

Job Embeddedness and Work Engagement among Pre-Primary Teachers in Central Uganda

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Abstract

Work engagement of teachers plays a critical role to enhance school development, learner academic achievement, students' mental health, and teacher retention. However, sustaining teacher work engagement remains a challenge especially in pre-primary education settings in developing countries where teachers face high work demands with limited resources. Although job embeddedness has been identified as a key factor influencing work engagement, evidence regarding its influence on pre-primary teachers' work engagement is scarce. This study investigated how job embeddedness influences teacher work engagement in pre-primary schools in Greater Mukono, Central Uganda. It examined whether job embeddedness dimensions, namely job fit, job link, and job sacrifice significantly influenced pre-primary teachers' work engagement in terms of social, emotional, and cognitive engagement. A quantitative approach, with a correlational research design was used. Data were provided by 153 pre-primary teachers through a self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive results revealed high levels of both teacher work engagement and job embeddedness in the sampled schools. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation modelling (PLS-SEM) results revealed that job fit and job link positively and significantly influenced work engagement of pre-primary teachers. Job sacrifice had a positive but insignificant influence on teacher work engagement. Therefore, job fit is necessary for teachers' work engagement, as well as job link. However, job sacrifice is not necessarily essential for work engagement of pre-primary teachers. The study recommended that school administrators should strengthen job fit and provide opportunities for job link to improve teachers' work engagement, but should not prioritise job sacrifice above other factors. This study provides empirical evidence on specific job embeddedness dimensions that school administrators can target to foster teacher work engagement as its practical contribution. Focus on improved job fit and strengthened professional connections among teachers, schools can develop evidence-based management practices that promote a more engaged and productive teaching workforce.

Keywords: Job Embeddedness, Teacher work engagement, Job Fit, Job Link, Job Sacrifice, Social Engagement

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1. Introduction

Work engagement has recently attracted considerable scholarly attention because of its importance in enhancing the quality education (Abun et al., 2021; Zuo et al., 2024). It is considered a prerequisite for organizational development as it strengthens employees' feeling of ownership and loyalty, and encourages them to perform beyond their prescribed job requirements (Ribeiro et al., 2023). In education context, teacher work engagement contributes to school development, learner achievement, and students' mental health and well-being, as well as teacher retention (Curran & Waterman, 2019; Mazzetti et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). Additionally, engaged employees are more enthusiastic and are excited about what they do with helps them to maintain better focus in their work (Abun et al., 2021). Highly engaged teachers show strong commitment to their school, contribute to reduced student dropout rates, and support improved student progress, and overall school performance (Topchyan & Woehler, 2020). Additionally, engaged teachers tend to pursue professional advancement and are more proactive in solving problems and often willing to take on additional tasks beyond teaching responsibilities (Kim et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Based on their work and responsibilities in pre-primary school settings, teachers require sustained effort, commitment, and high levels of teacher work engagement (Rowan et al., 2021). Therefore, engagement should be emphasised.

Work engagement has been variously defined. It refers to a job-related psychological state that is positive and

fulfilling, which stems from three interrelated constructs, including dedication, vigour, and absorption (Mazzetti et al., 2023). Work engagement is also defined as a positive emotional and cognitive working status characterized by absorption, dedication, and vigour (Zhang et al., 2021). On their part, Albrecht et al. (2021), define it as an individual's holistic involvement in their work physically, emotionally, and cognitively. However, the most widely accepted conceptualisation of work engagement comprises three dimensions: dedication, vigour, and absorption (Schaufeli, 2021). Vigour entails high physical stamina and mental concentration displayed by a worker in the workplace as seen from the way they persevere in the face of work challenges. Dedication entails full immersion of workers in their job tasks when they meet obstacles. Absorption includes becoming deeply engrossed in their work over a period of time (Schaufeli, 2013). Nevertheless, Klassen et al. (2013) argued that teacher engagement is distinct from engagement in other occupations and is best assessed through the dimensions of emotional, social, and cognitive engagement as is conceptualised in this article. Cognitive engagement refers to teachers' deliberate awareness of their responsibilities and goals within the organisation, driving a positive mind-set to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness (Sanchez, 2022). Emotional engagement involves teachers' emotional responses to their job activities in a positive way (Wang et al., 2021). Social engagement refers to teachers' interactions and connections with learners and colleagues characterised by active participation, collaboration, and positive interpersonal relationships (Klassen et al., 2013).

While work engagement is recognised as important, low work engagement among teachers remains a persistent global concern. The National Centre for Education Statistics report revealed that in United States, teachers lack emotional and cognitive engagement to their job indicated by the annual turnover that stands at 16% (McFarland, 2018). Other studies conducted in the USA show 10% of elementary teachers show negative emotions during 80% of their teaching (McLean & Jones, 2025). Similar reports in Singapore and Finland indicate a 3-4% teacher attrition rate. It has been also reported that in the Netherlands, only 19% of teachers are highly engaged (Schaufeli et al., 2017). This implies that the majority (81%) are less engaged. Likewise, higher turnover rates have been reported in Asia Pacific region, ranging between 28% and 60% (Bunnell & Poole, 2023). Such high attrition rates are associated with low emotional and cognitive work engagement (Kingsley, 2025).

In Africa, studies have revealed a similar trend across different countries. Vermooten et al. (2019) established that the rate of teacher absenteeism is at 19.7% in South Africa. Studies in Tanzania (Kibambila & Ismail, 2021) and Kenya (Muthoni et al., 2022) reveal existence of low emotional, cognitive and social engagement among teachers exhibited by unprofessional practices of teachers, like absenteeism, alcoholism, harassment, and low commitment to teaching. In Ethiopia, a recent study by Alene et al. (2025) reported stronger cognitive and emotional engagement compared to social engagement, while their qualitative findings showed disengagement behaviours of teachers in public secondary schools. The same situation exists in Uganda, where it has been reported that teachers show similar habits, particularly late coming, irregular attendance, and being involved in alternative work, which depict teacher disengagement (Kabuuka, 2022; Mugizi et al., 2020).

Previous studies indicate job embeddedness as one of the organisational factors influencing work engagement in different sectors (Huang et al., 2023; Lei, 2024; Ramaite et al., 2022). Nevertheless, despite these studies, limited research has focused on examining how job embeddedness influences teacher work engagement in pre-primary in the Ugandan context. Existing studies on teacher work engagement in Uganda, have mainly focused on predictors like perceived organisational support (Mugizi et al., 2022; Musenze & Mayende, 2020) and talent management practices (Mugizi et al., 2022). Other studies have investigated how support and work engagement relate among small and medium enterprises employees (Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu, 2024), prediction of transformational leadership on work engagement of public service employees (Patricia et al., 2020), and how work engagement on successful aging at work is affected by work-life balance (Kibedi, et al. 2025). Empirical research work on the influence of job embeddedness on teachers work engagement in pre-primary schools with particular attributes of job fit, link, and sacrifice remains scarce. Therefore, this study was conducted to address this knowledge gap by investigating the influence of job embeddedness on teacher work engagement in pre-primary schools, using selected pre-primary schools in Greater Mukono sub-region located in Central Region of Uganda. The study specifically sought to test the following hypotheses:

- H₁: Job fit significantly influences work engagement of pre-primary teachers.
- H₂: Job link significantly influences work engagement of pre-primary teachers.
- H₃: Job sacrifice significantly influences work engagement of pre-primary teachers.

2. Literature Review

This section gives the overview of the theory that informed the study, namely Job Embeddedness Theory. It also

synthesises empirical studies examining the influence of job embeddedness on teacher work engagement and identifies gaps in the existing literature which formed the basis for the current study.

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by the Job Embeddedness Theory developed by Mitchell et al. (2001) which explains why workers stay in their jobs and how organisational attachment influence their behaviour. It states that workers who are deeply connected to their organisation and community have lower intentions to leave their jobs and are less likely to do so (Mitchell et al., 2001). This theory highlights the factors that keep employees attached to their work, which as a result influences their attitudes and behaviour like work engagement (Xue et al., 2023). The theory conceptualizes job embeddedness as fit, link, and sacrifice. This theory is used in the current study to explain how job embeddedness dimensions namely link, fit, and sacrifice relate to work engagement of pre-primary teachers. This is because teachers who are strongly attached to their schools are likely to stay more engaged in their teaching job (Yun et al., 2024).

2.2 Job Embeddedness and Work Engagement of Teachers

Job embeddedness according to Mitchell et al (2001) describes a web or net in which a worker gets stuck into the job and can be understood in several ways. On their part, Awan et al. (2021) define it as a worker's social connection with the job that makes them reluctant to quit their job. Khorakian et al. (2021) define it as a construct that emphasizes the factors keeping employees in an organisation instead of reasons for leaving. Similarly, Fan et al. (2024) describe job embeddedness as the extent to which employees remain in an organization due to their connections with people and activities, their perceived fit within the organizational context, and the potential losses they would incur if they left. While Xue et al. (2023) define job embeddedness as a combination of forces that keep employees attached to their jobs and organizations through their connections, compatibility with the work environment, and the perceived sacrifices related to leaving. Therefore, job engagement is concerned with more of what makes employees stay in organisations with low intentions of quitting their jobs. Job embeddedness is a multi-dimensional construct comprising fit, link, and sacrifice (Chan et al, 2019). Related literature on the constructs in regards to work engagement of teachers follows:

2.3 Job Fit and Work engagement

Job fit refers to a worker's perception of how well is their compatibility with the institution, the job, the work environment, and the immediate community. Among teachers, job fit occurs when they perceive that their skills and qualifications match teaching demands, their values align with school culture, and they feel comfortable with school routines and expectations. Studies (Chen et al. 2024; Enwereuzor et al., 2018; Gonlepa et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2023; Keane et al., 2024) have established a significant relationship between job fit and work engagement. However, none of these studies examined the Ugandan context, thereby creating a contextual gap in the existing literature. Furthermore, most of the studies focused on employees from sectors other than education. For example, the studies investigated full-time employees in China (Chen et al. 2024), hospital nurses (Enwereuzor et al. 2018), university research assistants in China (Gonlepa et al. 2023) rather than teachers. This may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized to the teaching profession as it may not fully capture the unique dynamics of teaching environments. Also, differences in work environments, resource availability, and varying qualification levels, may limit the applicability of findings from other professions and settings to Ugandan pre-primary teachers.

2.4 Job Link and Work Engagement

Job link can be understood as the informal and formal attachments a worker has with other people, groups, or activities in an organisation and the wider community (Ramaite et al., 2022). These connections may include relationships with colleagues, supervisors, work teams, and professional networks that may increase their bonding to the workplace and job (Shah et al, 2020). The links an individual has influence their decision to stay at work (Lei, 2024). The greater the number and stronger these connections are, the more embedded the employee becomes, making them engaged in their work, and less likely to leave the work (Fan et al., 2024; Setthakorn et al., 2024). Some studies have examined the association between job link and work engagement (Fan et al., 2024; Lei, 2024; Ramaite et al., 2022; Setthakorn et al., 2024), which suggests that job embeddedness enhances employees' psychological bonding to their organisation. However, these studies have missed out to examine this relationship among pre-primary teachers particularly in Uganda. This may limit the applicability of their findings to pre-primary teachers. Thus, leaving a gap for this study to address.

2.5 Job Sacrifice and Work Engagement

Job sacrifice involves the perceived physical or psychological loss one may incur if they left the organization, including loss of valuable projects, good healthcare, pension plans, and a pleasant personal office (Chan et al.,

2019). Literature shows that employees who feel that they would lose valuable benefits, strong relationships, or opportunities by leaving the organisation tend to become emotionally attached to organisation which strengthens affective commitment and therefore, lowers the turnover rate (Ampofo, 2020). Studies have linked job sacrifice to employee work engagement in different sectors. Examples include: Awan et al (2021) in their study among bankers established that on-job embeddedness components including job sacrifice mediated the relationship between work conflict and intention to leave. Furthermore, Khan et al (2021) examined job embeddedness and organisation commitment and turnover intention among hotel workers in Pakistan. In the systematic review study on job embeddedness conducted by Malalage and Perera (2025) it was found out that most contemporary research focus on turnover intention, organisational commitment, and retention, with relatively little attention to work engagement as a major outcome. The review further suggested the need for context-specific studies especially in under-researched regions and sectors, such as Uganda and Education in particular, for better understanding of the role of job embeddedness across different work environments. Therefore, this study responds to the call to bridge the gap.

3. Methodology

This section presents the strategies and procedures employed to gather data. These include research approach, design, sample size, collection of data, and analysis.

3.1 Research Approach and Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach to collect statistical data for numerical analysis, aimed at producing generalisable findings. This approach was preferred for its reliable hypothesis testing capacity and ensuring clarity and rigor in investigating the hypothesized relationships (Mwita, 2022). It enabled the researcher to identify the magnitude and significance of the influence of job embeddedness dimensions on teacher work engagement. A correlational research design was applied to test the relationship between the variables, namely job embeddedness and teacher work engagement. This design was preferred because it facilitated establishment of the strength and direction of relationships between job embeddedness dimensions and teacher work engagement (Siedlecki, 2020).

3.2 Population and Sample

The study population comprised 871 pre-primary teachers across the four districts that form Greater Mukono sub-region in Central Region of Uganda (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017). Pre-primary teachers were selected because their experiences and roles directly aligned with the study objectives. The sample size included 265 pre-primary teachers determined by use of the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. However, the actual sample that provided data were 153 pre-primary teachers, who according to Hair et al. (2019), fulfilled the “10-Times Rule”. The rule recommendation is a minimum sample size of at least 10 times the maximum number of structural pathways directed at a particular latent variable in a model. In this study, the minimum required sample would be $10 \times 6 = 60$ cases because the highest number of predictors in a construct were six. The sample of 153 is above this threshold therefore, is sufficient enough for analysis with PLS-SEM.

3.3 Sampling Technique

A stratified sampling technique was used to determine schools for inclusion in the study. Lists of all pre-primary schools in the respective districts were obtained and stratified into rural and urban categories to account for contextual differences. From each stratum, schools were selected using simple random sampling. This procedure was preferred to enhance representativeness, minimize selection bias, and strengthen the generalisability of the quantitative findings (Rahman et al., 2022). In the second stage, a census sampling technique was applied within the selected schools to include all pre-primary teachers. This approach was deemed appropriate because most pre-primary schools in the study districts had only two, and at most three, teachers, making it feasible to capture data from the entire teacher population within each selected school. The census approach further enhanced the accuracy and completeness of the data by minimising sampling error at the teacher level.

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

The study adopted and adapted standardised tools namely Engaged Teacher Scale (ETS) by Klassen et al., (2013), and Job Embeddedness Measure (JEM) by Clinton et al. (2012) to collect data. In the adapted version of the instrument, the word school replaced organisation as the subject of the questionnaire items to suit the study context. The tool was self-administered rated on a five-point scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). It comprised of three sections: section A sought demographic information, section B, examined teacher work engagement, and section C, measured job embeddedness.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were managed and analysed using both SPSS and SmartPLS 4, each serving different but complementary purposes aligning with the study's research design and analytical requirements. SPSS version 20 was used for the initial data cleaning and descriptive analysis. Data cleaning involved detection and analysis of outliers through frequency tables, and boxplots to identify outliers and missing data before proceeding with further analyses. However, missing data were not observed since the questionnaire was administered using Google Forms, which was configured to require responses for all items before submission. For the main inferential analysis, PLS-SEM in SmartPLS4 was utilised to develop measurement model and path estimates.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

The study obtained ethical approvals from both UCUREC and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). Informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and the potential risks and benefits were carefully balanced as required. The study purpose was clearly communicated to respondents, who duly consented before their participation in the study. Furthermore, participation was voluntary and respondents' anonymity was observed to ensure their protection throughout the data collection process. Findings were reported in an aggregated form to dislink the respondents from the data so as to ensure confidentiality. To minimise potential risks, measures were taken to prevent identification of individual participants. The value of the study has been enhanced through dissemination of the findings in open-access publications and presentation in conferences, aiming at the advancement of early childhood education sector.

4. Findings

The study findings presented in this section include: descriptive statistics like demographic characteristics, mean scores, and measurement and structural models and their corresponding path estimates. These results provided the foundation for the respective analyses, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The demographic distribution of respondents who participated in this study are presented in this section. These characteristics offer important context for interpreting the respondents' perspectives and the school environments in which they operate. The variables considered include gender, school category, teacher qualification, and school location as summarised in table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	12	7.8
	Female	141	92.2
Total		153	100
School Category	Home-based Centre	12	7.8
	Nursery School	141	92.2
Total		153	100
School Location	Urban	79	51.6
	Rural	74	48.4
Total		153	100

Qualification	Certificate in Child Care	10	6.5
	Certificate in Nursery Teaching	85	55.6
	Diploma in ECD	14	9.2
	Bachelor's Degree in ECD	7	4.6
	Not trained	37	24.2
Total		153	100

Table 1 shows that out of all respondents, 141 (92.2%) were female and 12 (7.8%) were male, meaning that the pre-primary teaching workforce in this study was largely dominated by females. The table also shows that the majority (92.2%) of respondents were employed in nursery schools, while a small proportion (7.8%) work in home-based learning centres, reflecting that formal pre-primary schools are more prevalent in the study area. In terms of location, slightly more respondents (51.6%) were selected from urban schools compared to rural schools (48.4%) which demonstrates a fairly balanced representation of teachers from both settings. Regarding qualifications, most respondents held Certificate in Nursery Teaching 55.6%, followed by those without formal training (24.2%). A few held a Diploma in early childhood education (9.2%), a Certificate in Child Care (6.5%),

and Bachelor's degree in early childhood education (4.6%). This distribution highlights that all qualification levels were adequately represented in the study.

4.2 Measurement Models

Reliability, convergent validity, multicollinearity, and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of correlations were tested to ensure that data were suitable for structural modelling. Validity of data was affirmed by the Average variance extracted (AVE) and HTMT. The reliability was tested through Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability (CR). To confirm the independence of the predictor variables and their appropriateness, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were established. The mean scores were also established to determine how pre-primary teachers rated their work engagement and job embeddedness. The results of the measurement models are presented in table 2 and 3.

Table 2. AVE and Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of Constructs

Measure	Mean	AVE	CE	EE	SEC	SEL	TWE
CE	4.39	0.623					
EE	4.43	0.666	0.670				
SEC	4.22	0.737	0.569	0.633			
SEL	4.34	0.771	0.710	0.584	0.727		
TWE	4.35		0.874	0.841	0.867	0.890	
Measure		AVE	JE	JF	JL	JS	
JE	3.74						
JF	4.03	0.552	0.723				
JL	3.90	0.527	0.757	0.783			
JS	3.82	0.566	0.797	0.632	0.686		

JE=Job Embeddedness; JF=Job Fit; JL=Job Link; JS=Job Sacrifice

Table 2 indicates the mean scores of the different aspects of teacher work engagement. Cognitive engagement (mean = 4.39), emotional engagement (mean = 4.43), social engagement with learners (mean = 4.34) and social engagement with colleagues (mean = 4.22). These results reflect that all the mean scores were close to code 4, which denoted agreed, meaning that teachers rated themselves high. The general mean score for teacher work engagement indicated 4.35 implying that teachers' level of work engagement was high. In regards to job embeddedness, the overall mean score was 3.74 suggesting that teachers perceived their job embeddedness as high. All the job embeddedness dimensions were highly rated by pre-primary teachers. Job fit had the highest mean score of 4.03, followed by job link (M=3.90), and job sacrifice (M= 3.82). All AVE values exceeded 0.5 which is the recommended threshold indicating acceptable convergent validity (Shrestha, 2021). This suggests that all constructs appropriately measured and converged well on their respective constructs of job embeddedness and teacher work engagement. The HTMT ratios of correlation were below 0.90, the recommended value, reflecting their adequate discriminant validity among the constructs (Hair Jr. et al., 2020). This showed that the constructs were empirically distinct from each other and measured different concepts. Therefore, the collected data deemed suitable for structural modelling.

Table 3. Reliability and Value Inflation Factor

Measure	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	CR	VIF
CE	0.879	0.908	1.951
EE	0.873	0.908	1.785
SEC	0.881	0.918	1.907
SEL	0.852	0.910	2.081
Job Embeddedness	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	CR	VIF
Job Fit	0.837	0.880	1.756
Job Link	0.708	0.817	1.731
Job Sacrifice	0.845	0.886	1.589

Key: CE=Cognitive Engagement; EE=Emotional Engagement; SEC=Social Engagement with Colleagues; SEL=Social Engagement with learners.

Table 2 shows Cronbach's alpha values were between 0.708 and 0.881 and all CR values were above 0.70, revealing adequate internal consistency, which means that all indicators of teacher work engagement and job embeddedness reliably measured the intended constructs (Hair Jr. et al., 2020). Furthermore, VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 2.449 which are below 3, the commonly accepted threshold. This indicates no threats of multicollinearity and that the predictor, job embeddedness (JE), contributes independently to explaining variance in teacher work engagement (TWE). These results support the strength of the structural model, ensuring that the

path coefficients can be interpreted without concerns of inflated standard errors due to multicollinearity.

4.3 Structural Equation Model for Job Embeddedness and teacher work engagement

To assess how job embeddedness influences work engagement, a structural model was developed and tested. The model assessed three hypotheses: job fit (H_1), job link (H_2), and job sacrifice (H_3) each, significantly influences pre-primary teacher work engagement. These are shown in figure 1 as a structural model and illustrates the hypothesised predictive effect of job embeddedness dimensions and teacher work engagement.

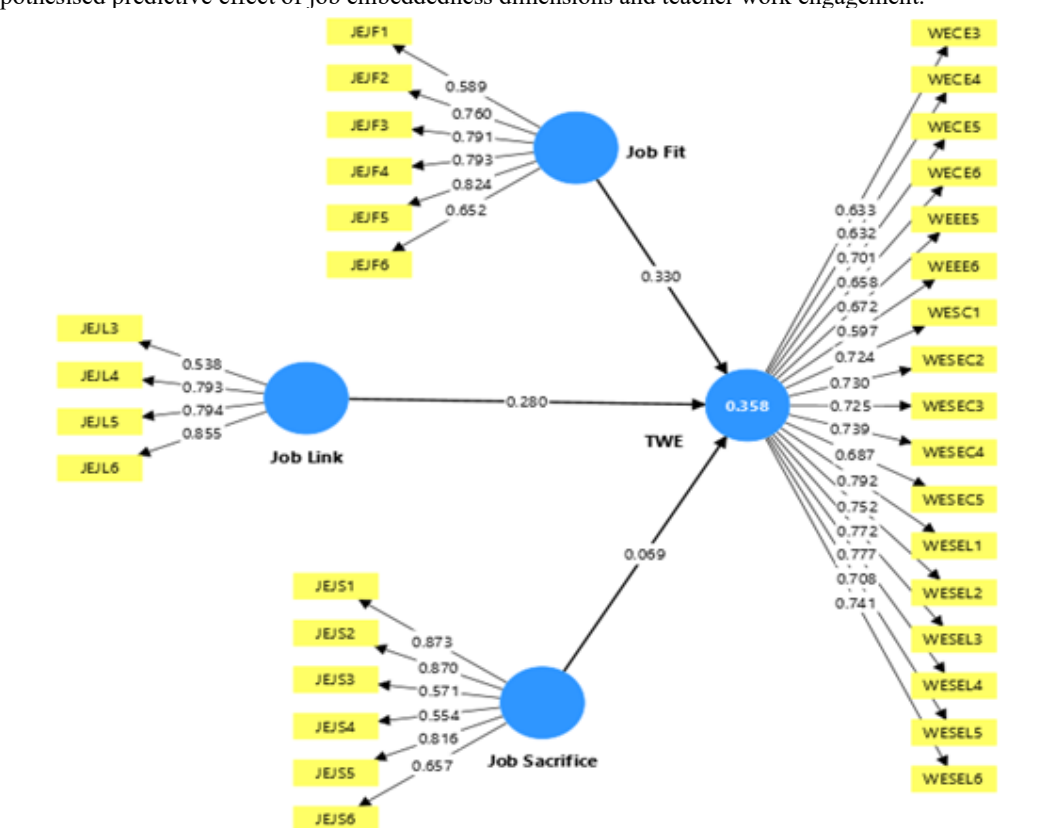


Figure 1. Structural Model for Job Embeddedness and Teacher Work Engagement

Figure 1 indicates how job embeddedness relates to work engagement of pre-primary teachers. Job embeddedness was investigated in terms of three dimensions namely, job link, job fit, and job sacrifice. All items for job fit and job sacrifice loaded above the validity value of 0.5 and were included in the model, but two items for job sacrifice JEL1 and JEL2 did not form part of this model because they loaded below 0.5 validity value. Teacher work engagement was investigated as emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, social engagement with colleagues, and social engagement with learners. Similarly, all items that loaded above 0.5 validity value were included in the model. To test the direct effect of the constructs, bootstrapping PLS-SEM analysis was done and the results are as shown in table 4.

Table 4. Path Coefficients of Job Embeddedness and Teacher Work Engagement

Path	β	t-statistics	P-values
Job Fit -> TWE	0.330	2.827	0.005
Job Link -> TWE	0.280	2.544	0.011
Job Sacrifice -> TWE	0.069	0.788	0.431
R-square = 0.358			
R ² adjusted = 0.345			

Table 4 indicates the relationship between job fit and teacher work engagement has a coefficient path of $\beta=0.330$, $t = 2.827$ (>1.96) and $p = 0.005$ (<0.05). This reflects a positive and statistically significant effect of job fit on work engagement of pre-primary teachers. Implying that the higher the teachers' levels of job fit, the higher their work engagement levels as well. The relationship between job link and teacher work engagement showed a coefficient path of $\beta=0.280$, $t = 2.544$ (>1.96) and $p = 0.011$ (<0.05). This indicates a positive and statistically significant effect of job link on teacher work engagement. Similarly, reflecting that the higher the teachers

perceived job link, the higher their levels of work engagement. However, the job sacrifice and teacher work engagement relationship has a coefficient path value of $\beta=0.069$, $t = 0.788$ (<1.96), and $p = 0.431$ (>0.05) showing a positive but statistically insignificant effect. Meaning this relationship could have occurred by chance. The path model shows coefficient determination ($R^2=0.358$) implying that the aspects of job embeddedness collectively, contributed 35.8% to the work engagement of pre-primary teachers. Adjusted R^2 of 0.345 suggested that the significant factors including job fit and job link contributed 34.5% to work engagement. This means that the remaining 65.5% is contributed by other factors not considered under the current model. The findings reflect that job embeddedness is a predictor of teacher work engagement, therefore, the hypotheses H_1 stating that job fit significantly influences teacher work engagement, and H_2 which states that job link significantly influences teacher work engagement are supported. While H_3 stating that job sacrifice significantly influences teacher work engagement is not supported.

5. Discussion

The findings indicated that job fit significantly influences work engagement of pre-primary teachers. These findings support the job embeddedness Theory by Mitchel et al. (2001), which posits that workers' attachment to their organisations is shaped by their perceived fit. This implies that teachers whose competences and skills match their teaching demands show more attachment to the school and are likely to be more engaged in their work. This finding aligns with that of Chen et al (2024) who established that a person organisation fit significantly influences work engagement among employees of both public and private enterprises in China. Likewise, these findings support the findings by Enwereuzor et al (2018) who revealed similar results that person job fit predicts work engagement among nurses. Furthermore, this finding is similar to that of Huang et al. (2023) who reported a significant association between person-job fit and occupational commitment among kindergarten teachers. The finding suggests that when pre-primary teachers perceive that their abilities, skills, and competences match their teaching demands, they are likely to show greater cognitive, emotional, and social attachment and invest more energy in their work.

The current study further revealed a positive and significant influence of job link on work engagement of pre-primary teachers. This result confirms the preposition of the job embeddedness theory which states that workers who are deeply attached to their organisation and community have lower intentions to quit their employment (Mitchell et al., 2001). According to Lei (2024), the employee decision to stay on their jobs and organisation is dependent on the connections they have with colleagues, supervisors, work teams, and professional networks. This suggests that teachers who maintain strong relationships with fellow teachers, parents, supervisors, and learners are likely to feel more attached to the school and become more engaged. This finding supports those of earlier scholars who revealed a significant relationship between job link and work engagement (Fan et al., 2024; Lei, 2024; Ramaite et al., 2022; Setthakorn et al., 2024). Therefore, it implies that to foster teacher work engagement, good interpersonal relationships and collaboration among pre-primary teachers should be strengthened.

The findings also revealed that job sacrifice had an insignificant influence on work engagement of pre-primary teachers. This is in contradiction with the Job Embeddedness theory which states that employees who perceive greater material, social, and psychological losses associated with leaving their jobs are likely to remain more attached to their organisations and show positive work-related attitudes and behaviours (Mitchel et al., 2001). It is also inconsistent with Awan et al (2021) who established a significant moderating effect of job sacrifice in the relationship between role conflict and intention to leave among bankers. Likewise, it supports Khan et al (2021) findings of a positive significant relationship between job embeddedness and organisation commitment and turnover intention among hotel workers. This finding may suggest that pre-primary teachers do not consider psychological losses associated with leaving their jobs when determining their level of engagement. Instead, their levels of engagement may be influenced by their job-skills compatibility and relationships within the school and community. This may be true especially in contexts where employment benefits are limited such as the Ugandan pre-primary schools (National Planning Authority, [NPA], 2022). This finding suggests that more attention should be put to improving the quality of teachers' work experiences and workplace relationships rather than relying on retention factors related to job sacrifice.

6. Conclusion

This study concluded that job fit is a critical factor in enhancing teacher work engagement levels. Teachers who feel that their roles align with their qualifications, skills, interests, and job demands are more likely to show high cognitive, emotional, and social engagement. Suggesting that assigning teachers roles that match their skills and competences, considering their personal values, and providing comfortable teaching environment can increase

their work engagement levels. The study further concluded that job link plays a vital role in promoting working engagement of pre-primary teachers. When teachers have strong professional and social connections within the school, they are likely to be more engaged in their work. Particularly providing them with opportunities to work together with fellow teachers on school activities and projects, and creating time to socialise with friends outside school hours, they become cognitively, emotionally, and socially engaged to their jobs. Therefore, strengthening teachers' sense of compatibility with their work and their connectedness to the institution is critical for sustaining high levels of work engagement.

7. Recommendations

School administrators and education agencies should adopt deliberate strategies to strengthen teachers' job fit by deploying teachers to roles that match their qualifications, skills, and interests. School administrators should provide opportunities for strong professional and social connections within the school. Such as adopting strategies that foster collegial teamwork, strengthen relationships with parents, and learners by providing them with opportunities to work together on school projects and social events. This may foster a sense of attachment and connectedness to the school, which consequently may increase levels of cognitive, emotional and social engagement in their work.

8. Practical Contribution of the study

The study provides practical insights for school administrators and education agencies on job embeddedness strategies that can foster teacher performance, well-being, and work engagement behaviour. From this study, it is observed that job fit is a crucial factor in enhancing teacher work engagement. As such, school administrators who deploy teachers in relation to their competences, skills, and interests improve teacher work engagement levels. Also, the job link encourages teachers to be cognitively, emotionally, and socially engaged in their work. Therefore, school administrators who provide an atmosphere such as social events, where teachers easily connect with fellow teachers, learners, and the entire school community, creates teachers' attachment to the school and are likely to have a more engaged workforce. On the other hand, though job sacrifice was not significantly associated with teacher work engagement, its positive relationship indicates that providing teachers with material, social, and psychological opportunities, that they would miss if they left the school, may contribute to their work engagement levels.

9. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

Although the current study contributes to the existing literature of how job embeddedness influences teacher work engagement, there are some limitations which should be noted. First, some findings were contradictory to the hypotheses and earlier studies, particularly the influence of job sacrifice on teacher work engagement indicating a need for further investigation of this relationship across other contexts. Furthermore, generalisation of these findings to teachers in other regions of Uganda or to other levels of education such as primary, secondary, or tertiary institutions may be limited. Future studies could replicate the research in different geographical and educational contexts to enhance generalisability. Also, the study adopted a purely quantitative approach, which may not fully capture the lived experiences and contextual realities of pre-primary teachers. A mixed-methods approach could provide richer and more comprehensive explanations of how job embeddedness influences teacher work engagement in different school settings. This study only focused on-job embeddedness, future studies may explore the off-job embeddedness such as community fit, community sacrifice, and community link.

Future research may investigate the influence of job sacrifice on teacher work engagement across other educational and cultural contexts to clarify the inconsistent findings reported in this study. Other studies should be conducted involving teachers of different levels of education from other regions of Uganda, using mixed-methods or longitudinal designs. This would enhance the generalisability of the findings and provide deeper insights into teachers lived experiences.

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