

Teachers' Understanding of Work Engagement

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Abstract

This study expands the area of work engagement research instead of always relating work engagement with job satisfaction and administration demands. In this research teacher engagement is also related to other factors which may affect teachers' satisfaction more than others, since the teachers spend most of their time with their students. This study also explore how other factors such as cultural differences can affect work engagement, especially when working in different countries. Emotional engagement in any job could be considered as the basics of work engagement despite the environment that the employee is exposed to. For example, a teacher who really finds teaching interesting will try every possible way to overcome any difficulties they face outside the classroom. This means that in our future research about work engagement, we should first check if that job was the employee's first choice since internal factors are more important than the external ones.

Keywords: Work Engagement, Job satisfaction, Emotional job Engagement

1. Work Engagement

Work engagement is “a positive work-related state of fulfilment that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006, p. 701). According to another definition, it is “a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being that can be seen as the antipode of job burnout” (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008, pp. 187,188). In addition, Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter (2011) mention that engagement is “emotional involvement or commitment”. It is, furthermore, “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). Salanova, Agut, & Peiró (2005, p. 1218) state that “when employees feel vigorous, involved, and happy in the workplace (i.e., engaged), they may experience positive perceptions about their work characteristics and service climate.”

Engagement can be classified according to the objectives of engagement. Schaufeli & Salanova (2011) mention “work engagement in general”, related to the usual “work-day engagement”, is about specific days, and “task at hand engagement” is related to a particular task. Engagement is the opposite of burnout. This is because “in the case of burnout, energy turns into exhaustion, involvement into cynicism, and efficacy into ineffectiveness” (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 188).

Vigour means making the effort to face challenges at work. Dedication is strong involvement and enthusiasm at work. Absorption happens when a person feels happy at work and time passes quickly. According to Christina Wilmar (2001), burnout and exhaustion are the opposites of vigour and dedication. Saks, 2006 (p. 601) adds attention as an element of work engagement. Attention is defined as “cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role”. Furthermore, Schaufeli & Salanova (2007, p. 190) argue that “efficacy could be considered an element of engagement.”

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) is usually used to measure work engagement: “it seems acceptable to use the UWES to compare work engagement of different race groups” (Storm & Rothmann, 2003, p. 68).

1.1 Factors Affecting Work Engagement

There are many factors that may affect work engagement. Work engagement may not be affected by age, but it may increase slightly with age. In addition, gender does not affect work engagement. On the other hand, work engagement may be affected by “occupational groups”. Schaufeli et al. (2006, p. 713) point out that “blue-collar workers were less engaged compared to managers, educators, and police officers”.

There is a difference between workaholics and engaged employees. Workaholics “work hard because of a strong and irresistible inner drive”, but engaged employees work hard “because for them working is fun” (Gorgievski, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2010, p. 85). Furthermore, Schaufeli & Salanova (2011) disagree with Bakker et al. (2011) that work-engagement leads to workaholism. Schaufeli & Salanova (2011, p. 44) argue that “Spending a lot of hours working or thinking about work is a necessary but not sufficient condition for workaholism”

since workaholism involves more “working compulsively” and “toxic (rather) than working very hard”. This means that work engagement is more related to intrinsic motivation, while workaholism is more about extrinsic motivation.

There are also other factors which may make work engagement an easy process; for example, job resources and personal resources. Job resources are the “physical, social, or organisational aspects of the job that may reduce job demands, be functional in achieving work goals, or stimulate personal growth” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Autonomy, social support from colleagues and skills variety are examples of job resources.

Work engagement can be predicted in a better way using job resources than job demands. Examples of these job resources are job control and organisation-based self-esteem, which are considered the best predictors of work engagement. Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) show that there is a relationship between job resources and turnover intention using work engagement as a mediator in this relationship.

Personal resources can also encourage work engagement. Bakker & Bal (2010) suggest that employees’ positive emotions help to build personal resources, such as social relationships and self-efficacy. These positive emotions make teachers feel good about the future. Personal resources are also called psychological capital (PsyCap). This is the positive condition for the psychological development of an individual. There are many characteristics of psychological capital; for example, having enough self-efficacy to overcome difficult demands, thinking positively about the future, planning successful goals and solving difficult problems and challenges. Engaged workers can transfer the positive attitudes that they have to their colleagues regardless of the available job resources they have. Engaged workers like to have more job challenges, so that they can maintain their engagement.

1.2 Negative and Positive Sides of Work Engagement

Unfortunately, there are negative aspects of engagement. For example, if work engagement makes an individual’s arousal too high, this may stop cognitive performance. In addition, high, positive engagement may lead to random performance in processes which may need more controlled performance. This high work engagement may also lead to family conflict.

Furthermore, some engaged employees may experience days when they have poor performance, so keeping a daily diary may help to explain the reasons for this. It may be relevant to consider whether engagement could be achieved through training courses. Saks (2008) adds that there should be greater focus on behavioural engagement, which is more observed by the organisation.

On the other hand, engagement has positive effects. Engaged workers experience fewer psychosomatic health problems, such as headaches and chest pain, while there is still no evidence that engagement affects physiological health. Additionally, researchers, try to determine the relationship between work engagement and burnout. Schaufeli & Salanova (2011, p. 41) emphasise that “not feeling burned-out does not necessarily mean that one feels engaged, and not feeling engaged does not necessarily mean that one is burned-out.” In addition, work engagement may lead to burnout when employees are investing their best

efforts without receiving appropriate feedback, which means that there is no balance between “give and take” processes.

Furthermore, Borup, Graham, & Drysdale (2014, p. 793) define six elements as the “core of teacher engagement”. These are “(1) designing and organising learning activities, (2) facilitating discourse with students and parents, (3) providing students with one-on-one instruction, (4) nurturing a safe and caring learning environment, (5) motivating students to engage in learning activities and (6) closely monitoring student behaviour and learning.”

2. Teacher Engagement

Engaged teachers can be defined as teachers “who feel energetic and dedicated, and who are absorbed by their work” (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 188). This means that engaged teachers or “engaged employees work hard (vigour), are involved (dedicated), and feel happily engrossed (absorbed) in their work” (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 190). They also “(1) often experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy, and enthusiasm; (2) experience better psychological and physical health; (3) create their own job and personal resources (e.g., support from others); and (4) transfer their engagement to others” (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 193).

Teacher commitment is related to teacher engagement. Collie, Shapka, & Perry, (2011) point out that there is a strong relationship between teacher commitment and students’ emotional and social engagement. Commitment here means the way teachers are attached to and involved in the teaching process. This commitment, which can predict teacher performance and burnout, will also motivate the teacher to search for the best teaching methods that can influence students’ engagement, efforts and self-confidence.

2.1 Factors Influencing Teacher Engagement

There are many factors which influence teachers’ engagement. Bakker & Bal (2010) explore the influence of job resources on teachers’ engagement. For example, teacher engagement is related to job resources in the school, such as supervision, support and social atmosphere. Students’ appreciation of teachers’ efforts is also considered one of the job resources that support teachers’ emotional engagement. Emotionally engaged teachers experience positive emotions, such as arousal, activation, happiness, energy and enthusiasm.

In addition, Klassen et al. (2013) assert that teachers should be cognitively, emotionally and socially engaged in their work. Social engagement includes having good relationships with colleagues and students. This is very important to motivate students. Teacher engagement influences teacher-student interaction and the relationship between teachers and students may influence teacher engagement too. These types of engagement may change over time: “a teacher may exhibit high levels of social engagement at the beginning of a career but lower levels of cognitive engagement” (Klassen et al., 2013, p. 48). Therefore, there should be training workshops to help teachers engage in their work.

Furthermore, having good teacher-student relationship will develop students’ cognitive and social outcomes even in the future (Davis, 2003). However, this relationship is influenced by

many factors; for example, students' views about themselves and their teachers. Teacher-student relationships also depend on teachers' motivation and interpersonal and social skills, and on how well both teachers and students are engaged with the material taught inside the classroom. The culture of the school and the classroom may also shape teacher-student relationships.

In addition, Den Brok, Levy, Brekelmans, & Wubbels (2005) observe that there are more differences in the motivational aspects between the same teacher teaching different classes than between different teachers. This means that the same teacher may behave differently in different classes in terms of motivating the students. Den Brok et al. (2005) also explain that it is important that teachers create a positive atmosphere inside the classroom by being helpful, friendly and understanding to their students with minimal strictness or restricted corrections of behaviours. This will also help to improve students' comprehension of English language. Teachers should also be aware of students' perceptions, since this affects their behaviour. In addition, students' perception can be used to predict their learning outcomes more than any other perceptions including that of teachers or administrators.

3. Teachers' Emotions & Emotional Intelligence

Recently, there has been a strong need to explore teachers' emotions in psychology. Nias (1996) mentions three important reasons for including emotions in teaching. First, "teachers do experience intense emotions in their teaching" (Nias, 1996, p. 293). Secondly, there is a strong relationship between teachers' emotions and cognitions. Thirdly, teachers' cognition and emotions are shaped by "social and cultural forces" (Nias, 1996, p. 294).

Basic emotions are "pre-packaged multicomponential response patterns or as subjective feelings" (Frijda Parrott, 2011, p. 407). The emotional process includes "appraisal, subjective experience, physiological change, emotional expression, and action tendencies" (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003, p. 329). Teachers' emotions and cognition are connected and cannot be separated from each other. There are many theories of emotion, as mentioned by Van Veen & Slegers (2006) in their explicit theory of emotions and cognitive social-psychological theory of emotions. Schutz & Pekrun (2007) add that control-value theory may explore how emotions affect learning and performance.

The positive emotions which are related to teachers are "love and caring". These have been noted by many researchers. Sutton & Wheatley (2003) mention researchers in Canada (e.g. Hargreaves, 1998b) and England (e.g. Woods and Jeffrey, 1996). Usually, "women and elementary teachers" care more about their students (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

Furthermore, Cowie (2011) explores the importance of having positive emotions towards students. This should be by educating the teachers about students' needs, interests and abilities. Teachers should try to develop a friendly relationship with the students by talking to them in and out of the classroom. A language teacher should go beyond teaching by discussing with the students different kinds of life issues.

In comparison, there are negative emotions such as frustration and anger. Sutton & Wheatley (2003) suggest that this could be because of "students' misbehaviour and violation of rules".

Although teachers' negative emotions can influence the students, there are some ways for teachers to control their negative emotions inside the classroom. For example, it is better to describe the students as "trying hard but slow" than as "lazy" (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

Furthermore, there is a relationship between positive emotions and teachers' intrinsic motivation. Positive emotions are important to motivate teachers intrinsically, but not necessarily a pre-requisite for it. In addition, teachers' emotions are important to form personal identity, which will guide them to care about their students. Nevertheless, this may depend on other factors, such as professional roles and institutional structures (O'Connor, 2008).

Students are influenced by their teachers' emotions. Michael (2000) states that "one person's emotional expression impacts other persons". For example, students can understand teachers' observable physiological changes and specific facial expressions. Furthermore, teachers' and students' emotions interact in classroom settings (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007). This influence can affect students' successes and failures. However, these emotions have different effects on teachers and students since teachers are older and have come from different cultural backgrounds.

Emotional Intelligence is also an important element related positively to teacher engagement. Emotional Intelligence is more about the ability to control the emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In addition Emotional Intelligence could be considered an important personal resource that helps the teachers to face problem-solving situations in a positive reaction (Mérida-López, Extremera, & Rey, 2017). Hurley & Cammack (2014) pointed out that Emotional Intelligence is important to prepare trainee teacher

How do teachers and students define teacher engagement from their points of view?

4. Teacher Engagement

4.1 Emotional Engagement

Teachers were asked during the interview about how they understand Emotional Engagement in the questionnaire given to them, and how their emotions towards teaching affect their engagement inside the classroom. An Elementary teacher believes that the happiest time is in the middle of the semester, because the teacher and students are creating something out of nothing, explaining during the interview:

“Q: Do you think your emotions are changing over time? Maybe at the end of the semester you are more happy because you said that you can see...”

A: The happiest I am is somewhere in the middle of semester.

Q: In the middle.

A: Somewhere in the middle of the semester is when I am the happiest. And that's when I actually find the work a bit – not that fun as I start it. Sometimes it is, like, fun because we are creating something out of nothing, but sometimes it's quite hard work to create something out of nothing, but if you like what you do most of the time it is fun. It takes me, for example, fifteen minutes to create all the material I need. Not to find that on the internet and print that

out – just to develop my ideas of how something should be presented, to write a short paragraph or instructions for writing or whatever. So, it is fun because we are creating something.”

The same Elementary teacher stated that teachers should control their emotions inside the classroom, saying:

“Q: But in the personality, can I make a change?

A: It’s controlling. It’s controlling yourself. If you do not know how to control yourself outside of the classroom, then how can you control yourself – oh, there are moments when I’m – when I get mad – we have done this. I have told you. I have explained hundreds of times, but that’s when I tell myself to keep calm. Keep calm. They are here to study. There are kids, they don’t understand, keep calm, and then I say okay, let’s go again.”

A Pre-Foundation “B” teacher believes that a teacher’s heart should be in teaching, otherwise it will be a difficult job and the students will not be interested. This point of view was explained during the interview:

“Q: So you think also this relationship affects your emotions toward teaching – you like teaching more, you feel more excited about teaching?

A: I think that teaching as a job – as a career – if it doesn’t make you feel excited, then you shouldn’t be teaching. It’s a job where if your heart’s not in it, it’s going to be the most difficult, challenging job in the world. Your heart’s got to be in it, otherwise it’s impossible to teach properly – I feel. I know for a fact I couldn’t go in a classroom and teach if my heart wasn’t in it. I just couldn’t do it. It’d be a long time and – I’m quite an expressive person – my students would know straight away if I am not interested. So, but, when I go in a classroom, even if I’m not feeling like it before I go in that room, if I’m not in the right frame of mind, I would hold that every time I go in that room suddenly I can switch into teaching mode and I get into, with interest, what I’m teaching – because if I’m not interested in it, the students are not going to be, whereas, if I am interested in it, you will at least get the students’ attention because they will see that you’re interested in what you are doing. There is more of a chance that they will be interested as well.”

The same Pre-Foundation “B” teacher commented that once you are engaged in teaching, you will put anything else in the back of your mind, and that it is good to show some of your emotions to the students:

“Q: So you are, maybe, engaged in teaching and you forget anything else.

A: Not forget, but I can put to the back of my mind, whereas, maybe, if I wasn’t teaching, if I’m just out with my friends socialising – I probably can’t control it if I got a problem outside that group and that will come into my mind, but, when I’m teaching, for some reason, it stays out because I’m focused on what I’m doing with those people at that time. That’s just me personally. I don’t know about other people. I’m not a very good actor and I’ve got a sort of characteristic face so that people know my feelings. But I think it’s not always a bad thing that you show your feelings. Students need to see that you’re not a robot, you’re a person. So,

sometimes, you know, it's – maybe it's something that's happening in the classroom – yeah, I will show my emotions sometimes. It's just a natural thing, but it's not really a bad thing all the time.”

Another Elementary teacher believes that teachers' Emotional Engagement and desire towards teaching are affected by students' attitudes inside the classroom, explaining:

“Q: Okay. When, for example, if you didn't have that good students, do you think this affects your emotional engagement towards teaching, that you don't find teaching fun anymore and you don't feel excited about teaching?”

A: Oh, totally. Totally. I've had classes where I can tell that the students don't care, they don't want to be here, they want to finish as soon as possible, and, if I tell them things, they're not really listening, they're playing with their phones – that makes me not very motivated for the class because I know whatever I do for them they don't really care, so I don't feel the same motivation or the same desire to do well by them or to spend time on making good exercises for them.”

The same Elementary teacher believes that students' motivation can affect Teachers' Engagement inside the classroom more than the students' level, saying:

“Q: So you think also the students' level can affect teachers' motivation and engagement?”

A: Level not so much. More the students' motivation. If you have students of a very low level that really want to learn, then that's fine. I think that can be very motivating for the teacher as well. The problem is students that aren't motivated. If they don't want to learn, whatever level they're at – even if they're really, really good – if they're not interested in learning more, then that's demotivating for the teacher. That makes it feel frustrating.”

The same Elementary teacher commented that the teacher can feel bad if the louder students in the class are not motivated, saying:

“Q: Okay. Do you think if you have a class of some students who are not motivated, it can affect the students who are motivated or can affect the teacher – even if they are just a small group?”

A: Totally. I mean that's – it depends on the individuals. It's the louder students. If the louder students are motivated and the quiet students aren't motivated, it doesn't really affect the class too much. There might be some students who don't get involved, but most of the class sort of stays involved. If you have loud students that aren't motivated, then it can be problem because they can disrupt it for the rest of the class and make the teacher feel bad.”

Another Pre-Foundation “B” teacher believes that experience gives the teacher more patience and understanding of teaching, explaining:

“Q: Even, for example, if you're trying your best but the students don't want to participate, they are still very passive – does this also make you, like, I don't like teaching anymore?”

A: No, no. Come on.

Q: Does this affect your...

A: ...No, I'm too old to say this ((laughs)).

Q: Do you mean the experience gives you...

A: Of course.

Q: Even if it is not with these students?

A: Experience gives you more patience, more understanding, more perseverance in your teaching career – maybe once, years ago when I just started teaching I said, okay, I'm not going to teach again, I don't like it, but now no, of course. I love teaching.”

Another Elementary teacher states that teachers lose creative thinking when they are over-burdened, and they will not have time to practice with their students,:

“Q: Okay. Does this whole situation influence your emotion towards teaching so that you feel you don't like teaching? You don't find teaching fun and these things?

A: Yes. When the teacher is over-burdened – of course, anybody. When he or she is over-burdened, his natural potentialities, they go down. And creative thinking – he loses creative thinking when a tired or preoccupied mind or tired mind can't think in a creative way. People lose their creativity when they're over-burdened. Give them time to digest and give them time to practise with the students.”

A Pre-Intermediate Consolidation teacher believes that their excitement towards teaching does not affect the students if they don't care, saying

“Q: So do you think their negative emotions are transferring to you? That you are excited...

A: ...I try to avoid that sort of transfer, but I also know that, excited or not, most of my students, at least in this group, they won't care. Excited or not. They won't care.”

The same Pre-Intermediate Consolidation teacher believes that they should hide negative emotions from their students, adding:

“Q: In the classroom.

A: Yes. Not to show anger. Even if there are reasons for anger, I think it's very important that you hide your negative emotions from your students.”

The Pre-Foundation “B” teacher also believes that teachers should hide their negative emotions from their students, explaining during the interview about her previous experience with school students:

“the one who wants to show off and they disrupt the class. I am not hiding that they piss me off, but I cannot let anything show. It means that I have to be cool and smiling, although I'm boiling inside ((laughs)).

Q: You mean the teacher has to mask their emotions?

A: ...((laughs)). But I don't let my emotions show, especially the hate part. I don't hate them, but I hate the behaviour and the naughtiness.”

The same Pre-Foundation “B” teacher believes that students’ misbehaviour can influence teachers’ emotions towards teaching, and make teachers hate teaching, explaining:

“Q: How can the teacher – does this sometimes influence your emotion towards teaching, that you don’t love teaching or that you don’t find teaching fun anymore because of some behaviour – some misbehaviour of some students?”

A: I didn’t experience this in Oman, during this term, but going back to my teaching years, yes. There were days where I felt I was pissed off. I hated teaching. I hated the class. They are so unruly, especially boys. So unruly, so – not stupid – but so lazy. They didn’t want to make the tiniest effort – even the homework, and they can do it – even in front of the classroom. Even five minutes is enough, but they don’t. It was as if they were challenging me. And I hated that. Sometimes I’d just take days off. Just to relax. Just to reload.

Q: To back up yourself.

A: Yeah.”

An Elementary Consolidation teacher believes that students’ exam results may affect teachers’ emotions, and make teachers feel worried more than the students themselves, saying:

“Whenever the exams approach I’m more worried than students. I worry about the students because I know that they will fail. I know they will get low marks and I know it’s going to be a very hard week for them to get used to the other week – to forget the exam results and to prepare them for a week without an exam. It’s really devastating for students – the exam results. Whenever the exam approaches, I feel more worried about their marks because of the way they are assessed.”

This means that the qualitative data also shows that teachers’ emotions change over time, since some teachers feel happiest in the middle of the semester. A number of teachers also think that teachers should hide their negative emotions inside the classroom, so that they will not affect the learning–teaching process. However, one teacher thinks that the teacher should show some emotions sometimes, so that the students will know that the teacher is a normal human being. It is also important that you love what you are doing, otherwise teaching will be a long, difficult job. The teacher should also put their problems in the back of their mind once they are in the mood for teaching, since students will know if the teacher is interested in teaching or not. Teachers’ emotions in general are affected by students’ attitudes inside the classroom.

4.2 Social Engagement with Students

Teachers’ Engagement also includes how the teacher is socially engaged and aware of students’ feelings. An Elementary teacher believes that the teacher can feel students’ emotions when they have fear because they do not understand, saying:

“Q: So you can feel it when they don’t understand?”

A: That's the only way I can feel their emotions, because there is some kind of fear. I don't understand. They don't think, "But she's here. It's her fault. She needs to deliver the message" ((laughs)) – no. But they see that some of them understand and they don't, so they probably think "If they understand, I need to understand as well." Probably the way of living in big families..."

This Elementary teacher also can feel the calmness in students' faces after group discussion, adding:

"Q: ...because you don't understand also the girls' language.

A: Yes. Yeah. But I see their faces, the calmness which comes after that. It's like watching a movie. She is so engaged there, you know, using her hands, pointing, and then – and then she turns around, looks at me and the calmness on her face – like, now I'm ready. That's what I never mind, even if they write, draw, whatever, but that's what I want to see – the calmness on their face because I don't like the fear I can see when they don't understand."

This Elementary teacher also feels pity for the students when they are worried or afraid, but does not show them this feeling, to keep authority in the classroom, adding:

"Q: Do you think the students' emotion can transfer to you? If they fear, you're also, like – or if they're worried, you're also worried why they are worried, or...

A: No. It's not – they are worried, they are afraid, but it's not that I feel the same way. It's just at that point I pity them, but I'm not showing them because I need to keep my authority, you know? I pretend that there is nothing. Yes. I don't tell them that, yes, I can read how much you understand."

The same Elementary teacher believes that if they show their real emotions to the students, they will lose control of the classroom, saying:

"Q: So you mask your emotions?

A: Of course. That's why I have "Majlis". That's my weapon. Because if I show them how compassionate I am, then I'm losing control, and I need to be in control all the time. Sometimes I would sit and cry with them, but no. I stay calm and strict."

The same Elementary teacher confirms that teacher personality is important for teachers' Social Engagement with the students, adding:

"Q: So do you think the personality of the teacher can affect the teacher inside the classroom? The real personality?

A: Yes, completely. Completely.

Q: Because, some teachers, they said that...

A: ...If you are grumpy at home, you are grumpy with your colleagues. How can I expect you not to be grumpy with your students? Because...

Q: ...So you are expecting the same? A: The same."

This Elementary teacher also believes that caring about the students comes from being social with them, explaining:

“Q: So you mean being social outside is, like, affecting, like, being social also with the students inside?”

A: Of course. Of course. Otherwise if you’re not social enough, you don’t care.

Q: So this ‘careness’ comes from being social?

A: Of course. You need to care about other people. First it comes from your family. You need to care about your own family. You are taught to care, so that’s how we can build people. You are taught by your parents. You see how your parents care about you, and then you care about your parents and your siblings and then you care about other people. You are taught to care about other people. If you are not taught to care about other people, then...”

A Pre-Foundation “B” teacher believes that the teacher should be aware of the students’ feelings to be engaged with them, saying:

“Q: So do you think this relationship affects the teacher’s engagement inside the classroom and can make it easier?”

A: Yes. Obviously, it’s a lot easier if as a teacher you feel that the students trust you and they’re responding to you and they’re working with you. It makes the teacher’s job a lot easier. As a teacher, you should be perceptive to the group of students as a whole – how they’re feeling. I feel I can. I know if students are comfortable and I know when they’re not comfortable. Even if there’s one in a group of twenty-three. If there’s one that doesn’t look right – maybe on a grammar point or something you’re teaching them – as a teacher, I would hope I can see that and I could basically pick up on that point. As a group – you have got to be aware of the students as a group, but also individually as well.”

The same Pre-Foundation “B” teacher believes that the teacher should be aware of the students’ feelings by understanding their facial expressions, so that it will be easier to develop the students, adding:

“Q: So you think also the teacher should be aware of students’ feelings?”

A: Oh, it’s essential. I believe it’s essential. If you’re not aware of your students’ feelings, then you’ve not got much hope of developing that student if you don’t understand their feelings. Any normal teacher, not just by body language but by facial expressions, should know what that student is feeling. Yeah.”

Another Pre-Foundation “B” teacher believes that students’ emotions do not affect the teacher’s emotions, but the teacher cares about students’ emotions and problems, saying:

“Q: Do you think, for example, if the students have negative emotions in their face – does this affect you also in a negative way?”

A: Well, it used to. Not now. Not anymore. When I had just started teaching it did affect me. It’s still – I care about it. I care a lot. What’s wrong? What’s her problem? What’s his problem? Is it something because of me or is it a personal problem? – Whatever. I try to

understand the student. I try, while they're doing activities – I try to approach the student and have a very short chat with him or her so I understand what's going on, but of course it affects teachers. It doesn't affect me now, but I care about it.”

The same Pre-Foundation “B” teacher believes that students sometimes test if the teacher cares about them or not, adding:

“Q: So this also affects you?”

A: Of course it does. And the students – you know, the students are very clever. All of them. No matter how naive you think they are, and they sometimes might be, they're very clever, and they understand you. They test you and they evaluate you the very first time you put your step in the classroom. You know? And there are two or three sessions. You may not know the students because there are many of them, but they have just one teacher. There is just one person who is all they need to care about. So they know their teachers – what their teacher likes, what he dislikes – you know? They know everything about their teacher, so they know that you're a caring one, actually.”

The same Pre-Foundation “B” teacher believes that it is difficult to be engaged with the students at the beginning of the semester even if the teacher understands the students' culture, because he or she needs to know the personal attitudes and personal traits of each student in the class. Towards the middle of the semester, the teacher believes that they know the students better, explaining:

“Q: Do you find your engagement with the students – at the beginning of the course was more difficult and in the middle it is, like, easier?”

A: Of course. As a person from a different country, as a foreigner, expat – whatever you may call it – it is difficult, although I knew the culture, although I knew the students' personal traits, whatever, blah, blah, blah – still, I think that it takes time for you to know the students. It has nothing to do with culture for me, because I know the culture. It has to do with their personal attitudes, personal traits. So, you have to know your students one by one. Now we are midway through, we just passed the mid-term, and now I feel that 100 per cent I know the students. So, no. At first it seems difficult.”

A Management member believes that the more experienced the teacher, the more he or she will engage with the students, explaining:

“Q: So do you mean, here, the more the teacher is experienced, the more the teacher will be more engaged with the students?”

A: Correct. Yes. Because they will know the students well over the time they spend here, they know the culture, they know what can be discussed with the students, how they would deal with the student problems – either behaviour problems or pronunciation problems or, you know, general language problems. So they become better...

Q: ...with them.

A: Yeah.”

A Special Needs teacher talking about the students in general believes that Teacher Engagement at the beginning of the semester might be more difficult because the teacher doesn't know many things about the level of the students, saying:

“Q: Do you think teacher engagement at the beginning of the semester is not that much and then it becomes more by the end?”

A: I think everyone is maybe a little bit uneasy initially. You don't know what exactly the levels of your students are. You haven't assessed them yet. You haven't had that interaction so that you know exactly how much they know. Do they understand you? Are they more critical or are they okay with being there? You just don't know. There's just so many things – as a foreigner – that you are not aware of, that it can be difficult.”

The same Special Needs teacher believes that the teacher shows that they care about the students by listening to them, adding:

“I think they just want to see that you really care and that you're also listening to them as much as you want them to listen to you.”

An Elementary Consolidation teacher believes that the teacher feels empathetic towards low-achieving students, but this empathy motivates the teacher to search for new approaches in teaching, explaining:

“Q: Do you think this experience is influencing your emotions toward teaching, that you feel you don't like teaching?”

A: I feel really sorry. For example, the other day, when I showed my students their mid-term results, mid-term marks, I was nearly crying to see a student who was feeling miserable, who was really unhappy to see how low his mark was, and the problem was he couldn't even explain to me his unhappiness, his emotions. He couldn't express his emotions that this is not the way it should be – that he is unhappy.

Q: You could see it in his face.

A: Yeah, I could see. He was mentioning Arabic words, something in Arabic, and he was trying to express his...

Q: A male student?

A: Yeah, a male student – it was. I think it's his third semester and he has to pass and there's also a TOEFL test there waiting for them. I really feel sorry for these students and I don't think – it doesn't change my attitude on teaching – about these issues. On the contrary, it actually motivates me because this is what it is. This is what teaching is. Of course, good students are always good. It's easy to teach them – the important part is dealing with these low-achieving students, and I feel motivated, but I try to – theoretically, I try to find information on how to deal with, how to put up with these students, in terms of approaches and methods. I always try to find information on the internet to apply in the classroom – which approach would fit with my students – but, theoretically, things are different than when it comes to practice. Things are completely different for the students.

Q: So you feel, maybe, empathetic with the students.

A: Yeah. I feel empathetic. Empathy. I try to do that because I can understand them. They never see English at home. They are exposed to the English language only in the classroom – I think. Not...”

This Elementary Consolidation teacher also believes that being aware of their students’ negative feelings can upset teachers and make them feel sorry, adding:

“Q: Do you find it difficult to be aware of your students’ feelings, problems?

A: It’s not difficult for me. I can – as I said, I was nearly crying to see a student – it makes me upset. Even at home, for example, it comes to my mind. For the whole semester I’ve been discussing – at home, when I go home, with my wife – how my students are, how I feel sorry about them – yeah, all this – it affects me.”

The same Elementary Consolidation teacher also believes that sharing students’ feelings with their teachers will create trust, but at the same time the teacher should be strong and encourage the students, saying:

“Q: Do you find like your emotions, you were very motivated before the mid-term exam and the marks and now you find yourself, like...

A: It is a bit hard, but, if it is hard for me, it is going to be two times harder for my students. So I try to be strong and to encourage my students again.

Q: So, you don’t show them this?

A: I don’t show it. Oh, of course, no. To some extent it is good if they see that you feel sorry and you are sharing their feelings. It’s good that they start believing you. They gain trust. They will start relying on you in terms of trust. It’s good, but it’s bad if you – it discourages them if you show all the time – it discourages them more – and they start to think that things are impossible, so they shouldn’t believe that things are impossible. They should always believe that nothing is impossible.”

This means that Social Engagement with the students is a very important component of Teacher Engagement. The teacher is socially engaged with the students when the teacher cares about students’ feelings, especially negative ones that are related to exam results and interaction inside the classroom such as fear and sadness. Caring about students’ feelings will create trust between teachers and students. At the same time, a teacher’s authority should be kept inside the classroom, so that the students will feel strongly against their negative emotions and will be motivated. Teachers should also be aware that students sometimes test if the teacher cares about them or not. This is why it is important to understand students’ personal attitudes, so that the teacher can socialise with them easily. Teacher’s empathy towards the students can also motivate teachers to search for new methodologies for teaching.

Analysis and Discussion:

Teacher- student relationship was also considered an important factor to enhance teacher engagement inside the classroom. This was confirmed by different interviewee including teachers, students and the management member. Al-Mahrooqi et al (2016) pointed out that

the teacher should create comfortable atmosphere inside the classroom by being not too formal inside the classroom. This what the students mention during the interviews that they want teachers who care about them psychologically and who trust them, so that they can have more confidence in learning the language. Dornyei & Malderez (1997) also affirm that students prefer domestic teachers who share decision-making with them. Zhao (2012) also certifies that the teachers should design reasonable tasks for the students, so that the students can feel their success. Students should also be encouraged by giving them positive feedback and this was also pointed out by the students themselves during the interviews. Zhao (2012) also emphasises that trust and respect are the basics of having successful relationship with the students and it is the way that shows the students that the teacher cares about them.

Summary of Findings

Teacher-Engagement is a very important factor for teaching effectiveness and motivating the students. Teachers' emotional engagement is very important for the teachers since teaching is an emotional process where emotions of both teachers and students interact with each other. For example, teachers may feel worried about their students' exams and may empathise with the students if they get low grades.

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