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Work Engagement and Teacher Autonomy among Secondary School Teachers



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Victor, Samson R, Patil, Umadevi: Work Engagement and Teacher Autonomy among Secondary School Teachers, Hamburg, Anchor Academic Publishing 2016

PDF-eBook-ISBN: 978-3-96067-563-1

Druck/Herstellung: Anchor Academic Publishing, Hamburg, 2016

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographical Information of the German National Library:

The German National Library lists this publication in the German National Bibliography. Detailed bibliographic data can be found at: <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

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Hermannstal 119k, 22119 Hamburg
<http://www.diplomica-verlag.de>, Hamburg 2016
Printed in Germany

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Education is the systematic and deliberate influence of the mature on the immature through instruction, discipline and harmonious development of five powers i.e. physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and aesthetic, according to the need of society (Redden 2005). Education is a process of human enlightenment and empowerment for the achievement of a higher quality of life (Manihar Singh AK,1994). For the same reason, as the priorities and thrusts of a nation undergo a certain amount of change from time to time, so must educational priorities and objectives, to enable education to retain its currency and relevance. One of the most important resources of country is its human resource. Education aims at the development of human resources to the fullest possible extent. Further Education is a lifelong process which develops the broad based knowledge, the main aim of education is above all is to shape a nation's future and this depends on education system of the nation. Accordingly, the goals and priorities of the nation must necessarily be reflected in the objectives of the teaching profession and of the teacher, since these are intrinsically and casually linked to the education system (Chris Berry 2008).

1.2 INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The education system in India is considered to be one of the largest and most ancient in the world. Presently the education system is divided into different levels or stages. The stages are classified as pre-primary level, elementary education, secondary education, undergraduate level and postgraduate level. Broadly, the primary education caters up to the age of fourteen years (referred to as Elementary Education), the Secondary education spreads over the ages of 15 and 16, and then to 17 and 18 in the senior secondary grades. India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, after China and the United States caters to graduate and postgraduate educations referred to as tertiary education (www.indianetzone.com, 2009).

1.3 SECONDARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

The secondary schools that prepare pupils for secondary schools and universities are the mediating link between the elementary schools and the colleges and if this is the position occupied by the secondary schools, it is then an undeniable fact that the type of education given at the secondary level plays a significant role in the field of education. Secondary education is mainly aimed at preparing the young students between the age group of 14-16 for the world of work and entry into higher education. In India, the secondary education starts from the class 9-10 and leads a student to the higher secondary classes of 11-12 (http://india.gov.in/citizen/secondary_education.php, 2011).

There are several institutions that provide secondary education in India and these institutions include both the government and private schools. Generally these schools follow either the state or the national curriculum for providing secondary education to the students. Apart from the central government, the state boards of education of the Indian states are also playing an important role in spreading secondary education in their respective states, with effective cooperation of teachers. (Panda Upendra Nath 2004).

1.4 ROLE OF TEACHERS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Education is a complicated process and the teacher, is one of the most important agencies to take part in educating the young. Obviously, the teacher in the present times as the key agency of education has the influence and responsibility to mould the next generation. Thus the importance of the teacher in national life cannot be over emphasized. It is he, who influences the immature minds of the youth. He treats and tries to mould living stuff into various forms. The future of the nation is fashioned by him through the process of education. A nation trying to march ahead on the road to progress can hardly leave the education of her sons and daughters in the hands of incompetent teachers. The world of tomorrow will be born from the schools of today says M.L. Jacks. In this way, the teacher, indeed, is the true builder of the nation.

A sound educational system is considered as the backbone of a developing country like India and teacher is the pivot around which the entire educational system revolves. The success of any educational system depends on the quality and capability of

the teacher who is indispensable in the system and thus the teacher forms an important force in the development of a society (Faranak Joolideh, K.Yeshodhara, 2009).

It is the teaching profession, which helps an individual in his growth fully, in his body, mind, and spirit, intellectual, emotional and with moral values and artistic sensitivity (Dhar P.L. 2003). Therefore, teaching has been accepted as the noblest profession. It has been well said that teaching means causing to learn. Nothing has been given until it has been taken, nothing has been taught until it has been learnt. Teaching is more than the efficient delivery of thoroughly prepared lectures, and a clear realization of these simple facts will save many beginners in the art of teaching from much disappointment.

Teacher is the most vital single factor of influence in the system of education. It is the teacher, who matters most, as far as the quality of education is concerned. It is the teacher, who refines instincts, makes pupil socially acceptable, inculcates values, provokes and develops capabilities of men, to their fullest and best, so that they may be of best use of themselves, to the society, to the nation and to mankind as a whole. A teacher affects eternity and he can never tell where his influence stops. The teachers play an important role in shaping and moulding the habits, tastes, manners and above all the character of students (Sushil Kumar Singh 2011).

In other words, the teacher occupies a unique place and he/she is the heart and soul of any educational institution. Without proper and well qualified teacher, even the best building, richest curricula up to date library and the most expensive equipment will be of no use, while a good teacher will be able to make education effective even with poor equipment. Hence the role of a teacher has never been limited to the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills and also important to influence in a changing world.

The university education commission (1948-49) states that “the success of educational process depends so much on the character and ability of the teacher that in any plan of university reform the main concern must be for securing an adequate staff with qualifications necessary for the discharge of its many sided duties”. The Mudaliar report has also observed by stating that “we are convinced that the most important factor in the contemplated educational reconstruction is the teacher-his personal qualities, his

educational qualifications, his professional training and the place that he occupies in the school as well as in the community”.

The importance of the teacher has been well realized in India and throughout the world. A teacher is the keystone of the edifice of education. He has been regarded as symbol of independence, freedom and progress. He is next only to the saint. Who moulds the character and behavior of those who come under his influence? Hence the responsibility of the teacher is very great and considerable. Any national system of education depends on its success in the quality of the teacher (Ojo.B.J, 2008). The present situation of classroom education has made the role of teacher increasingly challenging and complex. Therefore teachers are supposed to maintain the quality of teaching that improves the classroom learning which in turn helps to maintain the standard of education (Palakshaiah 1996).

Teaching profession is a complex one and includes ability to deal with students in school work, interest in collecting and learning up to date information, ability to design and adopt new techniques in teaching, thirst for knowledge, ability to point out individual differences among students to teach accordingly, ability to develop cordial relationship with his colleagues in order to uphold the group morale and to achieve the goals of education teachers are themselves expected to be agents of change. “No system of education can rise higher than its teachers.” (Kochhar, SK 2005). Therefore “The way to child-centered education can only be through teacher-centered school.” Hence the teacher has to have self autonomy and have to engage in his work effectively to achieve the expectations of the society in a changing world (Rao DB 2003).

If the destiny of a nation is being shaped in her classrooms, then the real destiny is the teacher said Dr.Kothari and teachers are the corner-stone, the pivot and the ‘backbone’ of the educational system. They are the social engineers who socialize and humanize young minds. They are the transmitters of intellectual technical skills from generation to generation. Their personality causes a strong ‘impression’ in the minds of students. It is rightly stated that “As is the teacher, so is the student”. The ancient India considered teachers as ‘Gurus’ and teaching profession as ‘Noble-profession’ for they were the ‘shapers’ and ‘molders’ of human personality and character. Then it has been aptly remarked, “If you educate a boy, you educate one individual. If you educate a girl,

you educate the whole family and if you educate a teacher, you educate the whole community.”

Right from the earliest period to the philosophers and administration have eulogized the teacher's work in most generous term. Teacher is called as a “Saviour of mankind”. As a result the strength of an educational system must largely depend upon the quality of its teacher which in turn results from the autonomy the teacher enjoys and work is engaging to the teachers.

1.5 CONCEPT OF WORK ENGAGEMENT

Khan (1990) was the first scholar given the concept of engagement, related this concept to the notion of psychological presence. According to his definition, engagement refers to the state in which individuals express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally – in their role.

Work engagement is conceptualized as the positive antipode of workplace burnout (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), a syndrome characterized by mental or physical exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach, Jackson and Leiter, 1996). In the literature, there are two approaches to work engagement. The first approach is advocated by Maslach and Leiter (1997). Maslach and Leiter (1997) argue that engagement is characterized by energy, involvement and efficacy – the direct opposites of the three dimensions of burnout.

The second approach to work engagement has been put forward by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002). Schaufeli and his co-researchers (2002) argue that burnout and work engagement are two distinct albeit negatively correlated states of mind as opposed to being two opposite ends of a single continuum, and as a result they define work engagement in its own right as a ‘positive, fulfilling work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption’ (Schaufeli et. al., 2002, p. 74). Vigor reflects the readiness to devote effort in one's work, an exhibition of high levels of energy while working and the tendency to remain resolute in the face of task difficulty or failure. Dedication refers to a strong identification with one's work and encompasses feelings of enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. The third dimension of engagement is absorption. Absorption is characterized by being completely

immersed in one's work, in a manner that time appears to pass rapidly and one finds it difficult to disengage oneself from work.

They differentiated three facets of engagement: vigor in which individuals experience and feel enthusiastically involved in challenging and significant work, as well as absorption, in which individuals is highly concentrated and happily engrossed in their role. So that s/he feels time passes quickly and it is difficult to detach from work (Schaufeli et. al., 2002).

Work engagement and burnout are the opposite poles of a continuum of work related well-being, with burnout representing the negative pole and engagement the positive pole. One who suffer from burnout feel mentally fatigue, always find something doubt about their future and have a sense of limited efficacy in professional settings. In contrast, engaged employee feel mentally strong to deal with the desirable tasks, always actively involved in effective activities and exhibit high efficacy in their profession (Maslach and Leiter 1997). Further these researchers contend that when individuals experience the feeling of burnout 'energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness'. However it is to be noted that it is not acceptable that both concepts are perfectly negatively correlated. That is, when an employee is not burned-out, this doesn't necessarily mean that he or she is engaged in his or her work. Reversibly, when an employee is low on engagement, this does not mean that he or she is burned-out. For this reason Schaufeli and his co-researchers (2002) argue that burnout and work engagement are two distinct concepts that should be assessed independently (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2001).

The three facets of engagement according to Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzacutelez-Romaacute, and Bakker (2002) are vigor in which individuals experience a sense of energy and resilience, dedication, in which individuals feel enthusiastically involved in challenging and significant work, as well as absorption, in which individuals is highly concentrated and happily engrossed in their role. So that s/he feels time passes quickly and it is difficult to detach from work.

Accordingly, vigor and dedication are considered direct opposites of exhaustion and cynicism, respectively. The continuum that is spanned by vigor and exhaustion has been labeled energy or activation, whereas the continuum that is spanned by dedication

and cynicism has been labeled identification (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2001). Hence, work engagement is characterized by a high level of energy and strong identification with one's work. Burnout, on the other hand, is characterized by the opposite: a low level of energy combined with poor identification with one's work.

Several studies have empirically validated that Work engagement is the complete involvement of an individual in their work. Engaged individuals are able to deal with the challenging tasks which fulfill their job demands. They are highly energetic, mentally and physically very strong that means quickly recover from the difficult conditions, enjoy their roles at every moment, find difficult to detach from their work, ready to work for extra hours even after the scheduled time. Always think positively to achieve the goals for the wellbeing of organization, highly competent, motivate themselves and others to promote the engagement at work. They are proud of their jobs, fully concentrate and take the initiative to change their working environments to encourage the individual to happily involve in one's work. Always seek for the opportunities to exhibit high performance which is suitable to their talents and interest, more zeal in their work, highly optimistic, good co-ordination with the colleagues and the higher authority, ready to accept the feedback with the open mindedness and the responsibilities to enhance the quality performance.

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma, and Baker, 2002). The definition of work engagement advocated by Schaufeli and his colleagues (2002) separates work engagement from the related concept of burnout and as a result establishes it as an independent construct which is important in its own right. Work engagement encompasses both the affective and cognitive aspects of work engagement. This implies that in addition to cognitions, engagement also involves an active utilization of emotions and feelings (Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008). This definition splits engagement into three dimensions: (1) vigor; (2) dedication; and (3) absorption, which can be analyzed separately. This permits for a more accurate detection of where strengths and deficiencies exist in terms of each facet of work engagement (Freeney and Tiernan, 2006). The driving force behind the importance of work engagement is that it has positive consequences for the organization. For example,

empirical research on work engagement reports that high levels of engagement lead to enhanced organizational commitment, increased job satisfaction, lower absenteeism and turnover rates, improved health and well being, more extra role behaviours, higher performance and a greater exhibition of personal initiative, proactive behaviour and learning motivation (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007). Thus investing in conditions, which foster work engagement among employees, is vital for the growth and profitability of organizations.

Structured qualitative interviews with a heterogeneous group of Dutch employees who scored high on the UWES showed that engaged employees are active agents, who take initiative at work and generate their own positive feedback (Schaufeli, Taris, Le Blanc, Peeters, Bakker and De Jonge, 2001). Furthermore, their values seem to match well with those of the organization they work for and they also seem to be engaged in other activities outside their work. Although the interviewed engaged workers indicated that they sometimes feel tired, unlike burned-out employees who experience fatigue as being exclusively negative, they described their tiredness as a rather pleasant state because it was associated with positive accomplishments. Some engaged employees who were interviewed indicated that they had been burned-out before, which points to certain resilience as well as to the use of effective coping strategies. Finally, engaged employees are not workaholic because they enjoy other things outside work and because, unlike workaholics, they do not work hard because of a strong and irresistible inner drive, but because for them working is fun.

Further Engaged individuals are energetic about their work, feel connected to their work, and are better able to deal with job demands (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007b). Vigor is characterized by energy, mental resilience, the willingness to invest one's effort, and persistence (Schaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002). Dedication is characterized by "a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" (Schaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002). Absorption is characterized by being engrossed in one's work, to the extent to which time passes quickly and it is difficult to detach oneself from work (Schaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002).

1.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF WORK ENGAGEMENT

Many studies have shown the characteristics of engagement. It involves investigating the hands, heads and heart in active, full work performance (Simmons.B.L., 2010) and exhibit considerable creativity, solves the problems effectively, fulfill the prescribed roles more effectively (Hakanen.,at.el., 2006). Engaged workers are more creative, more productive and more willing to go the extra mile (Bakker. A.B., Demerouti. E., 2008). The individuals who are engaged are energetic, dedicated and absorbed at work, primarily because they enjoy their role, which ultimately tends to exhibit the continuous professional development (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris, 2008). Engaged employees enact more discretionary behaviours to improve the organization as well as fulfill their role more effectively (Bakker, Demerouti, and Verbeke, 2004). Further the individual exhibit innovative behaviour and conflict with co-workers and satisfaction with co-worker relations (Janssen Onne 2003).

1.7 RESOURCES OF ENGAGEMENT

Job resources include social support, feedback, and opportunities for autonomy, variety, and growth. Such resources are good for the worker they satisfy basic human needs and good for the workplace, because when job resources are rich, work gets done more quickly and with better results. The process, moreover, is cyclical. Working better is more rewarding for the worker, which in turn increases her engagement and effectiveness.

Interestingly, engagement and high-quality performance is greatest when the demands of the job are highest. This principle applies even to what we think of as low-level jobs, such as those at a fast-food restaurant (Bakker., 2011)

Many researchers have identified that job resources such as social support from co-workers and one's superior, performance feedback, coaching, job control, task variety, opportunities for learning and development, training facilities promote work engagement. These resources useful for the achievement of work goals and also stimulate for learning, personal growth and development. For instance, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) demonstrated constructive feedback, social support, and coaching from supervisors-all exemplars of job resources were positively associated with three dimensions of

engagement: vigor, dedication and absorption. Similarly, in another study, supervisor support, appreciation, information, job control, innovation, and climate-six potential resources were also related to work engagement (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, and Xanthopoulou, 2007).

Employees' own personal resources such as self-esteem and optimism also contribute to work engagement. Not only do workers with abundant personal resources approach their jobs with more enthusiasm and joy; they also tend to be in better health, allowing them to focus and work hard. They tend as well to create more of all these goodies for themselves through "job-crafting," seeking ways to make their responsibilities "fit" their talents and interests and to increase challenge. Again, the process is an upward spiral. Job crafters gain admiration from other workers, thus transferring their attitudes to them. Those more productive attitudes increase the other workers' engagement and with it, their own productivity and personal reward.

Work engagement differs from person to person, which helps account for the fact that some are leaders and others are followers. For each person, engagement also ebbs and flows from day to day, even hour to hour (Bakker).

Personal resources, such as optimism, self-efficacy and resilience are functional in controlling the environment and exerting impact on it in a successful way. Engaged employees have several personal characteristics that differentiate them from less engaged employees. Examples are extraversion, conscientiousness and emotional stability. Psychological capital also seems to be related to work engagement. Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2007) studied Dutch technicians' work engagement in relation to three personal resources (self-efficacy, organizational-based self-esteem, and optimism) and reported that these resources were related to work engagement.

1.8 IMPORTANCE OF WORK ENGAGEMENT

Engaged workers are those who approach their work with energy, dedication, and focus. They are more open to new information, more productive, and more willing to go the extra mile. Moreover, engaged workers take the initiative to change their work environments in order to stay engaged.