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Evaluating Individual Characteristics' Work Engagement of Primary School Teachers Moderated by Organisational Factors in Acholi-Sub Region, Uganda

Gilbert Olanya¹ & Wilberforce Okongo, PhD¹

¹ Kyambogo University, P. O. Box, 1, Kyambogo, Kampala, Uganda.

* Author for Correspondence Email: olanyabaker@gmail.com

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Keywords:

Work Engagement,
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Organisational Factors.

This paper presents the influence of individual characteristics on primary school teachers' work engagement as moderated by organizational management factors in northern Uganda. The main objective was to examine the influence of individual characteristics on the work engagement of primary school teachers in the Acholi sub-region. By applying a cross-section survey design, the study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The primary data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire form with a total sample of 326 participants from the selected schools. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that the rate of teacher absorption as well as their self-efficacy was higher than their professional dedication and commitment to their academic service delivery. In conclusion, individual teacher characteristics were vital for the work engagement outputs of the school teachers to promote school work engagement in the Acholi northern Uganda's sub-region. The study recommended that the headteachers, education officers, boards, committees, and the government should approve individual factors that promote the work engagement ethics of the primary school teachers for better performance.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been established that, in educational institutions like schools, work engagement has become a human resource development strategy to enhance the commitment and involvement of teachers in their regular responsibilities (Sekhar et al., 2018). High levels of teacher work engagement are linked to effective teaching support, stronger collaboration with learners, and a favourable interaction that promotes students' positive academic attitudes. In this paper, individual characteristics refer to a person's attributes, beliefs, and attitudes that drive their decision toward certain behaviours (Ghiwaa et al., 2023). Chaudhary (2017) indicates that individual characteristics refer to demographic variables and dispositional characteristics of people. Operationally, individual characteristics were defined based on Chen et al. (2001) to refer to gender, age, education level, marital status, work experience, teacher position, and the dispositional factor of self-efficacy. On the other hand, age is the number of years a person can be by which he or she can be classified for identification; thus, individuals can be classified as young, middle-aged, or old (Mugizi et al., 2015). The conceptual framework was developed based on ideas obtained from Chen et al. (2001), Eisenberger et al. (2020), and Schaufeli et al. (2006). The framework shows that individual characteristics include gender, age, education level, marital status, work experience, teacher position, and self-efficacy.

Many studies have indicated that most primary schools and school teachers in the study area do not comply with school standards and procedures (Poro et al., 2019a; World Bank, 2020). For example, many teachers in the region were heavily involved in drinking alcohol instead of concentrating on their learners and some of them had been often arrested for drinking alcohol during teaching time (Ayugi & Openyitho, 2023). Individual characteristics denote the personal attributes, beliefs, attitudes, and characteristics of an individual that influence their decision toward certain behaviours (Ghiwaa et al., 2023). The factors describe demographic variables and dispositional characteristics of individuals (Chaudhary, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Although individual characteristics of school teachers are vital for their work engagement in Uganda's national education system, most primary schools in the Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda, have been grappling with the challenges for the last few decades. In a move to promote the productive engagement of teachers, the government of Uganda has so far trained teachers, paid their salaries on time, and provided teaching and learning materials timely among others (Poro et al., 2019b). Besides, some organizations have invested in education by providing technical support through teacher training (MacLellan, 2019). Work engagement of teachers was studied in terms of absorption, dedication, and vigour. Individual characteristics covered gender, age, education level, marital status, work experience, teacher position, and the dispositional factor of self-efficacy. Normally, highly engaged teachers are contented with their work and more likely to employ creative teaching methods and display organizational citizenship behaviours leading to teaching effectiveness (Zhang et al., 2021). Acholi sub-region in the Northern was the geography of the study with a focus on the four districts of Gulu, Amuru, Nwoya, and Omoro. Work engagement of teachers (dependent variable), individual characteristics (independent variables), and organizational factors (moderating variables) were the study variables.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Study Area/Population

The study adopted a cross-section survey design backed by mixed quantitative and qualitative data collection methods carried out in the selected four districts of the Acholi sub-regions in Uganda. The population for this study involved primary school teachers in the Acholi sub-region from both government and private primary schools. These districts were selected because of the continued poor performance of the teachers in the Acholi sub-region. Using the table for sample determination by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the sample size was determined. A sample size of 352 respondents was employed. The selection of the sample involved multistage sampling. To determine the number of

teachers to be selected from each distinct and two types of schools involved, proportionate sampling was employed.

Data Collection Procedure

The government schools had about twice the number of teachers in primary schools in each of the study districts, two-thirds (59) of the teachers were selected from government schools, and one-third (29) of them were selected from private schools. A stratified random sampling approach was adopted to select respondents from the study schools. This gave equal opportunity to all the potential respondents to be fairly selected to participate in the process. This method also helped to reduce the chances of bias when collecting data as well as to increase the validity of the process with its subsequent results. The stratification process that ensued was based on the participants' work experience; gender, and educational levels. Out of the 352 questionnaires that were given out, 326 were returned fully completed and were the ones considered for analysis.

Sampling Techniques

The study adopted the proportionate sampling method to select the number of districts and schools that participated in the process. The teachers from each study school were randomly selected. The teachers were selected at random as recommended by simple random sampling, based on the sampling frame that contained their names (Fricker, 2017). The simple random selection was used to gather objective data that were typical of the entire teachers. This helped to collect more broadly applicable and generalizable data for the study. The research effectively used questionnaire survey forms to collect primary data based on the previously designed instruments that were pilot-tested and approved for the research. Since the reliability of the variables had been confirmed by the earlier assessment tools to be valid.

Data Collection and Quality Control

A Self-Administered (SAQ) was the data collection instrument used to collect data. This was because the study was mainly quantitative data. The questionnaire comprised a title, cover letter, and three sections that are; A, B, and C. Section A was

on work engagement of teachers, section B was on individual characteristics, and on organizational factors. Apart from the questions on individual demographic characteristics which were nominal, the rest of the questions were based on the ordinal scale that is applied in the five-point Likert Scale from one (1) (strongly disagree) to five (5) (Strongly agree). Data quality assurance involved ensuring that the data collected were valid and reliable. The validity and reliability of quantitative data were attained by carrying out a pilot study of 50 teachers from the primary schools outside the studied schools.

Validity and Reliability of the Process

The extent to which a tool measures precisely what it is supposed to assess is known as its validity (de Souza et al., 2017). By ensuring that the indicators on the primary variables (independent and dependent variables) in the instruments adhered to the study's conceptual framework, the researcher established the content validity of the instruments. The question indicators were validated, and the supervisors' opinions regarding the instruments' indicators' applicability, phrasing, and clarity were solicited. SPSS was then used to compute Exploratory Factor Analysis to determine the construct validity for the pilot and the final data. Indicators loading highly that is above 0.50 were considered valid while indicators indicating low loading and those split loading that is those loading highly more than once were discarded. This was because indicators loading low were considered weak while split-loading indicators were considered complex (Taherdoost et al., 2022). This helped in attaining the validity of the instruments. Reliability is a measure of the consistency of the indicators of the data collection instrument (Mohajan, 2017). Using the Cronbach Alpha (α) method offered by SPSS, the reliabilities of the indicators in the different constructs were examined. At the benchmark of $\alpha = 0.70$ and above, reliability was achieved for the indicators in the various constructs (Viladrich et al., 2017).

Data Processing and Presentation.

Data management involves processing and analyzing the data collected. The data were

processed to ascertain their accuracy while analysis enabled the presenting, analyzing, and interpretation of the results. The data collected were fed into the computer using SPSS Version 26.0. Thereafter, there was the detection and treatment of missing data, and outliers, and carrying out diagnostic tests. Diagnostic tests included normality tests and linearity.

Ethical Considerations

The study sought ethical approval from the Gulu University Research Ethics Committee (GUREC), and then the study was also registered with the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST). After obtaining the above clearance, the researcher got a letter of introduction from the graduate school Kyambogo University to seek permission to allow the researcher to have access to the respondents. The views of each respondent were treated with utmost confidentiality and the instruments were anonymous. The researcher collected information from respondents after their informed consent to participate in the study. They obtained advance permission from the relevant District Education Officers and the head teachers. However, the respondents were assured that any information provided would be used only for academic purposes. In general, a high level of transparency or openness regarding the procedure, purpose, and nature of the research was observed by the researcher. The overall participation in the study was purely voluntary, confidential, and anonymous.

RESULTS

The principal objective was to examine the relationships between the individual characteristics of the work engagement of the school teachers in each of the four study districts in the Acholi sub-region in Uganda. The individual factors covered were namely; sex, age group in years, highest level of education attained, marital status, teaching experience, position in the school, and self-efficacy. The first six individual characteristics were measured using the nominal scale with appropriate options given. The seventh individual factor, self-efficacy was scaled using the five-point Likert Scale. Where, 1 = strongly disagree. 2 = disagree. 3 = undecided. 4 = agree. and 5 = strongly agree.

The first set of results on the sex-based performance of the respondents showed that the greater percentage (59.1%) of the respondents were males while the females were 40.9%. The results on age groups of the teachers in years showed that the greater percentage (51.4%) was of those that were 30 but below 40 years followed by 29.1% who were 40 and above. Hence, most of the teachers were those above 30 years. Hence, they responded based on higher experience. Regarding education levels, the highest percentage (48.6%) had grade III certificates followed by 29.7% with diplomas degrees, 19.8% had bachelor's degrees and 1.9% had postgraduate qualifications.

Regarding the teachers' marital status, the findings revealed that the highest percentage (78.0%) was married. This indicates that most of the teachers in the schools were married. Regarding the teaching experience of the teachers, the highest percentage (46.5%) had taught for five but less than 10 years, followed by 29.79% who had taught for less than 5 years, 15.5% who had taught for more than 10 years, and only 8.0% for those who had taught in the schools for less than one year. Concerning the positions of the teachers in the schools, the highest percentage (57.0%) had leadership positions such as head teachers, heads of departments, class teachers, and heads of subject among others and 4.0% were only subject teachers.

To evaluate variations in work engagement of teachers depending on their age, the findings revealed that the mean score of work engagement was higher for the teachers that were 40 and above years (mean (of 3.47), followed by those up to 30 years (mean (of 3.42) and those that were 30 but below 40 years having the lowest (mean (3.22)). The observed F-statistic ($F = 5.385$) was large with a significant level of significance ($p = 0.0005 < 0.05$). Thus, the variation in work engagement of teachers by age group was significant. An LSD posthoc test indicated that teachers above 40 years (mean (3.47) had a significantly higher mean than those who were 30 but below 40 years (mean (3.22)). Therefore, the work engagement of teachers' differed according to their age groups with older teachers having higher engagement levels.

To evaluate variations in the work engagement of teachers depending on levels of education, the findings indicated that the mean score on work engagement was higher for teachers with grade III certificates (mean = 3.36), followed by those with diplomas (mean = 3.32), then those with Bachelor degrees (mean = 3.28) and those with postgraduate qualifications had the lowest work engagement (mean = 3.22). The observed F-statistic ($F = 0.332$) was low and the level of significance ($p = 0.802$, $p > 0.05$) was high. Thus, the variations in work engagement of teachers according to levels of education were low. Therefore, work engagement levels did not differ according to levels of education.

To evaluate variations in the work engagement of teachers depending on marital status, the results showed that teachers who were married (mean = 3.35) had higher work engagement, followed by those who were single but never married (mean = 3.29), than those who were divorced (mean = 3.14) and those who widowed had the lowest (mean = 3.14). The observed F-statistic ($F = 0.486$) was small with a high level of significance ($p = 0.692$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, the variations in work engagement of teachers by their marital statuses were not significant. Therefore, the work engagement of teachers did not differ according to the marital status of teachers in primary schools.

To evaluate variations in the work engagement of teachers depending on teaching experience, the findings showed that teachers who had worked for less than 1 year (mean = 3.46) had higher work engagement, followed by those who had served for less than 5 years (mean = 3.44) with those who 5 but less than 10 years and More than 10 years have equal lower means (mean = 3.26). The observed F-statistic ($F = 1.971$) was small with a higher level of significance ($p = 0.118$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, the variations in work engagement of teachers to their teaching experience were not significant.

To establish whether there existed differences in the work engagement of teachers according to their positions in the schools, a Student's t-test analysis was carried out and the results revealed that on average, subjects teacher only (mean = 3.37) had a higher mean than those in administrative positions (mean = 3.30). The Student's t ($t = 4.321$) was high

and the probability or level of significance ($p = 0.038$) was lower than $\alpha = 0.05$ ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the work engagement of teachers significantly differed according to position in the schools with subject teachers only having higher work engagement levels.

The concept of self-efficacy which was identified as the seventh individual characteristic was studied using eight indicators. The findings about whether teachers could solve personal problems in addition to their job engagements were that the majority (76.4%) agreed while only 11.1% of the respondents disagreed, and 12.4% said they were not sure. The high mean (3.98) close to code four suggested that teachers could always manage to solve difficult problems of their jobs in the schools. Considering if someone opposed them, they could find the means to get what they wanted in the schools, the greater percentage (57.2%) concurred while 22.9% did not and 19.8% were not sure. The moderate mean (3.41) indicated that fairly, teachers could find the means to get what they wanted in the schools even if someone opposed them.

When asked if they would remain calm when facing difficulties in the schools, most of them (89.3%) agreed, a small number (7.8%) disagreed, and too few (5.0%) said they were not sure. The high mean (4.02) meant teachers indicated that they remained calm when facing difficulties in the schools. Regarding the teachers feeling confident that their abilities were equal to or exceeded those of their colleagues in the schools, a significant percentage (88.8%) concurred while 8.1% did not, and 13.3% were not sure. The high mean (3.87) implied that teachers concurred that they teachers felt confident that their abilities were equal to or exceeded those of their colleagues in their respective primary schools.

Considering if the teacher's past experiences increased their confidence that they performed successfully in the schools, a big majority (88.8%) agreed with the statement while very few (5.9%) disagreed with it, and only a handful (5.3%) said they were not sure. The high mean (4.10) indicated that the teachers ascertained that their past experiences increased their confidence that they performed successfully in the schools. When asked if their past accomplishments increased their

confidence to perform successfully in the schools, a big majority (88.5%) agreed while very few (6.5%) disagreed with it, and too few (5.0%) said they were not sure. The high mean (4.11) implied that the teachers indicated that past accomplishments increased their confidence to perform well in their respective schools.

About the teachers' job satisfaction in the schools and their expectations, the majority (59.8%) agreed with the statement while 29.4% of them disagreed, and 10.8% reported that they were not sure. The moderate mean (3.38) indicated that the teachers indicated that fairly, the jobs in the schools satisfied their expectations. The findings revealed that only two of the six individual characteristics namely sex ($r = 0.530$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), age groups ($r = 0.566$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), educational level ($r = 0.568$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), teaching experience ($r = 0.316$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), position in the organization ($r = 0.589$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), and self-efficacy ($r = 0.468$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$) had a positive and significant relationship with work engagement of primary teachers.

DISCUSSION

The results on individual characteristics of work engagement on organizational factors and work engagement moderating effect are discussed. Concerning age, the findings indicated that the engagement of teachers' differed according to their age groups with older teachers having higher engagement levels. The regression results also revealed that age was a strong antecedent of the engagement of teachers. This was supported by Douglas and Roberts (2020) indicated that employees older than 50 years had discernable engagement levels compared to those below. Also, the study agreed with Chaudhary and Rangnekar (2017) found a lack of notable variations in employees' levels of work engagement because of age. In the same vein, Rana et al. (2019) indicated the existence of discernable variations according to age.

Relatedly, Sharma et al. (2017) divulged that work engagement significantly differed with the age of employees. Further, Sharma and Rajput (2021) indicated that work engagement levels varied greatly according to age. Similarly, Zhang and Farndale (2022) indicated that engagement was significantly

predicted by age profiles with younger ones poised better than older employees. However, Shukla et al. (2015) were in disagreement indicating no discernable variations in engagement scores according to age. However, with the study's findings agreeing with most prior studies, it can be inferred that the effective engagement of teachers varied according to their age groupings, with older teachers having higher engagement levels.

Regarding education level and work engagement, work engagement levels did not differ and this was also supported by Chaudhary and Rangnekar (2017) who indicated a lack of notable variations in employees' levels of work engagement because of education level. In the same vein, Sharma and Rajput (2021) indicated a lack of discernable variations in work engagement according to education level. However, the finding disagreed with Hakanen et al. (2019) indicated that primary school leavers exhibited lower engagement levels than those with doctorates. Also, Sharma et al. (2017) divulged high discernable work engagement levels as a result of education level. Based on the findings, which agree with the majority of researchers, it emerged that work involvement levels did not differ by level of education.

Concerning marital status and work engagement, it was divulged that the work engagement of teachers did not differ according to marital status, results indicated it had no tangible impact on work engagement. This was in agreement with Köse (2016) who revealed that it was not to be an important predictor of work engagement. Relatedly, Prasad and Sandhyavani (2019) reported that there were no significant differences in work engagement of workers according to marital status. Willmer et al. (2021) revealed no significant associations were discovered between marital status and work engagement. However, the finding disagreed with Chan et al. (2020) indicating the existence of high disparities in work engagement according to marital status. Also, Shukla et al. (2015) found no discernable disparities in work engagement due to marital status. On their part, Çemberci et al. (2022) revealed that only employee absorption changed according to marital status.

Concerning experience and work engagement, no discernable variations were established due to the variable as advocated by Chaudhary and Rangnekar (2017) that a lack of discernable variations in work engagement according to job tenure or experience. Similarly, Sharma and Rajput (2021) revealed a lack of discernable variations in work engagement due to job experience. Sharma et al. (2017) found no disparities in work engagement as far as job experience was concerned. However, the finding disagreed with Çemberci et al. (2022) reported discernable work engagement because of job experience. In the same vein, Rana et al. (2019) divulged that working experience had distinguishable effects on employee work engagement. Shukla et al. (2015) established distinguishable differences in employee engagement according to working experience.

Regarding position in the school and work engagement, engagement of teachers significantly differed according to position in the schools with subject teachers only having higher work engagement levels. This also confirmed the regression results which revealed that position in the school had a significant influence on the work engagement of teachers. Similarly, Chaudhary and Rangnekar (2017) noted no distinguishable variations in work engagement due to position in the organizational hierarchy. In the same vein, Monje and Calvo (2023) reported disparities in work engagement according to position in the hierarchy of an organization. Also, Rana et al. (2019) divulged that demographic characteristics including designation significantly affected employee work engagement.

Concerning employee self-efficacy and work engagement, self-efficacy was deemed a discernable antecedent of teacher engagement consistent with Carter et al. (2018) who indicated the existence of positive significant linkages with work engagement. Similarly, Chan et al. (2017) indicated that self-efficacy led to the engagement of workers. Han and Wang (2021) demonstrated that self-efficacy had a substantial association with work engagement. Similarly, Xiao et al. (2022) indicated that employee self-efficacy was a major predictor of their work engagement. The findings agreed with previous

scholars, indicating that self-efficacy had a significant and beneficial impact on teacher work engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, individual characteristics were crucial factors for the work engagement of teachers and these included sex, age, positions in the schools, and self-efficacy. In the selected schools, males were more engaged than females older teachers were more engaged, and also subject teachers had higher work engagement levels. In addition, highly efficacious teachers were more engaged because they felt that they could not be impeded by institutional problems, could get what they wanted in the schools, could deal efficiently with unexpected events, and could remain calm when facing difficulties in the schools. They had confidence in their abilities, their past experiences increased their confidence to perform successfully and their past accomplishments enhanced their confidence to perform very well. It was vital to give individual characteristics and organizational factors equal priority in all the schools.

Recommendations

It was highly recommended that the individual characteristics of work engagement of teachers moderated by organizational factors were enhanced when the head teachers, education officers and other stakeholders involved in the management of schools should consider individual factors when supporting teachers to promote work engagement of teachers. Specifically, female teachers should be given more support than their male counterparts, schools should use older teachers to support the juniors and more teachers should be engaged at subject levels. Additionally, schools should promote the self-efficacy of teachers by building their confidence can be calm and committed to performing much better.

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