

# A Study of Work Engagement among Teachers in India

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The economic, social as well as emotional growth of a nation depends on the soundness of the educational background of its workforce. Teachers play a very influential role in shaping an individual's character and outlook towards life and its various experiences. It is extremely important that teachers are engaged in, interested in and love their jobs, if justice needs to be done to the profession. The current study aims to explore the differences in gender with regards work engagement, among teachers of private and municipal schools in Mumbai.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study is non-experimental, cross sectional and quantitative in nature. A questionnaire survey was conducted. The target population of the study included primary school teachers from municipal and private schools in Mumbai, India. Random sampling technique was followed. 350 questionnaires were distributed of which 326 were returned yielding 93% response rate.

**Findings:** Significant difference was obtained between work engagement levels of male and female teachers though the effect size was small.

**Research Limitations:** A cross sectional study is a single time snap shot of teachers' views. It is therefore suggested that a longitudinal study be conducted. Also a qualitative study should complement the quantitative study in order to understand the situation in a holistic manner. Geographical constraints make the study less generalizable across samples.

**Originality:** The study is an important contribution to the scarce research work that is done in the field of work engagement among teachers in India.

**Keywords:** Burnout, Teachers, Work Engagement

## **Introduction**

The economic, social as well as emotional growth of a nation depends on the soundness of the educational background of its people. According to the Census Board of India 55% of the population would be under the age of 20 by 2015. Thus, it is expected that by 2020, the young Indian would reach around 30 years of age compared to an older population in the West and major Asian countries (Basumatary, 2012). This would imply that a large, young and energetic workforce would be available to contribute to the overall growth and development of the country in various fields. The contribution of this class to the economic development of the country will completely depend on their educational backgrounds and how they have been shaped in their growing process right from their early childhood and schooling days. Teachers play a very influential role in shaping an individual's character and outlook towards life and its various experiences. It is extremely important that teachers are engaged and love their jobs if justice needs to be done to the profession. Organizations invest a lot in their most valuable assets, their people. Individual outcomes like decreased work engagement, decreased morale and demotivation can cause considerable loss to organizations in monetary terms as well as productivity. Principals and teachers determine the quality of education (Hallinger and Heck, 1996). Educational activities are carried out by teachers in the class which requires them to

spend maximum time with students. Thus, teachers are responsible for students' achievement (Rowan, Knobel, Bigum, & Lankshear, 2002) directly or indirectly. Teaching is a very emotional process and involves more than just knowing subject matter and delivering the same in the class. A teacher needs to be sensitive to understand, analyse and handle every student who has his own unique limitations and strengths. The teacher apart from preparing for his/her daily schedule, has to work extra hard to gauge the mental and physical aspects of his/her students and decide his/her teaching style so that everybody learns. Work engagement is a relatively new construct. Olivier and Rothmann (2007) suggest that work is an expression of the individual performing the task Kahn (1990) suggested that people, while at work, make significant contributions either physically, emotionally or cognitively. What is most important at work is to understand when people are completely engrossed in their job and fully exhibited their physical, emotional as well as cognitive abilities at work and when they remain completely withdrawn and dis-associated from their tasks. This movement between commitment and withdrawal is termed as personal engagement and personal disengagement (Kahn, 1990). When there is personal engagement people anchor themselves to their work roles and are productive to the fullest extent without any restraint in exhibiting their holistic abilities (Kahn, 1990).

It may not be wrong to say that the teacher is responsible for quality of education imparted, and also for influencing the intention of continuing to attend school, in the minds of young students. A disengaged or burnt out teacher remains uninterested in his/her work thereby causing students also to lose interest in schooling and this results in increased drop outs from school. It is therefore essential to ensure the creation of a school environment wherein the teacher willingly contributes his/her skills for the healthy all-round development of students who would be the future responsible citizens of the country. Primary school is the grass root level where the young vulnerable and receptive minds of students can be moulded and channelized in the right direction through efforts of teachers. Considering that today's students are tomorrow's citizens and future employees of big organizations, the issue of teachers' disengagement and disinterest at work needs to be addressed on an urgent basis.

### **Problem Statement**

In India, the third largest workforce happens to be teachers among the white collared workers. Research studies on the work engagement of teachers in India are very few and this needs to be addressed to improve the quality of education and encourage more children to enrol themselves in schools. In India there is a severe shortage of primary-level school teachers (around 5.86 lakh) and upper primary level teachers (around 3.5 lakh) (Pathak, 2014).

*Rationale for choosing gender differences in work engagement:* Gender difference in work engagement was chosen as a main focus in the present study for the following reasons: 1) Females comprise a large proportion of the workforce in teaching, in India. There are approximately 69 lakh teachers of which approximately 29 lakh are women (Chhopia, 2012). 2) Research studies often suggest that women are most of the times underestimated and undermined as far as capability, competence and leadership styles are concerned (Matlin, 2004). 3) Research studies also show that women experience more burnout symptoms than men (Innstrand, Langballe, Falkum, & Aasland, 2011; Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vala-chakis, 2006).

**Significance**

The study is an attempt to make an important contribution to the scarce research work that is done in the field of work engagement among teachers in India. It can also enable education authorities to understand the difference in engagement levels and to plan interventions to improve the situation so that more dedicated teachers take up the profession which in turn could motivate more students to enroll themselves in schools.

**Research question**

Is there any difference in work engagement among male and female teachers in private and municipal schools of Mumbai?

**Literature Review*****Work engagement***

Work engagement can be defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002a.). *Vigour* is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience at work. This implies that when a person has a high vigour at work, he/she will be focused on his task and remain undaunted in his efforts and contributions even if hurdles or problems were to come in his/her way. *Dedication* refers to a state of being intensely involved in one’s work and experiencing a sense of pride, inspiration and enthusiasm from one’s work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Langelaan, Bakker, Doomen, Van & Schaufeli, 2006). When an individual is dedicated he/she finds a lot of significance in his/her job and derives pride in doing it well. *Absorption* is characterised by significant levels of concentration and engrossment in one’s work. In this dimension, when at work, the individual finds that time passes quickly and detachment from work is difficult (Schaufeli et al., 2002a; Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006). Burnout is a state of emotional degradation that occurs progressively, leading to a decrease in motivation and commitment to work (Schaufeli, Leiter & Maslach, 2009). Burnout is characterised by exhaustion, cynicism and a lack of professional efficacy. Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) have suggested that vigour and dedication are direct opposites of exhaustion and cynicism. Thus engaged employees are characterised by high levels of energy, enthusiasm and immersion in their jobs as compared to burnt-out employees (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Taris, 2008).

***Predictors of work engagement***

Mostert and Rothmann (2006) have suggested that variables like age, gender and race, job stress and personality traits could affect work engagement. Jackson, Rothmann and Van de Vijver (2006) have suggested that job resources such as job control, supervisor support, access to information and an effective organisational climate were positively linked to work engagement. A study by Hakanen, Perhoniemi & Toppinen-Tanner (2008) has shown that presence of job resources would most certainly result in work engagement. They argued that when an employee had control over his/her job and experienced organization based self-esteem he/she would exhibit high levels of work engagement. Hakanen, et al. (2008) have provided evidence of job resources being a precursor to work engagement. Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2005) have suggested that job resources (performance feedback, social support from colleagues and supervisory coaching) are among the main predictors of work engagement.

***Work engagement and organizational outcomes***

Work engagement has been shown to be positively associated with various organizational outcomes. Research studies have suggested a positive relationship between work engagement and self-efficacy and it has been argued that self-efficacy may precede or follow work engagement (Salanova, Grau, Cifre & Llorens, 2000a). Work engagement is related to positive attitudes towards work and towards the organization, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and low turnover intention (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Work engagement is also related to positive organizational behaviours such as, personal initiative and learning motivation (Sonnentag, 2003). In a study on telecommunications employees in Jordan, it was found that work engagement was an important predictor of organization commitment (Abu-Shamaa, Al-Rabayah, & Khasawneh, 2015). In a study on nurses in psychiatric hospitals in Belgium, results suggested that conducive environments were associated with work engagement which in turn was associated with job satisfaction and intention to stay in the profession (Van Bogaert, Wouters, Willems, Mondelaers, & Clarke, 2013).

**Methodology*****Research design***

The study focuses on teachers' perceptions on work engagement. This study is a non-experimental, cross sectional and quantitative in nature. A questionnaire survey was conducted.

***Sampling***

The target population of the study included primary school teachers from municipal and private schools in Mumbai, India. The sample eligibility criterion was teachers should know to read and write English. Random sampling technique was followed. Respondents were given the questionnaires and also envelopes to seal responses. The researcher collected the responses personally. 350 questionnaires were distributed of which 326 were returned yielding 93% response rate.

***Instrument***

Teachers' work engagement was measured using the short form of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES 9) (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The items in the questionnaire used for the survey were in English.

UWES-9 is a 3 factor scale with 9 items. There are 3 items per dimension of **Vigour** [Items included the following: 1) At my work, I feel bursting with energy. 2) At my job, I feel strong and vigorous. 3) When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work], **Dedication** [Items included the following: 1) I am enthusiastic about my job. 2) My job inspires me 3) I am proud on the work that I do] and **Absorption** [Items included the following: 1) I feel happy when I am working intensely 2) I am immersed in my work 3) 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).

**Data Analysis and Results**

SPSS 16 was used to analyse the data.

### ***Reliability***

To assess the reliability of the measurement items of all the variables, an internal consistency check was carried out. The Cronbach's alpha for the UWES-9 was found to be 0.771 in the current study.

### ***Demographic details***

The sample characteristics show that 71.5% are females, 76.7% are married, 50% of respondents are less than 40 years of age and have 2 children on an average. 57% of the teachers have less than 15 years of experience.

### ***Tenure differences in work engagement***

A one way between group analyses was conducted to explore the impact of tenure of service on the work engagement of teachers. Respondents were divided into 7 groups (Group1: 0-5 years of service; Group 2: 5-10 years of service; Group 3: 10-15 years of service; Group 4: 15-20 years of service; Group 5: 20-25 years of service; Group 6: 25-30 years of service and Group 7: 30-35 years of service). There is no difference in work engagement scores of the various groups [ $F(6, 319) = 0.532, p = 0.784$ ] (see Table.1).

Table 1: Total Work Engagement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	68.110	6	11.352	.532	.784
Within Groups	6812.826	319	21.357		
Total	6880.936	325			

### ***Gender differences in work engagement***

Table 2: Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Work engagement	MALE	93	49.7634	3.99564	.41433
	FEMALE	233	48.2704	4.76335	.31206

It can be seen from Table 2. , that the mean of work engagement of males (49.76) is greater than females (48.27).

In order to understand whether the difference is significant, independent t-tests were conducted (see Table 3)

Table 3: Independent Samples Test

		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Work engagement	Equal variances assumed	1.093	.297	2.670	324	.008	1.49305	.55913
	Equal variances not assumed			2.878	200.406	.004	1.49305	.51870

The first section of the independent samples t-test output table indicates the results of Levene's test for equality of variances. This helps to determine whether the variance of work engagement scores for the two groups (males and females) is the same. Since the significance level (0.297)



is greater than 0.05 the variances are assumed to be equal. Since the value in the Sig. (2-tailed) column is less than 0.05 (0.008), it is concluded that the difference is significant.

Calculating the effect size

$$\text{Eta squared} = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + (N1 + N2 - 2)}$$

N1= number in group 1(males)

N2 = number in group 2 (females)

*Thus Effect size for independent samples t-test: Eta<sup>2</sup> = 0.02*

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare work engagement scores for males and females. There was a significant difference in scores for males (mean = 49.7634, Std deviation = 3.99) and females (mean = 48.2704, Std deviation = 4.76; t (324), p = 0.008). The magnitude of the difference in the means was small (eta squared = 0.02) (Cohen, 1988).

## Discussions

The results of the current study show that there is a significant difference that exists between the work engagement of male teachers as compared to female teachers though the effect size was small. The present study also suggests that length of service did not affect work engagement in any way. The results of the present study is different from the results obtained by Ray and Pena, (2012) where the researchers found that female teachers of Spanish schools showed greater work engagement levels as compared to males. Teaching profession does not provide substantial financial returns for males and thus if males have chosen this as a career it may be possible that they are genuinely interested in the profession and thus are exhibiting more engagement tendencies than females.

India is typically a collectivist society (Chadda & Deb, 2013). In India, the gender roles are instilled into the child's mind in the very early stages of life where the girl's role is equated with being at home, taking care of household chores, children and the male's role is identified with authority and superiority. These norms get institutionalized and reinforced through various cultural rituals as well as societal rules. Thus, even when small girls grow into adults they continue to exhibit behaviours that are typical of their gender (Usha, Lisa & Kirti, 2014). The current study consists of 71% females of which 53% are less than 40 years of age and 99% have on an average 2 children. Female teachers in the current study, on an average, have around 13 years of service and by this time it would be expected that they would be attached and committed to their jobs. This is not reflected in the work engagement values in the results. Though teaching is a convenient profession for females, they have other responsibilities like taking care of the house, children, elderly in the family, celebrating various rituals, festivals and household functions, which are very typical of Indian culture. While at school, teachers have to play many roles like that of a role model for students, a guide, friend, mentor, and administrator, link pin between parents and school authorities and counsellors for students. At home, female teachers have to play the role of a parent, wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and host to innumerable unexpected guests (Many Indian families by and large are joint families with many members in them, very typical of Indian culture). These roles are not mutually exclusive. These various roles have very different sets of behaviours associated with them and the teachers have to make very sincere attempts and severe efforts to mask their personal problems in order to comply with rules and regulations of school as well as cultural norms of their houses. India being a collectivist society, groups are valued over individuals (Hofstede, 1980) and emotional expressions tend to be controlled with great emphasis on how these emotions would impact the group dynamics (Mesquita, 2000). It would not be unimaginable that this regulation of emotions

would take its toll on the teacher's health resulting in emotional exhaustion leading to depersonalization from work. Many studies in the past have suggested that work-family conflict is a mediator of emotional labour-burnout relationship (Montgomery, Panagopolou, Wildt & Meenks, 2006; Montgomery, Peeters, Schaufeli, & Den Ouden, 2003). Perhaps the emotional labour due to professional as well as personal reasons maybe causing increased burnout thus manifesting as a decreased work engagement among female teachers (Noor and Zainuddin, 2011).

Since teaching has more females as compared to males, it may be essential for schools to revise policies in terms of introducing flexitime, day care centres for children, a pick drop shuttle facility that may relieve the females of the many worries regarding the same. Considerate leadership, counselling sessions and ensuring fun time for teachers may also make the school an exciting place for teachers. These endeavours may assuage the daily worries of ladies having to travel by public transport, having to leave their children while reporting to work and the worry of travelling back home after a tired day's work.

### **Limitations**

The study has some important limitations:

- 1) A cross sectional, quantitative study is a single time snap shot of teachers' views on work engagement. It is therefore suggested that a longitudinal study be conducted in order to better understand the phenomenon of work engagement.
- 2) The researcher also feels that qualitative study should accompany quantitative study in order to provide a holistic view and understand work engagement of teachers from various perspectives like family background and socio economic background.
- 3) Geographical constraints make the study less generalizable across samples.
- 4) Future research studies could try examining the effects of variables like organization culture, supervisor support, leadership styles of principals on the work engagement of teachers.
- 5) Future research can also include variables like absenteeism, organization commitment, organization citizenship behaviour and intent to quit and examine the effect of work engagement on the same.
- 6) Similar studies could be conducted across samples of doctors, policemen, bereavement counsellors and other such professions that are human intensive like teaching and involve emotional labour.
- 7) A comparative study can be made on work engagement levels of higher education institutions vis-à-vis school teachers.

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