

A Review of Environmental Support on Teachers' Engagement

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Abstract: Teachers' engagement is a key factor affecting their career development and teaching quality and it has been a hot topic in Chinese higher education. Teachers' engagement can be influenced by many factors that lead to job satisfaction leading to the retention in an educational institution. Although a series of internal and external factors have been revealed as important influencing factors of teachers' engagement, the role of environmental support as a prominent factor has received little attention. As far as known, there has been no comprehensive research on this issue. Therefore, inspired by this gap, the aim of this review is to evaluate existing literature on the environmental support on teachers' engagement, which is a relatively scarce area but of significant importance in clarify how to ensure, maintain, and improve teachers' engagement by creating a positive environment. The main content of this article includes three parts. Firstly, based on educational research, presenting an overview of teachers' engagement and environmental support. Secondly, emphasizing the influence of environmental support on teachers' engagement. Finally, summarizing the significance of existing research and proposing suggestions for further research.

Keywords: Influence; Teachers' Engagement; Environmental Support.

1. Introduction

Teachers' engagement is a necessary aspect for educational institutions to achieve success. Teachers' engagement refers to an individual's positive psychological experience, which manifests as enthusiasm and vitality in emotional, cognitive, and physical participation in the work process (Meng et al., 2022). In addition, teachers with a high level of engagement can transform positive energy and inspiration from various activities into useful resources for their work (Bakker et al., 2020).

Many researchers mentioned that disengagement is a widely concerned issue (Musenze, 2020). According to the Total Reward Survey, Hewitt (2012) explained that the proportion of highly engaged employees is quite low, accounting for less than a quarter of the global workforce. At the same time, according to the latest Global Workplace report, it has been found that up to 85% of employees are not fully engaged in their work (Oehler and Adair, 2019). Therefore, educational institutions need to be prepared for this challenge in order to maintain and improve the level of teachers' engagement.

One of the aspects that affects teachers' engagement is the environmental support. Sudarmayanti (2015) defines environmental support as a situation around the workplace, which will directly or indirectly affect employees. Environmental support encompasses three parts: Firstly, the physical aspect refers to the infrastructure of a school, including classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and sports facilities (Dwei et al., 2021). Secondly, the social aspect of a supportive environment means interpersonal interactions within school community, which involves the relationships between students, colleagues, and parents, emphasizing the importance of communication and collaboration (Dwei et al., 2021). Dewi et al. (2021) added that the psychological aspect involves the emotional and mental health of each person within the school. Rainey (2023) stated that teachers are more likely to be satisfied with their job and less likely to

leave their organizations when provided with a psychologically safe working environment.

However, as far as known, the influence of environmental support on teachers' engagement has received little attention. Furthermore, as revealed by the review of existing literature, there has been no theoretical review on the role of environmental support in teachers' engagement. It is of great significance to understand the basic elements of the best environmental support for teachers' engagement in good development. Therefore, based on previous research, this review paper aims to introduce the theoretical and empirical foundations of environmental support and teachers' engagement, particularly the influence of environmental support on teachers' engagement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Environmental Support

There are numerous researches on the importance of environmental support related teachers' engagement. According to Yayan Mulyana et al. (2021), environmental support can be the outside forces that will affect teachers' performance. The environment falls into two categories, the general environment and the special environment. The general environment is anything outside the organization that potentially influences the organization. Meanwhile, a special environment is a part of the environment that is directly related to the achievement of an organization's goals.

In terms of environmental support, Menon and Athanasoula-Reppa (2011) identified a multitude of factors including school climate, stakeholders, participation in school management, professional development, student progress and employment terms. They reported that experienced teachers demonstrated higher engagement related to the key stakeholders and participation in school management. Kim and Lee (2020) revealed that principal leadership had a significant influence on teachers' participation in professional development. They suggested that principals should provide

more opportunities for teacher collaboration. Likewise, Gülbahar (2020) revealed that perceived supervisor support has a significant correlation with job satisfaction and teachers' engagement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) concluded that the relations among teachers, parents, and schools was a crucial factor affecting student performance and educational outcomes. They reported that teachers' collaborative practices such as the sharing of teaching strategies, curriculum planning, opportunities for professional development, and involvement in decision-making can increase teaching efficacy and teacher retention.

2.2. Teachers' Engagement

In Schaufeli (2002) and other scholars' view, work engagement means one complete state of work, which is full of continuous and positive emotions and motivations, manifested in three aspects: vitality, devotion and concentration. May et al. (2004) argued that engagement includes cognitive, emotional and behavioral factors, which is reflected in the behavioral level of individuals. According to these definitions, Macey and Schneider (2008) agreed that people engaged in work are usually passionate about their job, and truly immersed in the job and genuinely enjoy their working hours. Klassen and his colleagues (2013) believed that teachers' engagement is a kind of motivational concept, indicating their willingness to allocate physical, cognitive, and emotional resources into teaching practices. Ge L (2022) pointed out teachers' engagement involves three dimensions: cognition, emotion, and support. Cognitive engagement means the level of attention and investment teachers put into their work. Emotional aspects refer to the positive emotional reactions of teachers toward work. Social engagement means teachers' understanding of their relationship with and concern for students and colleagues. Guglielmi (2016) added that teachers' engagement is various in the different age groups, and diverse resources can lead to this outcome. Young teachers' engagement is influenced by different working opportunities and how well they get along with colleagues. For older groups, their engagement depends on whether they have the opportunities to display and showcase their abilities in the workplace.

Through the literature review, it is evident that there are various definitions of teachers' engagement. Most scholars regard teachers' engagement as a psychological experience based on individual subjective feelings, with differences in content and dimensions. Therefore, this study defines that teachers' engagement as an ideal state that reflects teachers' positive psychological and emotional state and allows them to identify themselves psychologically with their work.

2.3. Factors Affecting Teachers' Engagement

At present, research on engagement for teachers is popular and practical. In 2007, Bakker and Demerouti stated job demands-resources framework offers a powerful explanation for the factors affecting teachers' engagement. Based on this framework, work conditions generally include two types: demands and resources. Resources are further divided into job resources and personal resources, which correspond to negative and positive work outcomes, respectively.

2.3.1. Job Resources

Job resources can exist in various forms, such as tangible materials and intangible relationships or support from the workplace. Bakker et al. (2007) pointed out that job resources can have positive effects: firstly, reducing the physiological

and psychological burden caused by job demands; secondly, contributing to the realization of work goals; and finally, promoting personal professional development (Schaufeli et al., 2004).

Many studies have confirmed a positive connection between job resources and the teachers' engagement. For example, the evaluation and response from others on people's performance and the support from colleagues form a strong association with teachers' engagement. Research conducted among 2000 Finnish teachers in 2006 found a positive association between job information, superior support, innovation atmosphere, and social atmosphere with their engagement.

When teachers face high-intensity work demands, the importance of engagement becomes more prominent. Bakker et al.'s (2007) research among Finnish teachers showed that job resources mitigate the negative impact of students' misbehavior on teachers' engagement. When students perceive teachers' engagement, they improve their academic engagement. In addition, Jiao Haitao (2008) found that organizational climate is positively correlated with teachers' engagement. Li Min (2015) found a significant and moderate positive correlation between the level of teachers' salary and their sense of engagement.

2.3.2. Job Demands

Job demands refer to ongoing efforts at work, related to specific physical and mental demands (Wang, 2022). Although not all demands are negative, intense job demands can become sources of stress, leading to negative outcomes such as low efficiency and a lack of security. Under this situation, employees are willing to learn, master and update their skills. On the other hand, job demands can also stimulate the curiosity of members and cultivate their abilities and spirit of responsibility. That is to say, job demands can bring challenges, such as work responsibilities, workload, cognitive requirements and a sense of time urgency (Schaufeli, 2012).

Chinese scholars, Shen Yan'e and Zhang Yanan (2017) believed that students' misbehavior in job demands and pressure from entrance examinations significantly predict teachers' engagement. By exploring the effects of work demands and work resources on teachers' engagement, Liu Ye jin and Wenxin (2022) found that obstructive factors (administrative demands, stressful demands, etc.) contained in teachers' job demands will consume their physical and mental energy, and negatively affect the vigor, dedication and absorption in work process, thus inhibiting the level of teachers' engagement.

In summary, researchers agree that job resources and personal resources can impact teachers' engagement. Job resources can mitigate the terrible effect of job demands on people, facilitate the realization of job goals, and promote personal progress and advancement. Especially under strict job demands, these resources are easy to become elements of motivation for members. Further, individuals highly engaged in jobs have different personal resources, including confidence, self-recognition, mental toughness, positive behavior, etc. These resources can help individuals adapt to working conditions and lower the pressure when confronted with job demands. They also control the work environment and make a difference through their own influences in the workplace.

2.4. Measuring Teachers' Engagement

2.4.1. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

To form a profound understanding of teachers' engagement, researchers often adopt Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) to assess teachers' engagement. This scale has two versions: Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) created the first version with 17 items; Schaufeli (2006) and other researchers designed another version composed of nine items. The UWES has been validated by researchers in some nations, including Finland, Italy, China, and Malaysia.

There is a study relevant to teachers' engagement in which the UWES acts as an appropriate instrument. The researcher conducted a survey among 853 subjects, including teachers from Canada, Indonesia, Oman and China. UWES was cited by Klassen (2012) and his colleagues to measure engagement of teachers. Researchers aimed to identify the effectiveness of UWES in assessing engagement within cross-cultural communication, especially among educators. Klassen and other scholars (2012) used the 17-item UWES, translating the items into Arabic, Chinese, and Bahasa for respondents to understand. The scores were then compared with other study items measuring job satisfaction and resignation intention. According to the findings, engagement and job satisfaction are positively associated, while there is a negative association with resignation intention. Klassen (2012) and his colleagues believed that engaged teachers are "rarely to experience burnout and health issues" and the probability for them to leave their job is quite low. Teachers are more willing to bear additional duties that favor the development of schools. They also suggested developing new measurements for teachers' engagement, which should be more specific than UWES and include components of social relationships.

In summary, the function of UWES is to estimate teachers' engagement and to explore the degree of energy and psychological adaptation they invest in working. The research results have provided favorable evidence that the UWES is trustworthy in studies related to teacher engagement, with its validity and reliability tested in different countries.

2.4.2. The Engaged Teachers Scale

Another instrument adopted by researchers is the Engaged Teachers Scale, which was created by Klassen and his colleagues (2013). Through this scale, researchers can obtain some explicit information about the work features of teachers in classrooms or schools.

Silva Júnior (2020) mentioned that ETS comprises 16 items, divided into four aspects: cognitive engagement (e.g., higher working intensity and heavy workload); emotional engagement (such as being willing to teach and enjoy teaching); engagement with colleagues (e.g., better relationships with colleagues and support from colleagues in school); engagement with students (e.g., showing enthusiasm and expressing concern when contacting with students).

Yerdelen et al. (2018) conducted a study to validate the ETS internationally. In this study, a translated version of the ETS was used, and data was collected from 388 Turkish teachers. The findings showed positive associations between each of the four subscales and teachers' engagement. Yerdelen et al. 's (2018) study demonstrates that teacher's self-efficacy can forecast their engagement level. However, the study had a limitation: it did not consider the context of teaching staff working outside abroad, as all participants were working in their home country.

2.5. The Relationship between Environmental Support and Teachers' Engagement

Engagement is a kind of mental state, integrating behavioral, emotional and cognitive dimensions, which enables employees to achieve success in the workplace (Bakker, 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Martínez et al. (2019) pointed out that engagement is one of the pillars of education because it presents a relationship with the prevention of failure and abandonment of work, as well as increased job satisfaction and motivation (Froiland, 2021). However, the teaching profession is a stressful occupation with high demands. Teachers may find it difficult to fully engage in their work.

Tortosa and other scholars (2024) conducted a survey and mentioned that there are inherent factors in the teaching profession that hinder the generation of engagement. Some respondents have revealed that toxic environments, poor social relationships, and social pressures to cope have affected their dedication to work. Some teachers do not even feel the support of their families or peers, which affects their level of engagement. Lohman (2006) also found that three environmental factors inhibit teachers from engaging in formal learning activities: limited time, being away of colleagues' work areas, and insufficient funds. Emery et al. (2021) indicated that organizational structure can vary with respect to teaching and learning in higher education. This variation can lead to differing levels of departmental support, funding and resources, and interest from faculty with respect to their teaching practices.

Based on previous research, it is necessary to examine the influence of environmental support on university teachers' engagement and try to avoid creating a negative environment which can impede both teachers' engagement and well-being, as well as hinder student learning and development.

3. Conclusion

In summary, the aim of this study is to analyze the role of environmental support in teachers' engagement, hoping to provide some new insights for university education management. Therefore, this study extends the previous understanding of environmental support and teacher engagement, and provides a more comprehensive description of their relationship.

The school environment will have a positive impact on teachers' engagement. If the school environment supports the work of all teachers, then the level of teachers' engagement increases with the goal of improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Therefore, school leaders should make efforts to create and maintain better environment, which will affect teachers' engagement and their job satisfaction. With higher engagement, teachers tend to involve in all decision making related to the future of schools, so that teachers also have a strong responsibility for the better development of the school.

4. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

However, for the future research, it is essential for researchers to pay attention to and deal with the limitations of this review study. This study has two main limitations. The first limitation is the existence of potential publication bias. There is a inclination for researchers to deal with positive

reports. Another limitation is the lack of unified empirical research. This study serves only as a starting point for educators and researchers to understand the role of environmental support in teachers' engagement. Therefore, more empirical research is needed to promote and enrich the development of this area. One possible study is to investigate how psychological environment and social environment affect teachers' engagement. In addition, it is also necessary to study environment support from a cross-cultural perspective.

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