



Culture Triage and Work Engagement of Public Elementary Teachers in Panabo City Division

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.5.0724.1609>

ABSTRACT

Engagement in work holds significant importance in the field of teaching as it enables educators to accomplish teaching-related tasks more effectively and derive satisfaction from their profession. This engagement is believed to be influenced by cultural factors; however, this specific aspect has not been explored within the local context. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the extent of cultural influence and work engagement among public elementary teachers in Panabo City Division. Additionally, it sought to examine the association between these variables and the domains of culture that significantly impact teachers' work engagement. Using probability sampling, 200 elementary teachers from public schools were selected as participants. Employing a descriptive-correlational survey methodology, the collected data were analyzed using Mean and Product-Moment correlation techniques. The results indicated a widespread presence of cultural influence and work engagement among teachers, with a significant relationship observed between the two variables. Based on these findings, it is recommended that higher authorities within the Department of Education, along with school administrators and teachers, collaborate to cultivate a positive cultural environment conducive to enhancing teachers' work engagement. Moreover, future research endeavors could explore additional factors contributing to work engagement utilizing alternative research approaches.

Keywords: Culture triage, work engagement, descriptive correlation, Panabo City Division, Philippines

Introduction

Work engagement is an employee's level of interest, enthusiasm, and investment in their job. For teachers, a high level of engagement significantly contributes to academic achievement. Engaged educators demonstrate a commitment to delivering high-quality education, which is evident in their classroom practices. They actively seek out new ideas, implement effective teaching strategies, adapt instruction to meet students' needs, maintain high expectations for student performance, take ownership of student learning outcomes, and regularly assess student progress while providing feedback (Cardwell, 2011). However, the demanding nature of the teaching profession often hinders teachers from fully engaging in their roles.

In the contemporary landscape, teaching stands out as one of the most demanding helping professions, requiring a diverse set of emotional competencies, such as fostering caring relationships with students and effectively managing their behavioral challenges. Additionally, teachers need cognitive skills to tailor lessons to meet the needs of diverse learners, including those with learning disabilities. Common stressors for teachers include time constraints, disruptive student behavior, frequent changes in administrative policies, and navigating complex relationships with students' parents, colleagues, and school administrators (Shackleton et al., 2019). A study conducted in Italy revealed that secondary school teachers experience higher levels of exhaustion, which impedes their ability to engage fully in their work (Cacciamani et al., 2022).

In the Philippines, teachers face a multitude of tasks that can lead to a decline in their performance and impact their engagement at work. Aside from their primary teaching duties, they are also expected to fulfill numerous other roles, such as being communicators, facilitators, counselors, disciplinarians, mentors, and even surrogate parents. These additional expectations and responsibilities present challenges to the professional lives of Filipino teachers. Moreover, like individuals in any profession, teachers also encounter personal challenges from time to time. This is not unique to Filipino teachers but is a common experience among educators globally. These challenges can range from financial difficulties to family issues and health concerns, all of which can trigger negative emotions in the classroom (Go et al., 2020).

In the Panabo City Division, the researcher observed that teachers are not fully engaged in their teaching roles due to various personal and professional factors. They face numerous challenges that diminish their motivation and level of engagement. Additionally, the school environment itself contributes to their disengagement from work. Teachers often contend with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate ventilation, limited facilities, a lack of learning materials, and disruptive student behavior, all of which hinder their ability to perform optimally. However, these observations have not yet been formally investigated. The dearth of studies examining the relationship between culture triage and work engagement prompted the researcher to explore these variables further. This endeavor also aimed to provide insights to policymakers in developing policies, programs, interventions, projects, and activities that could support public schools in enhancing teachers' work engagement.

This study primarily drew upon the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model of work engagement proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2006). Job and personal resources play crucial roles as precursors to work engagement (Bakker et al., 2004). These resources assist employees in coping with job demands, such as high workload and role ambiguity, and include factors such as social support, supervisor support, developmental opportunities, and autonomy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker, 2015). Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that job resources are the most significant predictors of work engagement (Crawford et al., 2010; Halbesleben, 2010; Christian et al., 2011).

Job resources within the work environment, such as social support from colleagues, job autonomy, and performance feedback, have the potential to enhance employees' work engagement, alleviate job demands, facilitate the achievement of work goals, and foster personal growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). On the other hand, personal resources refer to "aspects of the self that are generally associated with resilience and pertain to individuals' belief in their ability to effectively control and influence their environments" (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Examples of personal resources include optimism (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007), emotional intelligence (Mérida-López et al., 2019), and self-efficacy (Mazzetti et al., 2021). Meta-analytical evidence indicates that personality-related personal resources, such as optimism, conscientiousness, self-efficacy, and proactivity, are positively correlated with work engagement (Halbesleben, 2010; Christian et al., 2011; Mazzetti et al., 2021).

Recently, Haynes (2020) proposed employing the job demands–resources (JD–R) model to investigate the mechanisms that underlie the connection between perceived school culture and individual organizational outcomes. This suggestion arises from the view that school culture can be regarded as a type of "second order" job resources (Schneider et al., 2017; Ancarani et al., 2019). Utilizing the JD–R model, Haynes (2020) found that perceived school culture indirectly influenced employee turnover intentions by impacting affective motivational states, which are considered personal resources.

In the realm of work engagement, empirical research has demonstrated that personal resources, such as self-efficacy, optimism, and organizational-based self-esteem, play a significant mediating role in the relationship between job resources (including autonomy, social support, and opportunities for professional development) and work engagement (Llorens et al., 2007; Van den Broeck et al., 2008; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009).

Teaching, being a profession characterized by high levels of emotional demand, places considerable burden on educators. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of empathy in professions focused on helping and caring, suggesting that heightened empathy could serve as a protective factor against stress or burnout resulting from job demands (Wilkinson et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2017). Therefore, affective empathy can be logically considered one of the personal resources contributing to work engagement among teachers (Hakanen & Roodt, 2010; Stojiljkovic et al., 2012; Li et al., 2015).

Organizational culture components align closely with the job resources outlined in the JD-R Model, including autonomy, performance feedback, social support, and supervisory coaching (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Other resources include organizational-focused resources such as a culture of fairness and support, team-focused resources like team climate, and job-level resources including career development, autonomy, supervisor support, and role clarity (Albrecht, 2012). Research by Halbesleben (2010) utilizing the JD-R model consistently linked feedback, autonomy, social support, and organizational climate with engagement or specific facets of engagement. Additionally, a human resource development (HRD) climate has been identified as influential (Chaudhary et al., 2012).

Meta-analytical studies have pinpointed work role fit, job variety, rewards and recognition, recovery, and opportunities for development as reliable predictors of engagement (Crawford et al., 2010). An organizational culture characterized by teamwork, pleasant working conditions, employee attention, development opportunities, flexible working practices, and effective leadership and management practices may significantly impact work engagement (Devi, 2009).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach, specifically utilizing the descriptive correlational method. Quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns, averages, predict outcomes, test causal relationships, and generalize findings to broader populations. In contrast, qualitative research involves the collection and analysis of non-numerical data. Furthermore, a descriptive correlational study focuses on describing relationships between variables without attempting to establish causation (Bhandari, 2022). This research followed a quantitative approach as it relied on statistical analysis for data interpretation. It was descriptive in nature, aiming to assess the extent of culture triage and work engagement. Additionally, it was correlational, seeking to measure the association between culture triage and work engagement among public elementary teachers in the Division of Panabo City.

Research Respondents

This study included 120 public elementary teachers from the Division of Panabo City. Determining sample sizes involves considerations of resources and statistical requirements. When dealing with a large population, a minimum sample size of 100 participants is typically recommended (Akman, 2023). Therefore, the inclusion of 120 respondents was deemed sufficient to fulfill the study's objectives. In establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, elementary teachers with a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience in public schools were selected for participation. This criterion aimed to leverage their two years of service as public servants to assess the extent of their culture and work engagement. Participants who felt uncomfortable or hesitant in completing the survey questionnaire were given the option to withdraw from the study voluntarily. Their decision to withdraw was respected, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing the welfare of the respondents throughout the study.

Research Instruments

In collecting data, this study utilized an adapted survey questionnaire. The questionnaire that was employed in this undertaking was divided into two sets. The first set was focusing on culture triage while the second set was about work engagement.

The culture triage questionnaire was adapted from the study of Phillips and Wagner (2003). The instrument consists of 15 items. It has the following indicators, namely: professional collaboration (1-5); collegial relationship (1-5); and efficacy or determination (1-5). The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot testing having a result of .72 suggesting that the items have relatively *high* internal consistency.

The questionnaire on work engagement was adapted from the study of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004). It is a 17-item research tool emphasizing the following dimensions: vigor (1-6), absorption (7-12), and dedication (13-17). The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot testing having a result of .75 suggesting that the items have relatively *high* internal consistency. The instrument in this study was contextualized to achieve the purpose of this study. The researcher integrated all the comments and suggestions of the adviser, panel members and expert validators for the refinement of the tools and to achieve construct validity.

Table

Table 1

Summary on the Extent of Culture Triage

No	Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
1	Professional Collaboration	3.16	Moderately Extensive
2	Collegial Relationship	3.78	Extensive
3	Efficacy or Self-Determination	4.13	Extensive
Overall		3.69	Extensive

Table 1 provides the summary on the extent of culture triage. It is exhibited that the overall mean of culture triage is 3.69, which is in an extensive level. This means that culture triage is oftentimes evident.

Data show that all three (3) indicators reveal a varying result ranging from moderately to very extensive level. As arranged chronologically, efficacy or self-determination has the highest mean score (4.13). This is followed by collegial relationship (3.78), and professional collaboration (3.16). The findings on extensive teacher behavior reaffirm the widely held view of Rama-phakela and Mdhlalose (2021), who explained that a positive culture triage can enhance teacher performance and contribute to the creation of quality schools. It is essential for all members of the school community to adapt to the existing school culture. Developing a strong school culture can foster a spirit that enhances teacher performance in their duties, ultimately improving the overall quality of the school.

School culture significantly impacts school quality and can influence the improvement of a school's standing. Therefore, schools need to earnestly build a positive school culture to enhance school quality. Without a strong, positive, and conducive school culture, efforts to improve school quality become less effective. This finding echoes Maryamah's research (2016), which concluded that developing a strong, intimate, conducive, and responsible school culture leads to better work quality, facilitates open communication at all levels, creates a sense of togetherness and belonging, and increases solidarity and kinship among staff.

Additionally, Pniewski (2017) described school culture as "just how things are" within a school, a powerful yet often invisible force that can either support or hinder the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. School cultures can be broadly categorized as positive or negative. In a school with a positive culture, there is a cohesive attitude among teachers and administrators, which is reflected in student behaviors and attitudes. Positive developments are shared, supported, and celebrated by both teachers and administration.

Moreover, Duan et al. (2018) emphasized that school culture is critical because it encompasses habits, traditions, and formalities that shape interactions between teachers and students, as well as interactions among teachers themselves. Previous studies have demonstrated that organizational culture significantly impacts the work results of both employees and organizations. This is equally true in an educational context, where school culture can influence students' academic achievement (Badri et al., 2014).

Furthermore, DeVaney (2014) defined culture as the way things are done and the stories that are told within a context. Culture is created and re-created by individuals considered members of that context, including teachers, students, parents, and communities (Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014). It shapes and reshapes what people do, think, and feel. Teachers are influenced by school cultures that they themselves might have helped shape (Kleinsasser, 2013).

Table 2

Summary on the Extent of Work Engagement

No	Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
1	Vigor	4.15	Extensive
2	Dedication	4.44	Extensive
3	Absorption	4.52	Extensive
Overall		4.49	Very Extensive

Table 2 provides the summary on the extent of work engagement. It is exhibited that the overall mean of work engagement is 4.49, which is in a very extensive level. This means that the work engagement is oftentimes evident.

Data show that all three (3) indicators are in an extensive level. As arranged chronologically, absorption (4.17) have the highest mean. This is followed by dedication (4.16), and vigor (4.15).

The positive results of this study align with Byrne and MacDonagh's (2017) assertion that an engaged workforce is enthusiastic and optimistic about work activities and capable of handling job responsibilities. Work engagement is defined as an individual's positive attitude toward their work or activity. In other words, work engagement reflects a person's positive outlook on their job and their enthusiasm or love for their work.

Nanto and Ozan (2020) emphasized that enhancing the energy employees bring to their work has become increasingly important. This is particularly true in the education sector, where it has become essential. Work engagement involves channeling a teacher's desire and energy into their work. This can only be achieved in an educational environment where the individual feels supported.

Table 3

Significance of the Relationship Between the Culture Triage and Work Engagement

Culture Triage Indicators	Dependent Variable	r-value	p- value	Decision on Ho
Professional Collaboration		0.612	0.000	Ho is Rejected
Collegial Relationship		0.655	0.000	Ho is Rejected
Efficacy or Self-Determination		0.675	0.000	Ho is Rejected
Work Engagement				
Overall		0.647*	0.000	Ho is Rejected

*Significant at 0.05 significance level.

Presented in Table 3 are the data on the significance of the relationship between culture triage and work engagement. Reflected in the hypothesis, the relationship was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The overall r-value of .647 with a p-value of <0.05 signified the rejection of the null hypothesis. It means that there is a significant relationship between culture triage and work engagement of teachers. This shows that culture triage is correlated with work engagement of teachers.

Doing a pairwise correlation among the measures of both variables, it can be gleaned that professional collaboration, collegial relationship, and efficacy or self-determination revealed the computed r-values of 0.655, 0.612, and 0.675 respectively with p-values which are less than 0.05 in the level of significance. This implies that as professional collaboration, collegial relationship, and efficacy or self-determination increase, the work engagement of teachers increases.

The results of this study align with Meier's (2012) findings, which revealed that perceived school culture influences teachers' attention, identification with their school, work ethic, and goal achievement. It is reasonable to propose that teachers who perceive their school culture positively are more likely to be engaged in their job. These teachers may exhibit high work engagement by emotionally connecting to their work and colleagues. Both direct and indirect evidence supports the association between perceived school culture and teachers' work engagement.

Supporting these findings, Lee and Louis (2019) mentioned that empirical studies show teachers in schools with a positive culture remain highly motivated to teach and take responsibility for students' learning. Conversely, in schools with a negative culture, teachers experiencing burnout or holding negative beliefs about their teaching abilities see declines in their relationships with students and the quality of their teaching practices.

Further evidence indicates that positive aspects of perceived school culture, such as mutual respect and trust among colleagues, serve as emotional resources for sustainable school improvement (Lee & Louis, 2019). Relevant findings show that perceived school culture positively correlates with teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which, in turn, are positively related to work engagement (Kim et al., 2017). Collectively, empirical evidence suggests that perceived school culture may significantly contribute to work engagement (Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019).

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were offered:

The prevalence of culture triage suggests that it is frequently observed in schools. Specifically, collegial relationships and efficacy or self-determination are extensively evident, indicating their frequent occurrence. However, professional collaboration is occasionally evident, as perceived by teachers. Conversely, the extent of work engagement among public elementary teachers is often apparent. In fact, all indicators, including professional collaboration, collegial relationships, and efficacy or self-determination, are frequently observed and practiced by teachers. Based on the findings, culture triage and work engagement are correlated, with culture triage significantly influencing the work engagement of public elementary teachers. This result rejects the null hypothesis that suggests there is no significant relationship between culture triage and work engagement.

Recommendations

The following suggestions were offered based on the conclusions of the study:

The higher officials in the Department of Education may craft effective policies, programs, projects, interventions and activities which may further intensify the culture triage specifically on professional collaboration. Also, the department may identify other means to upgrade, strengthen or sustain the work engagement of teachers by providing them seminars or trainings.

Meanwhile, school principals may find means in enhancing their school's culture triage. They may craft a monitoring tool to assess from time to time the status of their school's culture and how does it affect the work engagement of the teachers. Moreover, they may also craft new interventions strengthening teachers' work engagement. Based on the findings, school principals need to strengthen the professional collaboration among teachers. They may conduct SLAC sessions or meetings to discuss with their teachers on how to intensify collaboration among them and how to establish a healthy culture at school.

Teachers may take an effort keep on upgrading themselves. They may attend various seminars, webinars, or any undertaking that would help them reinforce their work engagement. They may also find means on how to be of help to their school principals on fostering a healthy school culture specifically on professional collaboration and collegial relationship.

Future researchers may further explore relevant information about culture triage and work engagement of teachers. Also, other means of research approach such as qualitative or mixed methods approach may be utilized to further explore the involved variables in this study. More so, they may make a comparative study about the culture triage and work engagement of teachers in the public school and in the private school.

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