Factors Affecting Academics Work Engagement: A Case of Higher Education Institutions in Xinjiang, China

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ABSTRACT

For a long time, the management of teachers in colleges and universities has focused on specific tasks such as performance assessment, professional title evaluation and employment, and salary promotion. College teachers are prone to depression, anxiety, burnout, and other psychological problems due to work pressure. These factors are not only having a direct impact on their own smooth development, but also is related to the level of talent training and the quality of higher education development. Their work engagement level is not only affected by the external support and material incentives given by the organization, but also by their own happiness in the process of teaching. Therefore, teacher's work engagement has become a research hotspot This paper attempts to summarize and analyze the previous research results, the methodology used in this research is the primary data where the questionnaire administration is being used as a quantitative research method to collect the data from the respondents in this research. The findings of this study have been expected to study the factors which are perceived organizational support, well-being on work engagement among academics in higher education institutions in Xinjiang, China. Thus, the teachers who work at universities, colleges or any form of higher education institutions are being focused on this research. Furthermore, this research has been focused on the discussion of perceived organizational support, well-being in order to make some theoretical reflections and practical explorations on the current level, influencing factors and mechanism of work engagement of college teachers.

Keywords: University teachers; perceived organizational support; psychological well-being; work engagement

1.0   BACKGROUND
1.1   Global Higher Education
Higher education plays an important role in social development. As the world's

population grows, more and more people are enrolling in higher education institutions (HEIs). On September 16, 2021, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published a report entitled "Education at a Glance 2021″ which revealed that an average of 85% of younger adults (25-34 year-olds) across OECD countries have completed upper secondary education in 2020(OECD Indicators, 2021) On the international level, UNHR (United Nations Human Rights (UNHR), 1976) affirmed the right of people to higher education by stating that "Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education". Higher education represents, to a great extent, the highest ideals and expectations of a country and society, which has naturally become the focus of societal attention, and has always been one of the topics concerned by researchers all over the world.

Higher education plays a vital role in countries' realization of their socio-economic development and in establishing a competitive, skilled workforce globally, and it represents, to a great extent, the highest ideals and expectations of a country and society, which has naturally become the focus of societal attention, and has always been one of the topics concerned by researchers all over the world.

It is well known that higher education is the lubricant of economic growth; therefore, the role of higher education in promoting and facilitating social and economic development in developing countries cannot be underestimated. In this circumstance, the demand for higher education has seen increased.

1.2   Higher education in China

With the rapid development of China's economy and the enhancement of its international influence, China's higher education is undergoing fundamental changes. On May17Tth,2022, at the conferences of the "decade of education" held by the Ministry of education, they pointed out that in the past decade, the level of education popularization at all levels has reached or exceeded the average level of middle - and high-income countries.

Higher education has created remarkable development achievements and built the world's largest higher education system. By 2011, there were 2738 higher education institutions (including 241 independent institutions), with total 44.3 million students in school. The gross enrollment rate of higher education has increased from 30% in 2012 to 57.8% in 2021, an increase of 27.8 percentage points, achieving a historic leap forward (SCIO, 2022).

To ensure that more people can embrace higher education, the Chinese Government has continuously improved the enrollment and teacher training system. The increasing number of young people enrolling in HEIs has greatly improved the amount and penetration of higher education in China. However, due to the unilateral pursuit of speed and scale, the uneven development of higher education in the East, Central, and West

regions of China has become increasingly prominent, which has not only led to educational inequalities and inefficiency but also become an important factor restricting the overall progress of China's society.

1.3 Current Situation of Higher Education in Xinjiang，China

Xinjiang, the north west of China, which is the largest province in China, but it is also a relatively underdeveloped province in terms of higher education. In 1949, there was only one university in Xinjiang. After 70 years of development, Xinjiang has formed a complete education system from preschool education to higher education.By 2020, Xinjiang has 56 higher education institutions with 486,680 students, an increase of 6.24 times compared with 78,000 in 2012(Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region People's Government Website, 2021) However, the rapid development of higher education has brought many new challenges to higher education institutions and teachers. Cultivating high-level teachers is the premise and cornerstone of achieving high-quality development of education, and teachers' work engagement will become the main body to promote high-quality development of education.

In recent years, the social status, treatment level and resource allocation of college teachers in China have been greatly improved. However, it is found that they are facing increasing professional pressure in their daily work and life, they not only need to complete relevant teaching tasks, but also need to engage in student management, scientific research, cultural communication, social services and foreign exchanges. They also undertake the responsibilities of contacting social groups, taking care of families and raising children. The difficulty in the sense of achievement and satisfaction is also far greater than that of other teacher groups, and it is easier to have psychological problems in interpersonal relationships, professional emotions, work engagement and so on, which have a direct impact on the level of college teachers' work engagement. Therefore, to study the influencing factors of college teachers' work engagement is an effective way to actively explore and improve the level of college teachers' work engagement, and also has important reference significance and application value for the management of college teachers.

2.0 Influencing factors of teachers' work engagement

Teaching is unquestionably a demanding vocation, and the stress and emotional demands associated with this job can lead to job burnout as well as low job satisfaction (Capone & Petrillo, 2020). However, the majority of academics in the current teaching force are still enthusiastic and find their work worthwhile and satisfying (Clark-Chiarelli et al., 2019). Influenced by positive psychology, some scholars have gradually shifted the perspective of their research to teacher work engagement. Research has shown that the more engaged teachers are in their work, the better students perform and the better prepared they are for the future. Furthermore, if teachers are engaged in their work, they are less likely to quit (Vermeulen et al., 2014).

There are many studies on work engagement abroad, and the research objects are

mainly focused on employees. The JD-R model is the most commonly used theoretical model for studying work engagement (Schaufeli, 2017). Demerouti put forward the Job Demands-Resources theory in 2001, which was initially used to explain the phenomenon of job burnout (Vignoli et al., 2017). After Schaufeli et al. Introduced work engagement into the model, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model has been continuously improved. Work engagement is the result of high-level work resources and personal resources. Work resources (such as social support of colleagues) are physical, psychological, social and organizational characteristics that enable people to face work requirements. Such resources can promote personal and professional development. Personal resources are those positive characteristics of people, with the ability to reduce the negative impact of job requirements. Personal resources include optimism, resilience, self-esteem or self-efficacy (Schaufeli, 2017).

In recent years, the Job Demands-Resources model has also been applied to the study of teachers' work engagement. The studies have focused on primary and secondary school teachers, and researchers hope to improve the quality of education and reduce the turnover rate of the teaching force by studying the factors influencing teachers' work engagement. A small number of studies have focused on teachers in higher education, but not on non-academic workers working in higher education. The studies that have been conducted on teacher work engagement can be roughly divided into studies on the antecedent variables of teacher work engagement and studies on the outcome variables.

2.1 Antecedent Variables Affecting Teachers' Work Engagement

Antecedent variables affecting teachers' work engagement, including individual variables and organizational factor variables. Individual factors cannot be ignored in the study of work engagement. Gender (Topchyan&Woehler, 2021), Mental State (Lu et al., 2022), Personality Traits (Li et al., 2017) Self-efficacy (Li et al., 2017; Burić&Macuka, 2018;Skaalvik&Skaalvik, 2016), well-being (Tesi et al., 2019), emotion regulation (Greenier et al., 2021), identity (Vander Want et al., 2019), etc. will all affect an individual's level of work engagement. For example, Skalvik&Skalvik, (2017) research on Norwegian teachers found that higher teacher self-efficacy predicted better work engagement. Skalvik&Skalvik, (2018) further found that teacher well-being predicts higher job engagement and lower turnover motivation. Albrecht & Marty, (2020) found that self-efficacy and trait competitiveness in individual resources were significantly positively correlated with teachers' work engagement through a questionnaire survey of university teachers.

In terms of organizational factors, those that have an impact on employee work engagement include: job characteristics (Rachman&RachmanSulistyo, 2019; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019), organizational justice (Sharma &Kumra, 2020; Imamoglu et al., 2019) ,Job resources (Knight et al., 2019; Moreira-Fontán et al., 2019), empowerment (Rachman&RachmanSulistyo, 2019; Ancarani et al., 2019; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019), organizational support (Meintjes& Hofmeyr, 2018; Wang et al., 2020;Wen et al., 2019), appropriate recognition and reward (Bay et al., 2014; Abun et al., 2021; Al-Hawari et

al., 2019), other organizational contexts (Hasan et al., 2020; Paais&Pattiruhu, 2020; KAWIANA et al., 2021)significantly related to employee mental health. Job enrichment and job role fit, co-worker encouragement and superior support, job resources availability has a positive impact on job engagement through different individual psychological states; on the contrary, adherence to co-worker norms have a negative impact on job engagement through psychological safety and participation in outside activities through psychological availability.

According to the JD-R model featuring the dual process (i.e., an energy sapping process in which demands cause exhaustion vs. a positive motivational process in which resources foster engagement), decreasing job demands helps employees concentrate on their jobs and minimizes moments of unproductivity; increasing job/personal resources helps employees preserve energies and remain engaged (Kwon & Kim, 2020). Organizational support and job characteristics have predictive effects on job engagement. Both organizational justice and organizational support have good predictive effects on job engagement (Imamoglu et al., 2019; Vol et al., 2020). Yongxing et al. (2017) confirmed for the first time that the relationship between work engagement and objective task performance is moderated by POS, such that the positive relationship is more significant when POS higher than lower. Rasool et al. (2021) pointed out that the sense of organizational support is an important predictor of employee work engagement. The direct relationship between workplace environment and employee engagement be confirmed that if employees are working in a toxic environment, they will spread negative feelings among other co-workers. And organizational support also increases employee engagement with the work as well as with the organization. It is confirmed that when workers perceive the support from the organization, their sense of belonging to the organization is strengthened(Rasool et al., 2021).

2.2 Research on the outcome variables that affect teachers' work engagement

Topchyan & Woehler (2021) explored the relationship between teachers' work engagement and job satisfaction. Silvia Simbula & Dina Guglielmi (2013) explored the relationship between work engagement and mental health problems, job satisfaction and out of role performance through a longitudinal study of Italian teachers. Helena Granziera&Harsha N. Perera(2019) conducted a study on 595 teachers in primary and secondary schools in Australia and found that teachers' self-efficacy and work engagement are interrelated over time. Teachers' job satisfaction is predicted by job input, and job satisfaction is predicted by job input. Bakker& Albrecht (2018) believed that work engagement connectwith personal characteristics, organizational factors and performance.Wuet al. (2019) found through research that when employees can devote themselves to work, they will show a work state of behavior, cognition and emotion that is consistent with the expected work state of the organization. Work engagement can predict the individual performance of employees and the performance of the whole organization.

From the above studies, it can be found that the studies on the factors influencing

teachers' work engagement mainly involve the study of antecedent and outcome variables of work engagement, and link the antecedent variables to the outcome variables to explore the mediating or moderating role of work engagement. In addition, besides verifying the applicability of the relationship between the variables of interest and work engagement across countries, studies have been exploring the relationship between new variables and teachers' work engagement to expand the JD-R model. In this paper, psychological well-being is individual variables and organizational support is organizational factor variables are selected from the former dependent variables to explore their effects on the work engagement outcome variable employee performance. Instead of focusing on elementary and secondary school teachers as in previous studies, the research object shifts to the field of higher education, where only a few studies have focused. The purpose of the study is to seek strategies to promote employee work engagement through the study of the factors influencing work engagement in order to provide better organizational climate and support, reduce employee turnover, improve employee performance, and maximize their value.

3.0 Research on the correlation of main variables
3.1 Perceived organizational support and psychological well-being

After reviewing the previous research literature, it is found that the research on the relationship between organizational support and well-being mainly involves subjective well-being, emotional well-being and psychological well-being. Research by Malik& Noreen (2015) pointed out a relationship between teachers' occupational stress, perception and well-being. Perceived organizational support moderates teachers' well-being and occupational stress.

The research by Eisenberger et al. (2016) has emphasized on developing and maintaining an engaged workforce remains a critical objective for HR professionals as domestic and foreign competition stiffens. Perceived organizational support involving the extent to which employees feel the organization values their work contributions and cares for their well-being, provides an important tool for this objective. Evidence-based research consistently shows that perceived organizational support is linked to employees' increased psychological well-being and performance plus reduced absenteeism and turnover.

Employee happiness or well-being is an emerging topic in management as well as in psychology. Joo&Lee(2017)have conducted the research on 550 employees in a conglomerate in South Korea, employees were highly engaged in their work, satisfied with their careers, and felt a greater sense of well-being in their lives when they had higher perceived organizational support and psychological capital . Work engagement fully mediated the relationship between psychological capital and career satisfaction. Perceived organizational support had an indirect effect on subjective well-being through career satisfaction.

Another research by Rafsanjan(2020)on 233 lecturers from 19 universities in Indonesia,

investigated the role of perceived organizational support as a moderating variable in reducing the negative effect of teacher-researcher role conflict on psychological well-being (work enthusiasm and emotional exhaustion).The study found that teaching-research role conflict was negatively related to psychological well-being, perceived organizational support was a significant moderating variable in this model, it reduced the negative effect of teacher-researcher role conflict on psychological well-being.

3.2   Psychological well-being and work engagement

Teachers' well-being is also associated with other psychological constructs, including negatively with teacher stress and burnout. Burić, Slišković&Penezić(2019) aimed at testing the reciprocal relationships between teacher burnout, psychopathological symptoms, and negative student-related emotions, and to explore the protective role of resilience in these aspects of teachers' psychological well-being. The obtained results highlighted the adverse effect of burnout in predicting teachers' subsequent emotions and psychopathological symptoms. Teachers with higher burnout levels had higher levels of negative emotions towards their students.

Zeng et al.(2019)has conducted the research on the relationships among growth mindset, work engagement, perseverance of effort and well-being for secondary school teachers in the Chinese educational context. Participants included 472 secondary school teachers from 10 secondary schools in central China.The result showed that growth mindset, well-being, and perseverance of effort could all predict work engagement.

The research by Sudibjo&Sutarji(2020) has emphasized on the effects of job satisfaction, well-being, and emotional intelligence to the teachers' employee engagements at SDS Pelangi Kasih Jakarta. The results have indicated that job satisfaction, well-being, and emotional intelligence had positive effects on the teachers' employee engagements at SDS Pelangi Kasih Jakarta.

Greenier et al.(2021)investigated the role of emotion regulation and psychological well-being as predictors of work engagement through using 108 British and 255 Iranian English language teachers as a sample. The results demonstrated that both emotion regulation and psychological well-being significantly predicted work engagement for the whole sample of British and Iranian teachers. However, psychological well-being appeared to be a stronger predictor of work engagement.

3.3   Perceived organizational support and work engagement

Regarding the relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement, scholars have conducted research a long time ago.Eisenberger et al.(2016)pointed out through research that when the organization gives employees a greater degree of support, recognition and motivation at work, employees will form a stronger sense of organizational support, thus improving their organizational identity, increasing the level of work engagement, and reducing their desire to leave.Meyers et al.(2020)pointed out that employees with a higher sense of organizational support will greatly improve their

vitality and dedication in work, and then have a positive impact on their work engagement.

Scholars have done relevant research on the relationship between these two variables on teacher groups. Murthey(2017)conducted research on employees from nine different organization and found significant positive relationship between work engagement and perceived organizational support.

Najeemdeen(2018)examines the effectiveness of perceived organizational support, perceived organizational culture on work engagement among academic staff universities. The results indicate that all independent variables which are perceived organizational culture, perceived organizational support are positively correlated with the dependent variable which is work engagement.

According to Saeed, S., & Abid, H. C. (2021), perceived organizational support significantly affects the work engagement. Work engagement was accounted for 30.9% of the variance in the model. This Relationship shows that organizational support is very important factor to enhance the work engagement of teachers. This finding is similar to the study by Hasnida, Samosir, Novliadi (2019) they reported that perceived organizational support has positive effect on work engagement and 13.69% of the variance was accounted. Najeemdeen et al. (2018) found in their study that organizational support positively affects the work engagement of university teachers.

4.0   CONCLUSION

In summary, during past research, scholars have conducted numerous studies on the factors influencing the three variables of organizational support, psychological well-being, and work engagement, and have achieved rich results.However, many imperfections can also be found, such as the definition of the three concepts has not yet formed an authoritative consensus, the questionnaire measurement has not been unified, and the influence relationship has not been completely exhausted; In addition, in terms of the research objects of these three variables, the applied research on the group of teachers is relatively few, especially the research on the group of college teachers in northwest of China.

Work engagement among employees is critical to ensuring that organizations are more competitive and improve organizational performance. Therefore, organizations must focus on the needs of their employees to increase their motivation to engage in work. By combing through the literature, it can be concluded that perceived organizational support and teachers' mental health can affect the work engagement of university teachers. Management should continue to observe and investigate other factors that may affect university faculty engagement. In order to understand issues and needs, university management must maintain a close relationship with faculty so those faculties feel supported by the organization. Perceived organizational support will increase the level of mental health of employees, thereby increasing employee motivation and willingness

to participate in any job. In addition, management should pay more attention to the mental health level of college teachers. For a long time, the management of teachers in colleges and universities has focused on specific tasks such as performance assessment, professional title evaluation and employment, and salary promotion. College teachers are prone to depression, anxiety, burnout and other psychological problems due to work pressure. Providing teacher mental health training, improving the work environment, and developing a positive organizational culture can all influence employee behavior and work engagement attitudes.

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