

Comparative Study of the Work Engagement of Interns and Secondary School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Background: Professional engagement is a complex process and likely varies depending on the individual's personality and characteristics such as years of experience. There are conflicting results regarding the effect of professional engagement and its impact on work performance among physical education teachers and interns. Our study aims to examine the relationship between work engagement among physical education teachers and interns. **Objectives:** In this study, we compared work engagement between interns and physical education teachers. **Methods:** Two hundred fifty individuals (130 young interns, 120 qualified teachers) participated in this study. The teachers were classified based on their years of experience (1-2 years and 2-5 years). All participants completed the questionnaire translated and adapted by Loadhal and Kejner (1965), readapted by Alem, Bujold, et Bertrand, 2003 to evaluate the parameters of engagement. **Results:** Interns had significantly higher values in all dimensions of work engagement overall (all $P < 0.001$). Interns are more involved and motivated in their work, leading to better professional engagement overall. Comparison based on years of experience revealed that as the number of years increases, work engagement decreases among physical education teachers. **Conclusions:** Based on the results from our current study, we conclude that teacher's professional commitment decreases over time.

Keywords: Work Engagement, Tunisian Teachers, Student Interns

INTRODUCTION

Anglo-Saxon research distinguishes between the concepts of "organizational commitment" and "job involvement," which "refer to the cognitive or affective relationships linking the employee to their work environment" (Neveu, 1996, p. 63). In France, the term "implication" is more commonly used (Ripon, 1987; Michel, 1991; Thévenet, 1992), in a broader sense covering both notions. Implication is considered one of the goals of HRM, and efforts can be made to influence the necessary conditions for its emergence (Neveu, Thévenet, 2002). As Neveu and Thévenet (2002) emphasize: "the concept is interesting regardless of its definition. It emphasizes what a person invests in their work or organization." The authors therefore distinguish between

implication related to work and that related to the organization under the same concept. However, given the research objective is to better distinguish the links between an individual and their work from the links between an individual and their organization. The former will be referred to as "engagement," while the latter will be called "implication" (Neveu, 1996; Palmero, 2000). The concept of engagement has been extensively researched since Allport's work in 1943, which defined it as an attitude. Reeve and Smith (2001) identified over 1200 articles dedicated to its study during the period of 1968-1998. Empirical research has also highlighted the antecedents and consequences of engagement, along with other correlated variables. Several literature reviews emphasize the importance of this research theme (Brown, 1996; Neveu, 1996; Palmero, 2000; Peyrat-Guillard, 2002). However, this abundance of research has contributed to a certain confusion (Lapalme, Doucet, 2004) regarding different conceptual approaches to engagement and its operational definitions through scale development (Reeve, Smith, 2001).

In particular two measurement scales based on different visions of engagement have stood out in literature due to their frequent use: those by Lodahl and Kejner (1965), followed by Kanungo's (1982a, b). According to Brown (1996), Kanungo's approach has become widely accepted as the definition of engagement represented as a unidimensional cognitive construct. Furthermore, Kanungo's approach aims at developing a definition and measurement that is generalizable across cultures thus avoiding North American cultural biases.

The validation of a new scale requires a specific theoretical positioning within research field and robust empirical validation. Recently, a team of Dutch researchers focused on developing a measure for work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002), starting from studies on burnout. Neveu (1995) characterizes professional burnout as "unresolved stress that over time produces deep psychological troubles in individuals leading dysfunctional organizational behaviors such as poor customer service, significant absenteeism, atomization within teams etc." Maslach & Leiter (1997) developed positive psychological aspect of professional burnout: Engagement. This reflection stems from psychology's general trend focusing on individuals' strengths and optimal functioning within organizations rather than weaknesses or dysfunctions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Maslach & Leiter enriched the conceptual framework identifying two main characteristics: first characteristic corresponds to disharmonies between man and his job: Maslach & Leiter (1977) envision six types of disharmonies: work overload, lack of control, inadequate rewards, lack of community, lack of justice, and value conflicts. The second characteristic is commitment ("engagement"), considered as opposite state from professional burnout.

OBJECTIVES

Given the importance of commitment in teaching profession and its impact on job performance, this study aims at achieving following objectives:

Compare professional commitment among trainees and physical education teachers (Teachers versus trainees), evaluated using questionnaire translated adapted by Loadhal & Kejner (1965), read apted by Alem, Bujold and Bertrand, (2013).

Verify if seniority has an influence on teachers' job commitment.

METHODS

Participants

A total number of 250 participants were recruited (130 trainees, and 120 teachers) constituting 52% and 48% respectively. Participants were prospectively classified into two groups: trainees (n=130; 52%) consisting of sports education students from Higher Institute of Sport and Physical Education of Ksar Said, and teachers (n=120 ;48%) comprising physical education and sports teachers from several institutions in Tunis region. Stratifying according other years' experience (1-2 years, and 2-5 years); 60 participants representing 50% each group with experience ranging between 1 to 2 years and in another group ranging between 2 to 5 years.

Procedure

Participants were requested to attend two sessions, with a one-week interval between them. The first session (control) aimed to help participants become familiar with the psychometric tool, without gathering any data. In the second session, participants were instructed to complete the questionnaire in the presence of a member of the research team who was available to address any questions or concerns. Participants were given twenty to thirty minutes to finish.

The questionnaires were administered in a comfortable environment. Participants were thoroughly informed of their rights during the study to ensure anonymity of results. No details about the objectives of the study were provided to the participants until after they completed the protocol, which had been reviewed and approved by the Ethical Committee of the National Center of Medicine and Science in Sports of Tunisia, Tunis, before the beginning of assessments. Each subject provided signed informed written consent before participating in the study.

Measures

Work Engagement:

Work engagement, as considered by Meyer and Herscovitch (2001), is "a force that binds an individual to behavior that has meaning for one or more targets." It is a prevalent psychological configuration that can influence or even determine someone's conduct. The interest in the concept of engagement lies in its ability to explain a person's motivation to act independently from their attitudes and extrinsic benefits. Engagement explains significant changes that may seem contrary to an individual's own interests; therefore, it provides a complementary way to explain people's behavior, justifying its relevance (Meyer et al., 2004). Thus, engagement is defined as an individual's psychological attachment to a target (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

Work engagement was assessed using a questionnaire translated and adapted by Loadhal and Kejner (1965), readapted by Alem, Bujold et Bertrand (2003). The items are ordered sequentially on this scale which remains widely used for measuring work engagement and its hierarchically related subdomains within psychology research. Half of these items are formulated inversely; participants respond to 17 elements expressing feelings of engagement on a 4-level Likert scale ("Strongly Disagree" - "Strongly Agree"). This measurement tool was designed specifically for evaluating parameters related to work engagement in teaching.

Data Analysis:

Descriptive statistics expressed key results as mean $\pm$ standard deviation presented in Table 2. The normality test for each variable was conducted using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Subsequently, comparison between means was performed using Student's t-test to assess differences between two groups (trainees and teachers).

Reliability and validity assessment involved calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Profiles were determined relative to average performance based on normalized scores or $Z_i = (x - m)/e$ where x represents group performance; m denotes average performance across both groups; e signifies standard deviation across both groups; Z_i indicates deviation from average.

A three-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) compared different groups based on teacher status and years' experience.

Pearson correlations examined relationships between work engagement scales.

All statistical analyses utilized SPSS version 13.0 software with significance set at $p \leq 0.05$.

RESULTS

Validity & Internal Consistency

Regarding internal consistency within dimensions measured by work engagement questionnaire items: unadjusted $\alpha = 0.930$, adjusted $\alpha = 0.928$ indicating excellent reliability overall with subscale alphas ranging from 0.515 to 0.711.

Correlation Between Self-Esteem Dimensions

Significant Pearson correlations existed among all dimensions with p -value < 0.001 ; coefficients ranged from 0.160 to 0.962.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha for Each Sub-scale and Domain

Sub-scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Question 1	0.538
Question 2	0.682
Question 3	0.621
Question 4	0.638
Question 5	0.711
Question 6	0.685
Question 7	0.494
Question 8	0.587
Question 9	0.515
Question 10	0.553
Question 11	
Question 12	0.587
Question 13	0.515
Question 14	0.587
Question 15	0.515
Question 16	0.587
Question 17	0.515

Global	0.930
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Work Commitment Between Teachers and Trainees, and Years of Experience

The results indicated that the trainees had significantly higher values than physical education teachers in all dimensions of work engagement (all, $P < 0.001$). Teacher status was statistically very significant for each component ($P < 0.001$), the effect of years of experience was statistically significant ($P < 0.001$). The results show that the parameters of work engagement are better among trainees overall. The results show that physical education teacher trainees are much better than incumbent teachers in terms of various issues evaluating work engagement. Trainees are more involved and motivated in their work, allowing for better professional engagement.

DISCUSSION

To our knowledge, this is the first survey systematically comparing work engagement, assessed using the questionnaire translated and adapted by Loadhal and Kejner (1965), readapted by Alem, Bujold et Bertrand (2003), between physical education and sports teachers and trainees. It is also the first to examine differences between teachers' years of seniority. Finally, this study was unprecedented in examining a Tunisian sample. The main results from this survey showed a statistically significant difference between PE teachers and trainees; trainees demonstrate greater professional involvement than teachers.

Work Engagement Between Physical Education Teachers and Trainee

Significant differences between teachers and trainees in physical education and sports in certain alternative components of work engagement. The parameters of work engagement are better for trainees overall. Our study's results confirm those reported by Huberman (1990), who demonstrated that teachers' professional engagement decreased over time. Huberman & Vandenberghe (1999) speak about the relationship between the teacher and their students as being the most discouraging and emotionally exhausting for teachers. These causal relationships are established in the research of Esteve & Fracchia (1988), as well as Huberman (1989) when they advance the hypothesis of a link between disengagement and disillusionment or "reality shock." Esteve & Fracchia (1988) emphasize the "decrease in support that society offers to teachers." Similar elements can be found in Tardif & Lessard's research, which states: "Teachers generally feel that their work is not recognized at its true value" (Tardif & Lessard, 1999, p. 507). Teachers actively seeking another job while remaining employed would leave teaching if they found one (King & Peart, 1992). Huberman (1989) lists motivations such as: Contact with young people, comfortable with young people, desire to share and explain knowledge. The research by Huberman (1989) provides a list of factors that have "motivated" teachers to engage and remain committed: Means of earning a living, becoming independent, access to higher social status. Conversely, Lacey's research shows that teachers see their profession as an opportunity to live an ideal of "caring," finding similarities between teachers and doctors on this point. Similar conclusions can be found in Bednarz et al.'s more recent study on the motivations of student trainees choosing the teaching profession. Furthermore, some studies tend to indicate that it is the most talented teachers who "disengage" from and leave the profession in greater numbers (Fresko et al., 1997; Gold, 1996; Sprinthall et al., 1996). Allen et Mayer (1991) reported that these personal characteristics linked to engagement remained variable regarding their importance or degree of effect.

Rosenholtz (1991) demonstrated that weakly engaged teachers stagnate in their profession, i.e. they feel either progress or development. They seem less motivated to complete their task and have little ambition regardless of their agenda experience. These results of our study confirm those reported by Rosenholtz (1991).

Table 2: Mean values $\pm$ Standard deviation (SD) of questions relating to Work Engagement

Questions	Groupes	Nombre	Moyenne $\pm$ SD	<i>t-test</i> (signification)
Question 1	Stagiaires	130	4,00 $\pm$ 0,00	18,98**
	Enseignants	120	1,40 $\pm$ 0,75	
Question 2	Stagiaires	130	3,77 $\pm$ 0,43	10,57**
	Enseignants	120	1,60 $\pm$ 0,99	
Question 3	Stagiaires	130	4,00 $\pm$ 0,00	15,22**
	Enseignants	120	1,40 $\pm$ 0,94	
Question 4	Stagiaires	130	3,77 $\pm$ 0,43	14,80**
	Enseignants	120	1,30 $\pm$ 0,66	
Question 5	Stagiaires	130	4,00 $\pm$ 0,00	23,70**
	Enseignants	120	1,25 $\pm$ 0,64	
Question 6	Stagiaires	130	3,77 $\pm$ 0,50	15,66**
	Enseignants	120	1,30 $\pm$ 0,57	
Question 7	Stagiaires	130	3,77 $\pm$ 0,43	18,79**
	Enseignants	120	1,30 $\pm$ 0,47	
Question 8	Stagiaires	130	4,00 $\pm$ 0,00	18,49**
	Enseignants	120	1,45 $\pm$ 0,76	
Question 9	Stagiaires	130	1,27 $\pm$ 0,45	13,71**
	Enseignants	120	3,60 $\pm$ 0,75	
Question 10	Stagiaires	130	4,00 $\pm$ 0,00	72,63**
	Enseignants	120	1,05 $\pm$ 0,22	
Question 11	Stagiaires	130	4,00 $\pm$ 0,00	35,70**
	Enseignants	120	1,10 $\pm$ 0,45	
Question 12	Stagiaires	130	1,00 $\pm$ 0,00	11,77**
	Enseignants	120	3,45 $\pm$ 1,15	
Question 13	Stagiaires	130	1,27 $\pm$ 0,45	12,83**
	Enseignants	120	3,65 $\pm$ 0,75	
Question 14	Stagiaires	130	4,00 $\pm$ 0,00	14,80**
	Enseignants	120	3,65 $\pm$ 0,75	
Question 15	Stagiaires	130	4,00 $\pm$ 0,00	14,39**
	Enseignants	120	1,40 $\pm$ 0,99	
Question 16	Stagiaires	130	1,07 $\pm$ 0,25	25,70**
	Enseignants	120	3,90 $\pm$ 0,45	

* Significant difference at $p < 0.05$; **Significant difference at $p < 0.01$

Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) and other researchers have observed a correlation between teachers' organizational commitment and student performance. It seems that teachers' commitment not only contributes to students' success, but is also transmitted by it (Firstone and Pennell, 1993).

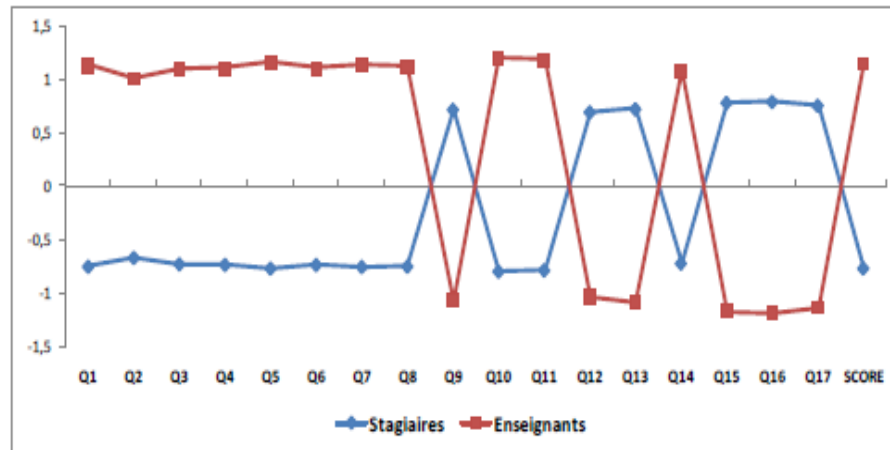


Figure: Mean values of work engagement recorded among interns and teachers

The mean values show that physical education teachers have very little considered work involvement. Teachers with low engagement stagnated in their profession, meaning they feel no progress or development, seem less motivated, and have little ambition. Work engagement decreases among physical educators, probably due to professional exhaustion and psychological distress which in turn constitute a source of abandonment, disinterest, and dissatisfaction.

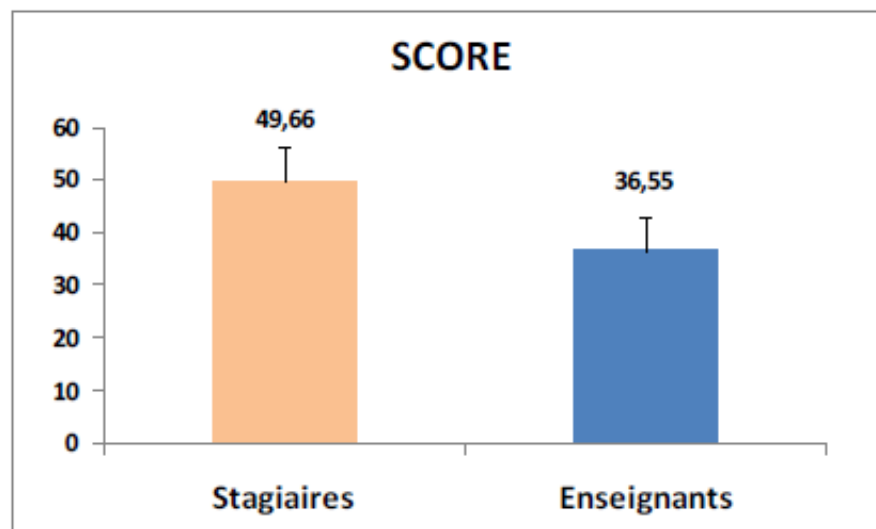


Figure: Total score of work engagement recorded among intern students and teachers

Comparing between the two samples, we notice a very significant difference. An overall view allows us to identify a remarkable difference between the teachers (36.55) and the interns

(49.66) on both diagrams. We can conclude that teachers feel less motivated where work engagement is low.

Work Engagement According to Years of Seniority

The results of the current survey show significant differences related to the number of years of seniority of teachers. Research reveals that a considerable number of teachers leave the profession within the first five years." (FCE, 2000, p. 24). More precise statistics for Tunisia seem to be nonexistent, but it may be interesting to refer to statistics from the United States where one in five teachers leaves the profession within the first three years and one in three leaves within the first five years (West, 2002). Over time, teachers have increasingly lower levels of work engagement. Years of seniority are negatively correlated with work engagement and leave teachers with tasks partly outside their skills; by a situation of integration which is sometimes less a finished process than an extended state indefinitely spread over several years that forces novices to constantly adapt to a changing, complex and difficult reality or even abandon the profession they aspired to. (Gauthier & Mellouki, 2003, p. 74).

CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that in a Tunisian sample, work engagement differed between teachers and trainees and according to years of seniority.

The on-going study also confirmed that professional commitment among teachers decreases over time. Our research aims at highlighting the effect of year-of-seniority variable and status as an EPS teacher (trainee versus teacher) on work engagement. These research findings also seem to provide additional insight into better understanding work engagement construct by clearly deciphering its different facets.

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