advice to their problems.

Being a teacher in Nigeria: Based on the latest policy approved by the national council of education which centrally controls policy issues in the education sector in Nigeria for anyone to be called a professional teacher, s/he must possess the least of a National Certificate of Education (NCE). While this has been fully implemented in the secondary schools (Junior and Senior), it is yet to be achieved in the primary schools across Nigeria. However, a deadline of 2010 has been slammed on the grade II certificate teachers in the primary schools in the country. The teachers registration council has also been empowered by law to register and issue certificates to professionally trained teachers to make the job a professional one that should command the respect of all citizenry. Unlike in the primary schools, teachers in the junior and senior secondary schools do specialise in different subjects being offered in the schools. They are also known to restrict themselves to the teaching of these subjects only for years as move from schools to schools on transfer in their career thereby becoming specialists in the teaching of these subjects and even becoming examiners for the central examining bodies in the country. This study, therefore will seek to explain the levels of teacher engagement in the particular context of junior secondary school English teachers in Osun state of Nigeria.

Review on the literature: Work engagement has been defined as job engagement which is an employee's interest in enthusiasm for and investment in his or her job (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Further, Kirkpatrick (2007) has argued that empirical studies have revealed that job engagement is associated with various positive behaviours and outcomes for both employees and the organization.

Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) looked at work engagement in a different construct and defined it as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in ones work and persistence in the face of difficulty. Dedication is ones sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. Absorption refers to the state in which one is highly concentrated and happily engrossed in works so that s/he feels time passes quickly and it is difficult to detach from work. Engaged teachers, therefore, feel strong

and vigorous at work, enthusiastic and optimistic about the work they do and are very often immersed in that work. Further Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) state that work engagement is not a momentary and specific state, it is a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behaviour.

Research has suggested that the level of work engagement in general is affected by personal characteristics, the work place (Brown, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 2007) and the characteristics of the work including job status and job demands (Mauno *et al.*, 2007). Teachers' engagement might be affected by their personal characteristics like identity, self-esteem and the sense of efficacy. Therefore, teachers with clearer identity, higher self-esteem and higher sense of efficacy tend to be more engaged in their job.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: The target population of this study was junior secondary school English teachers in Osun Province of Nigeria. The sample was selected based on the requirement that the teacher participants should be English teachers from all five local governments in the rural areas and one in the capital city in the state. Upon the selection and recruitment of the teacher participants, among 196 selected teachers, 162 teachers completed and returned the questionnaire, giving the response rate of 82%.

Measures: Teacher work engagement in this research was measured using the short form of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES 9) developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002). This measure is a three-factor scale consisting of nine items aiming to measure the three dimensions of work engagement vigour, dedication and absorption. Three items were used to measure each of the dimensions. Items used to address the vigour dimension of work engagement include statements like (V1) At my work, I feel bursting with Energy, (V2) At my job, I feel strong and vigorous and (V3) When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.

Participants' dedication to the job of teaching was measured using items such as, (D1) I am enthusiastic about my job, (D2) My job inspires me and (D3) I am proud of the work that I do. Absorption aspect of the teachers was also measured using a three-item subscale consisting of statements like (A1) I feel happy when I am working intensely, (A2) I am immersed in my work (A3) I get carried away when I am working. All nine items were anchored in a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

Procedure of data collection: All samples were directly contacted by the researcher in their schools in the five local governments in Osun State between May and June 2009. In the meetings, teachers who fit the sample criteria were invited to participate in the research and were asked to fill in the work engagement questionnaire. Participation of the teachers was voluntarily.

The questionnaire was presented to the teachers together with other sub-scales of teaching efficacy, including the 3 OSTES sub-scales (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001). Statements were presented in English Language.

Data analyses: Research variables in the administration of the survey, participants demographic data were collected along with the collection of the work engagement data. The collection of these demographic data was aimed at investigating whether or not there were effects of those demographic data on the work engagement of the participants. Those demographic data consisted of participants, gender, ages, educational background, teaching experiences, work status, types of school and the LGAS where the teachers were teaching. Educational background in this research was mainly focused on whether the participants had English teaching education background.

All those six demographic data were investigated to see their main effects as well as their interaction effect. Due to the computer-power limitation, however only main effects and two-way interaction effects could be computed. The collected data were then analyzed using the SPSS statistic package version 14. The analyses on the data covered the descriptive statistics and the Multifactor-multivariate Analysis Of Variance (MANOVA). MANOVA was used in considerations that this research sought to investigate not only the main effects of the independent variables but also the interaction effects in the data. By using MANOVA it is hoped that the analysis would be able to compare groups formed by the categorical independent variables within the sample. Besides by applying the post-hoc test, MANOVA has the ability to provide the possibility of looking further to identify certain independent variables which provide the most effects in differentiating a set of dependent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analyses on the sample revealed that among the sample group of 162 teachers, 62 (34.3%) teachers were male and the other 100 (65.7%) were female teachers. Those teacher sample ranges in their ages from

23-57 years old with 31 (13.8%) teachers having <5 years teaching experience, 68 (44.7%) with 5-15 years and 61 (40.1%) with >15 years teaching experience. The sample teachers were drawn from four LGAS in the rural areas and one Municipal LGA in the State, 22 (15.5%) from Irewole LGA, 27 (17.8%) from Olorunda, 33 (21.7%) from Ola-Oluwa, 25 (16.4%) from Ola-Oluwa and 45 (29.6%) from Odo-Otin. Results suggest that the work engagement among the junior secondary school English teachers in Osun State of Nigeria is generally high (overall Mean = 5.04, SD = 1.13 on the 7-point likert-type scale; M = 4.99, SD = 1.13 for vigour, M = 5.44, SD = 1.08 for dedication and M = 4.71, SD = 1.03 for absorption). The reliability of the data is also high ($\alpha = 0.91$ overall; $\alpha = 0.76, 0.83, 0.79$, respectively for component vigour, dedication and absorption subscales).

Multifactor multivariate Analysis Of Variance (MANOVA) revealed that there were no significant main effects found in the data. There was no significant differences in work engagement between male and female teachers ($F(57, 152) = 0.176, p > 0.05$). The participants' ages did not have significant effects on subjects work engagement ($F(177, 139) = 0.983, p > 0.05$). Education background had also no significant effect on the work engagement of the teacher sample ($F(57, 149) = 0.131, p > 0.05$). This means that both teachers with or without English teaching education background engage equally with their job. Teaching experience had no significant effect in on subjects work engagement ($F(116, 150) = 0.305, p > 0.05$). There were no differences in work engagement among teachers with different status ($F(116, 149) = 0.613, p > 0.05$). Types of school where the teachers were teaching did not contribute significant differences in the level of teachers work engagement ($F(57, 152) = 0.442, p > 0.05$). The LGAS where teacher sample are teaching have no significant effects on the work engagement of the teachers ($F(177, 152) = 0.914, p > 0.05$). Furthermore, multivariate analysis of variance did not find any interaction effects among the variables (Table 1).

There are no significant effects of any independent variables on the work engagement of the teacher sample. This is however surprising base on some general expectations that there would be differences in work engagement between male and female teachers, even though there is no research yet to prove gender differences in teachers work engagement. In the Nigerian context, males are expected to provide the main financial support to the family. Given that teaching profession does not provide good financial returns, responsibility to provide living for male teachers will to some extent be a factor potentially raising differences in the teacher engagement. While female teachers might feel secure with

Table 1: Frequency distribution of teacher sample

Independent variables	Number	%
Gender		
Male	62	34.2
Female	100	65.8
missing figures	0	0.0
Ages		
<30	24	9.5
31-40	72	51.8
41-50	41	27.0
>50	12	7.9
Missing figures	13	8.6
English teaching education background		
Yes	144	94.7
No	15	3.3
Missing	03	1.9
Teaching experiences		
<5 years	21	13.8
5-15 years	78	44.7
>15 years	61	40.1
Missing	02	1.3
LGAS		
Osogbo	22	14.5
Olorunda	27	17.8
Ola-Oluwa	33	22.7
Irewole	35	16.4
Odo-Otin	45	29.6
Missing	0	0.0

the low income and enjoy their teaching position due to their limited financial necessity in this case to provide additional financial support to the family, male teachers will have to find other jobs to provide livings for the family. The responsibility to do the duty of the other job (s) will take a certain amount of time, efforts and energy of male teachers from the teaching profession. Male teachers, therefore will be potentially less engaged in their teaching work. Data on the engagement of junior secondary school English teachers, however tell a different story. There is no significant contribution of gender on the differences in work engagement among the teachers.

Difference in ages is also a potential cause of differences in work engagement among teachers. Older teachers might show either lower engagement due to the more responsibilities they have or higher engagement level due to their more settled profession. However this is not the case based on the data. Differences in ages do not stimulate differences in the level of engagement of the teachers in this state. Furthermore, the researcher also anticipated to see the influence of teacher status in work engagement. As earlier mentioned, since they are all on tenured employment and thus may have a more secure position given there are not many cases of teachers losing their jobs after gaining this professional status. Although one might argue that a secure position will bring about higher level of engagement, it can come up with a completely different fact. In the Nigerian context, it was supposedly to happen that after a teacher gained this

secure position as a civil servant, s/he would be less engaged in the teaching profession and started to look for and engage with the second or third jobs. Data on teachers work engagement collected from the sample, however, do not support the assumption.

The nature of the LGAS where the teacher sample taught was supposedly to have a certain contribution on the teachers work engagement. Those LGAS with positive policy towards teachers and teacher development program were also expected to have positive contribution compared to those with less positive ones. Research has suggested that work engagement to some extent is boost by opportunities and resources (Mauno *et al.*, 2007; Oplatka, 2004). Differences in resources provided by different LGAS should contribute differences in work engagement of teachers in those areas. The data again, however, reject this theoretical assumption. There are no significant differences of teachers work engagement due to different LGAS where they teach. One factor that could be adduced for this development in the Nigerian context however is the fact that there is usually a central coordinating commission (state teaching service commission) that regulates and ensure same conditions of service as well motivating teachers in the rural areas with special allowance which boost their morale always and make them not to feel any sense of loss of city life. Regarding the fact that there are no differences in the results of either main or two-way interaction effects, it is, therefore interesting and worth asking the question concerning; what makes teachers remain highly engaged in the teaching profession?

Motivation for choosing teaching as a profession:

Research has suggested that there are three types of motives driving people to choose teaching as profession. Although they vary among individuals, such motives can in general be classified into extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic motives (Brookhart and Freeman, 1992). Extrinsic motives include both material such as salary and pension and psychological benefits like job security and longer vacation. Intrinsic motives usually deal with the perceived nature of teaching profession. Many people still believe in the respected nature of teaching profession, such as the honour of being a teacher and teaching as a caring and noble profession. Altruistic motives cover such motives like the willingness to work with children, the desire to influence the future generation and helping students to gain successes. It is quite unfortunate however that most studies in motives for choosing teaching as a profession were done among either pre-service teachers (Thom, 1992; Yong, 1995) or beginning teachers (Brown, 1992; Watt *et al.*, 2007) with

less attention being paid to the motives in relation to the level of engagement of experienced teachers or teachers who have been in the profession for relatively long time for example <15 years. It is therefore not very relevant to look at the level of engagement of the junior secondary school English teachers in Osun in a way suggested by the previous research. However, it is true that there must be something that makes these teachers remains highly engaged in the profession.

CONCLUSION

This study provide insight into the social and religious aspects of teachers work engagement. It suggests that in a certain context like that of Nigeria, the role of social and religious norms need to be taken into consideration in seeking for factors related to teachers work engagement. However, such factors need to be verified in a larger scale of research involving more participants. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data will enrich the understanding on the important issue in teachers work engagement.

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