

# Antecedents to Employee Engagement: A Qualitative Study of 28 Senior Secondary School Teachers in Nigeria

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**Abstract-** This study explores the antecedents of employee engagement among civil servants. Participants included 28 teachers from 8 government owned senior secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. The teachers cut across all levels in terms of experience, grade level, and gender. Teachers were interviewed about factors that get them engaged at work. The results revealed six main themes: passion for the job, availability of materials for the job, work environment, relationship and support between employees, training and retraining, and pay and remuneration. The findings are discussed in relation to best practice in engaging employees to work within the public sector.

**Index Terms-** Employee Engagement, Antecedents, Teachers, Public Sector, Secondary Schools

## I. INTRODUCTION

Between 1990 and now, employee engagement has emerged as a concept that has captured the attention of academics and practitioners. Due to its structural relationship between antecedents and consequences, employee engagement has received great attention from both academics and practitioners in the fields of human resource management, organisation development, psychology and business (Kim, Kolb, and Kim, 2013). While there is evidence of increasing theoretical consolidation and growth, the literature captures the inherent debate and variations of employee engagement.

Numerous studies have reported the benefits of employee engagement. For instance, employee turnover is significantly reduced when there is high level of employee engagement (Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011). Also, EE has positive influence on organisational performance indicators such as customer satisfaction and loyalty (Oakley, 2005; Salanova et al, 2005; Menguc, Auh, Fisher, and Haddad, 2013), financial performance and profitability (Oakley, 2005; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli, 2009; Harter, Schmidt, Killian, and Agrawal, 2009; Halbesleben, 2010), productivity and profitability (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002), and safety (e.g. May, Gilson and Harter, 2004; Hansez and Chmiel, 2010). Moreover, employee engagement over time leads to organisational commitment (e.g. Hakanen, Schaufeli, Ahola, 2008b; Boyd, Bakker, Pignata, Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, 2011), and more personal initiative and innovative behaviour at work (Hakanen, Perhoniemi, Toppinen-Tanner, 2008a), and reduces absenteeism (Schaufeli, Bakker, and Rhenen, 2009). Finally, employee engagement has been associated with more organisational citizenship behaviours and reduced unproductive

attitudes and behaviours (Sulea, Virga, Maricutoiu, Schaufeli, Zaborila and Sava, 2012).

As a result of its superior business outcomes, organisations and governments around the world have been in search of ways to increase employee engagement (Wollard and Shuck, 2011). This has led to research exploring the key factors that can enhance, and perhaps help the development of an engaged workforce (Saks, 2006; Wollard and Shuck, 2011). As such, research has reported different antecedents to employee engagement such as job characteristics, perceived organisational support, perceived supervisor support, rewards and recognition, value congruence, work-life balance, job fit, workplace safety (Harter et al, 2002; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004; Saks, 2006). However, the increase in the list of the antecedents of employee engagement has only led to disparate and disconnected debates because of the lack of consensus on its meaning and characteristics (Grumman and Saks, 2011). This is because of different issues which call for more exploratory studies focused on the antecedents of employee engagement. While various academic studies have focused on the antecedents to engagement (e.g. Saks, 2006; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Shuck et al, 2011), there still exist lacuna in the understanding employee engagement in both practice and academics.

Firstly, many of the reported antecedents of employee engagement were from studies based on hypotheses testing (e.g. Harter et al., 2002; May et al., 2004; Saks, 2006). While these quantitative studies have tested and validated already constructed theories employee engagement, it is important to note that such studies have certain weaknesses. For instance, such quantitative studies may not reflect the original understandings of the research participants (Choy, 2014; Creswell, 2013). Also, the theories used might not reflect the research participants' understandings (Choy, 2014). Besides, the researcher may miss out on phenomena occurring because of the focus on hypothesis testing rather than on theory building (Creswell, 2013). Finally, the knowledge produced may be too abstract and general for direct application to specific situations, contexts, and individuals (Creswell, 2013; Choy, 2014).

Secondly, many of the studies on engagement has been within the western context, especially in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, as well as some parts of Asia, Oceania and South America, and these cover more of the private sector than the public and the third sectors contexts. Also, little or nothing is known about employee engagement in an emerging economy like Nigeria. It is pertinent to note that most of these studies as earlier mentioned are generally theory testing, and validating, which means the true meaning of employee engagement and the factors that drive it may still be elusive

within these contexts despite the research results. This may be responsible for the lack of a generally acceptable definition for employee engagement, and the diverse views as regards its antecedents.

Hence, the purpose of this paper is to explore and understand the antecedents to employee engagement within the Nigerian public sector as a means to initially develop a strategic plan for engagement in the sector. This will help identify and understand employee engagement and its antecedents based on the understanding of the constituents of the research context. Also, this paper seeks to see if the results of this study would be similar to other antecedents already identified in literature. The main research question for this study is that; what are the antecedents to employee engagement?

This research will provide guidance and be helpful for management and other decision making bodies within the Nigerian public sector most especially the education sector. This study will be useful for policy makers and practitioners in the education sector of Lagos State and Nigeria. It will provide certain direction for future researchers interested in understanding employee engagement and its features within this context. Moreover, this study will provide recommendations for Lagos State government on how to increase the engagement level of teachers as well as other civil servants in the state. The findings of this study will recommend that employee engagement is very important to any organisation that seek to improve its performance. Employee engagement helps the organisation to reduce turnover, augments team work and improves the employee productivity, which in turn enhances the overall organizational performance. Furthermore, employee engagement helps the organisational sustainability and improves the economic development of the country.

Hence, the next section examines some of popular the antecedents of EE found in the literature and considered likely to influence the engagement level of teachers in public senior secondary schools in Lagos, Nigeria. The section begins by clarifying the term antecedents before discussing the significance of understanding the antecedents of EE. Then, some proposed antecedents of EE as reported by literature are examined in relation to Kahn's psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability. This section ends with a summary of the discussion about the antecedents.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

While the focus of this study is to explore and identify the antecedents of employee engagement, it is important to note that this study follows Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement. Therefore, Kahn's (1990:694) definition of personal engagement as - "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally, and mentally during role performances" – is the working definition adopted by this study. This definition is adopted because it reflects the understanding of engagement from the perspectives of the research participants in Kahn's (1990) study. Also, this definition reflects employees' positive behaviours towards work role expressed cognitively, emotionally and physically, which are

products of psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability – engagement (Kahn, 1990).

Employee engagement is an essential tool required to reshape business strategies in today's challenging and unpredictable economic atmosphere (Shuck, 2011). Many studies have constantly confirmed the relationship between employee engagement and profitability through higher productivity, increased sales, customer satisfaction, and employee retention (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). As a result, many organizations are now measuring employee engagement because of the positive outcomes it purportedly brings to organizations (Rigg, 2013). This is owing to the fact that engaged employees have been shown to perform better than disengage employees (Rigg, 2013). As Bakker and Demerouti (2008) indicated, engaged employees perform better because they experience positive emotions, happiness, joy and enthusiasm, better health, and they may even transfer their engagement to others in the organization. Moreover, in the academia, EE has been said to be associated with positive work attitudes and behaviours (e.g. Shantz, Alfes, Truss and Soane, 2013; Sulea et al, 2012; Hansez and Chmiel, 2010), individual health and well-being (Hakanen and Schaufeli, 2012), and better role performance (Bakker and Bal, 2010).

For instance, Harter et al (2002) that employee engagement is of great importance to business. In their meta-analyses of research in 7,939 business units in 36 companies, Harter et al (2002) investigated the relationship between employee satisfaction, engagement and customer satisfaction, productivity, profits, employee turnover and safety at business unit levels. Employee engagement has positive links with business outcomes which includes customer loyalty and satisfaction, profitability, productivity, employee turnover and safety (Harter et al, 2002). Engagement relates positively to business unit outcomes with the strongest effects for customer loyalty and satisfaction, employee turnover, and safety (Harter et al, 2002). Through this study, Harter et al (2002) concluded that building engagement in the workplace can have significant impact on business successes. Other research too support the findings of Harter et al (2002) and agree that engagement is related to positive business outcomes such as customer satisfaction and loyalty (Salanova et al, 2005 Menguc et al, 2013), financial performance and profitability (Xanthopoulou et al, 2009; Harter et al, 2009; Halbesleben, 2010), and safety (Hansew and Chmiel, 2010).

Kahn (1990) opined that engagement positively affects employee performance. Also, studies report that engagement improves the innovative behaviours of employees (Agarwal, Datta, Blake-Beard, and Bhargava, 2012), and leads to better employee performance (e.g. Xanthopoulou, Heuven, Demerouti, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008; Bakker and Bal (2010)). In addition, engagement makes employees to be more intensively involved in their work and pay attention to details (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). Employee engagement makes employees go beyond mere job description, but it makes them dynamic in performing their work in a manner that suits the changing work environment (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). For instance, in a survey of over 9000 people across 12 organisations, Robertson, Birch, and Cooper (2012) found that engagement relates positively with employee productivity. Furthermore, Merrill, Aldana, Pope, Anderson, Coberley, Grossmeier, and Whitmer (2013) in a survey of 20,114 employees from three geographically dispersed companies in the

United States found that engagement improves job performance and employees' productivity. Similarly, in a survey of 979 managerial employees from six service sector organisations in India, Agarwal et al (2012) found that employee engagement relates positively to employees' innovative work behaviours that boost productivity. Taken together, employee engagement is certainly beneficial in terms of productivity.

Also, there are claims that employee engagement reduces employee turnover and boosts employee retention. For example, in a survey of 5443 employees from 185 departments within a large healthcare organisation in the United States, Collini, Guidroz, and Perez (2013) found that employee engagement helps to reduce the rate of employee turnover. When nurses are engaged, they are happy and have no intention of quitting their jobs (Collini et al, 2013). Similarly, Agarwal et al (2012) also reported that engagement relates negatively with intention to quit jobs amongst Indian managerial employees. Moreover, in a study of 291 managers from Indian industrial sectors, Agarwal et al (2012) identified that a negative relationship exists between employee engagement and turnover intentions. Lastly, a cross-national study of 853 practising teachers from Australia, Canada, China (Hong Kong), Indonesia, and Oman, Klassen et al (2012) reported a significantly negative relationship between employee engagement and quitting intentions across the five countries. This confirms earlier views held by other researchers (e.g. Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) that engagement is fundamental to employee retention. Generally, employee engagement helps to increase employee retentions and reduce employee turnover.

Generally, there are strong evidences that employee engagement leads to positive results for both organisations and employees. Already, there are suggestions that engagement significantly reduces employee turnover; enhances job performance, task performance, OCBs, productivity, safety, customer satisfaction-loyalty, self-efficacy, and profit. Thus, it is clear that employee engagement matters a lot. As a result of the benefits of engagement to organisations and individuals, business leaders, political leaders and public service leaders are working towards improving the levels of engagement within their influence (Wolland and Shuck, 2011). Organisations are looking for ways to embrace employee engagement, formulate development strategies for it, and measuring engagement amongst their workforce to identify initial things to do (Ketter, 2008). Although attention has been on achieving the highest level of engagement, research suggests that there might be antecedents to employee engagement, which worth paying attention to in order to help the development of employee engagement (Saks, 2006). Limited research in the field of human resource management have paid attention to the antecedents to employee engagement (e.g. Saks, 2006; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Shuck, Reio and Rocco, 2011). Most of such studies have primarily focused on correlational tests of variables rather than trying to identify such antecedents through the understanding of workers' experience of factors that get them engaged at work (e.g. Saks, 2006; Shuck et al, 2011). Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore, and identify the antecedents to employee engagement through the understanding of workers' experience of what gets them engaged at work.

### III. RESEARCH METHOD

#### PARTICIPANTS

Twenty-eight teachers from eight government owned secondary schools across three local government areas – Alimosho, Ikeja, and Lagos Island local government areas - in Lagos state, Nigeria took part in this study. Teachers across the eight schools were informed of the study through the Commissioner for education and the Tutor-generals in charge of each local government areas, who sent the advert to the teachers in the different schools. The teachers were also informed about the study by the researcher when he was at each school. Of the twenty-eight teachers who participated, eight were from two senior secondary schools in Lagos Island which is a suburb area; ten teachers from three schools in Ikeja which is an urban area; and another ten teachers from Alimosho which is a rural area. Of the twenty-eight teachers, sixteen of them were females while the remaining twelve are males. The teachers cut across all subjects and years of experience in order to get the views of all classes of teachers – early years teachers (0 – 11 years in service), mid-experienced (12 - 23 years in service), and senior teachers (24 – 35 years in service). The criteria were that the participants must be subject teachers in public senior secondary schools across the three local government areas mentioned above. The three local government areas were selected because they were the ones easily accessible by the researcher within the budget available for the study. In addition, these twenty-eight teachers were the ones who showed interest in finding out more about the study and decided to take part in it.

#### PROCEDURE

Information about the study was delivered to the teachers by the Principal of each secondary school within the three local government areas. The researcher approached potential participants, invited their interest, informed them of the study, and then gave a copy of the consent form and the statement of the study to teachers who agreed to participate in the study before making arrangements for an interview with each potential participant. All participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at anytime. None of the participants withdrew their participation from the study.

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed and used to obtain information about teachers' experience and knowledge of the factors that get them engaged to work. In the interviews, questions were asked about teachers' understanding of engagement, factors that influenced them to be more engaged at work and otherwise.

The interview questions were unstructured and designed in such a way that promotes open – ended responses from the teachers. The interviews were between 45 minutes and an hour long. The interviews were audio-taped with the consent and permission of the participants and transcribed.

Transcripts were analysed for main themes and then coded according to those themes using the three phase coding system of Nueman (2000). During the initial coding stage, the researcher performed an initial scan of the data to highlight words and phrases used by the participants, and to locate initial themes. The primary researcher invited other researchers to participate in the analysis in order to avoid going down narrow analysis paths, and ensured that individual biases about "what is going on" are kept

in check. The research team identified the core themes through a process of collaborative analysis and linked the core themes to the purpose of the study. In the second phase, the researcher focused on connecting themes and finding links in the data. Finally, the researcher read through the data again, and assigned citations that elucidate the final themes. All coding was checked by another researcher to ensure it was coded accurately.

#### IV. FINDINGS

The analysis of interviews with the teachers revealed six main themes: passion for the job, availability of materials for the job, work environment, relationship between employees, training and retraining, and pay and remuneration.

#### PASSION FOR THE JOB

Most of the teachers interviewed spoke how their mind-sets, what they desire, and what they love to do have influenced their choice of profession and performance in the teaching role. Most of the teachers expressed that they are doing the job they have always desired and loved to do. When asked about how to describe an engaged teacher and what influences teachers to be engaged, most of the responses revealed that the passion an individual has for a profession makes him or her committed to the job as well as engaged. For instance, Rotimi, a male teacher with 18years of experience, having a smile on his face said that *"I think I will first of all start from your mindset as an individual...this job I love it...from the onset I want to be a teacher...a job that you love you will be committed to it."*

The interviews also revealed that having the heart and interest for a job and being ready to sacrifice one's energy and time for and on the job indicate the love an individual has for a job. An individual who has the heart for a job, interested in the job, and ready to sacrifice for the job has passion for the job. These characteristics indicate passion for the job which in turn influences engagement. For example, Niyi a male teacher with 23 years of experience stated that *"if somebody has that heart for the job...you will be ready to sacrifice...you will sacrifice your time, sacrifice your energy, sacrifice personal belongings like money."*

Also, teachers reported that their love for children and having the interest of the students in mind influence their love for the job. They claimed that caring for the students is an important factor that made them become teachers. For instance, when asked to describe an engaged teacher, Bimbo, a female teacher with years of experience stated that *"A fully engaged teacher is somebody that is willing to work, love his job and ready to achieve the organisational goals...has the interests of the students at heart and he's willing to know and achieve the organisational goals..."* In response to how teachers get engaged, she said *"you love the job first of all... you have the interests of the students...you see the students like they are your own children..."* When asked the same question, some teachers pointed out that love for a job could be as a result of parents' occupation and the love an individual has for children. A good example of this is Tomilola, a female teacher with just 8 months in service who reported that *"another thing is that you need to have passion for the job...for example, I really love this job...I have always wanted to be a teacher and that is because my dad*

*is a lecturer...also, I have passion for children...I like being around children...and that encouraged me to become a teacher as well..."*

#### AVAILABILITY OF MATERIALS FOR THE JOB

Most of the teachers reported that having the right tools and resources needed for the job essentially influence employee engagement. Kolade, male teacher with 8years of experience identified that availability of materials needed for the job is a precondition to employee engagement. He said that *"the facilities and materials for teaching help teachers to be engaged when they are available..."* In fact, Laide, a female teacher for years identifies materials for the job as being an important factor for getting teachers engaged. She said *"one of the factors will be the availability of materials needed for the job... if all those things are not available, there is no way the teacher will be able to discharge the duty very."* Teachers believe that having instructional materials needed for their job helps them to be engaged. Bimbola, a male teacher for 6years has a clear idea about how availability of materials for the job helps teachers to be engaged. He said *"there are some things that we needed as sort of materials or equipment or devices that will be used by that teacher to effectively discharge that duty...one of such is instructional materials... if those things are provided, at least it will aid teaching..."* most of the teachers are of the view that when they are well equipped with the tools and materials they require within their different fields to teach, such would get them engaged with their work.

#### WORK ENVIRONMENT

Another major theme that emerged from the interviews was that a good work environment influences individuals to be engaged to work. For instance, Rotimi talked about how the immediate surroundings of the workplace (the school), and other factors such as the quality of the classrooms, staff rooms, quality of the air (ventilation), and the noise level can be positive or negative for employee engagement. Most teachers believe that when the environment is of good quality, it serves as an antecedent to engagement. For instance, Folake, a female teacher with 19years of experience believes that having good ventilated classrooms and staff offices would encourage teachers to be engaged to work. Speaking excitedly about how teachers become fully engaged, Folake said, *"I think number one is good environment...if we have airy classes, conducive classes...then the classes are not overpopulated...and good quality, well designed offices...we will be engaged."* Another teacher, Adeyemi who has only been a teacher for three years claimed that the environment in of his school really attracted him to work. He said *"...so teachers are highly engaged through the following factors....one, a very conducive environment for the teachers...having the right furniture in the staff room and classes encourage teachers to be more engaged."* In fact, in a particular school, all the teachers identified work environment as a major factor that influence their engagement to work. An eye-catching statement was made by one of them, Bahorun, a male teacher with 19years in service stated that *"I feel comfortable ...if I am not comfortable with the job and this school...no matter the challenge I face...I will remain here because the environment is conducive for me...in fact...I love being here than being at*

home." In fact, another teacher, Abeke, a female teacher with about 3years 2months experience in service made a submission about the school she work in; "*the environment here is very good for learning and teaching...the quality of classes and offices are good and lovely...it encourages teachers to be effective...I enjoy coming to this school to work every day unlike my former school where the environment is nothing to write home about.*" This clearly indicates that a good and conducive work environment could be a precondition to engagement.a good work environment makes the workplace attractive to employees and in turn encourages them to be engaged to work.

## **RELATIONSHIP AND SUPPORT BETWEEN EMPLOYEES**

A major theme identified from the interviews could be relationship between employees. Teachers talked about how the cordial relationship and family-like relationship that exist amongst them serve as a precursor to employee engagement. This was identified as a major theme in every school where teachers were interviewed. For example, Niyi, male teacher with 23 years of experience claimed that "*relationship with co-workers serves as a way of motivating me to be engaged at work...supports from colleagues in all forms help a lot*". Niyi's statement shows that good relationship amongst employees encourages supports on the job amongst them. Niyi talks about how the cordial relationship among teachers in his school has resulted into the creation of a social committee in the school. This social committee is made up of teachers and through it they attend to one another's needs. This cordial relationship promotes teamwork among the teachers as well. In the interview with Bola, a female teacher with 10 years' experience, she shared experience about how other teachers were able to help her and other teachers who were busy preparing the final year students for their final exams with other responsibilities of their jobs as a result of the good relationship they have. In an event that happened while interviewing a teacher which reveals the cordial relationship and support among the teachers, Simbi, a female teacher with 25 years' experience sought the help of another teacher to take her class while she took part in the interview. The other teacher happily jumped at the request and made for the class immediately. Also, Hammed, a male teacher with just 6months experience in service expressed that having cordial relationships with other teachers have helped him to be engaged because whenever he is faced by any challenge on the job, others are easily accessible for him to seek their help. For instance, Folake described a scenario that supports Hammed's point, but her final statement says it all; she stated that "*at least I have seen people in this school calling on another staff within the school to teach a topic...and the person did it with all pleasure...and it was done...I think that is a good relationship...and it has helped...*". In describing how relationship and support between employees help them to be engaged, Bolarinwa, a female teacher with up to 12 years' experience said "*in this school we are working as a team...then we work as brothers and sisters...keeping good relationship with ourselves...*"

## **TRAINING AND RETRAINING**

Teachers also identified training and retraining as a precondition to employee engagement. Teachers talk about how

learning new skills about their jobs in response to the twenty first century technological changes have made them become engaged to their jobs. Making a point for how training has help to engage teacher to work, Bimbo, a female teacher with 14years of experience was quick to say "*we enjoy trainings and seminars here which help teachers to be engaged...the trainings and seminars are focused on how to help teachers resolve any challenges they are facing...these trainings are regular..*" In fact, a teacher claimed that training contributed to the love for the job. Tomilola, a new female teacher with about six months in service said "*the training I got when I was doing my teaching practice internship made me love the job completely and I made up my mind that this is where I am needed...*" In addition, teachers believe that training and retraining has helped them understand their jobs better in terms of duties and responsibilities of the role. Laide, a female teacher with 10 years in service stated that "*with the trainings and seminars, teachers have been exposed to the understanding that we are stakeholders in the education sector and we have our quota to contribute...so, understanding your position and responsibilities as teachers helps us to be engaged in this school...*" The availability of training and retraining for employees from the responses of the participants suggests it could be an antecedent to employee engagement.

## **PAY AND REMUNERATION**

Pay and remuneration was highlighted by teachers as an important antecedent to employee engagement. For instance, Sholape, a female teacher with 3years of experience claimed that pay is the "*real antecedent of engagement for me.*" Most of the teachers confirmed that pay rise will reduce teachers' turnover and encourage them to be engaged to work.This is because teachers believe they are poorly remunerated. According to Laide, a female teacher with 10years' experience, "*if there is no increment in salary*" teachers will not be engaged to work. Laide concluded that "*salary is important*" and that if there is an increment in salary, it would be good for teachers. While Tolu, a male teacher with 20 years' experience identified that good salary can help engage teachers to work, Rotimi pointed out that salary increment could reduce employee turnover. Rotimi identified that if you are "*well remunerated*", you will not be searching for other jobs or businesses to make extra income and you will be focused on your job. In another response supporting this theme, Funmito, a female teacher with 23 years of experience, talks about the fact that "*when you are well paid, you will be committed*".These views from the teachers revealed that pay and remuneration could be an essential factor influencing employee engagement among workers.

## **V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Prior studies have indicated that employee engagement has positive results on organisational performance. It has been reported that employee engagement reduces employee turnover, increases profitability and productivity at work (Harter et al, 2002). Hence, employees become innovative and proactive (Hakanen et al, 2008a), and avoid unproductive behaviours (Sulea et al, 2012).

Little research has been conducted to explore in-depth the factors that influence employee engagement or antecedents to engagement in the public sector, especially in Nigeria. The aim of this study was to interview teachers about their knowledge and experiences of factors that influence them to be engaged at work. Twenty-eight teachers were interviewed in-depth.

Six main themes were identified as important factors influencing employee engagement amongst teachers in public senior secondary schools from three local government areas in Lagos State, Nigeria.

The passion an employee has for his or her job is important in developing interest and love to be engaged to such job. In particular, most of the teachers highlighted that employee engagement would occur only when an employee has passion for the job he or she performs. One explanation for this is that passion for the job or passion for work has a link with engagement (Ho, Wong and Lee, 2011). Also, this explains the suggestion made by Zigarmi, Nimon, Houson, Witt, & Diehl (2009) that employee work passion results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviours, which highlights employee engagement. In addition, this highlighted the suggestion of Gilbert and Foley (2012) that passion for work is associated with employee engagement.

Another antecedent to engagement reported by the teachers is availability of the materials needed to perform the job roles. Many of the teachers reported that adequate provision of the tools needed to carry out their works will influence their engagement to work. Availability of the materials employees need to do their job is important in maximising employee competence, in showing employees that their work is valued, and in showing the organisation's support for them in performing the work they are asked to do (Harter, Schmidt, Killham, and Agrawal, 2009). It appears that providing the needed materials needed by employees for their jobs preconditions them to be engaged.

The work environment was also shown to be important in influencing employees to be engaged at work. From the perceptions of the teachers, the condition and quality of the work environment really matters in terms of engagement to work. If a good work environment is provided by employers, it is likely that tasks will be completed successfully, and employee engagement will occur (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter and Taris, 2008). A work environment that protects the health and safety of employees serves as a precondition to employee engagement (Dollard and Bakker, 2010). This suggests that a good work environment could influence the engagement state of employees at work.

The relationship and support employees give to one another in the workplace goes a long way in influencing their state of engagement to work. Previous studies suggested that co-workers relationships might influence employee engagement (Yanchus, Fishman, Teclaw & Osatuke, 2013). Also, Gruman and Saks (2011) suggested that co-workers support could be a precondition to employee engagement. This can be explained on the suggestion that as the level of trust and interpersonal relations increase among employees at a workplace, employee engagement could occur. Trust has a fundamental role in the engagement process as workers trust that their investment of energy, time, and personal resources will be rewarded (Gruman and Saks, 2011). Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young (2009) have stated that

employee engagement cannot exist without trust as trust and fairness are the basis for workers to feel and act engaged.

Training and retraining has been identified to be a possible factor to influence employee engagement. This study suggests that providing a workplace that allows employees to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies that relate to their work roles could make them engaged. Previous studies have suggested that training positively influences engagement (e.g. Saks, 2006; Gruman and Saks, 2011; Jiang, Hong, McKay, Avery, Wilson, & Volpone, 2014). Availability of training to workers helps career development and this influences employee engagement (Gruman and Saks, 2011). Training can help prepare employees to cope with the job demands. As described by Kahn (1990), employees are more ready and available to engage in their roles when they can cope with different demands and when they have the ability to engage in coping strategies.

The results of this study show that pay and remuneration is an important antecedent to employee engagement. Many teachers were of the view that their salaries and benefits influence their level of focus and concentration on the job. Teachers believe that increasing their pay and benefit would get them to be engaged. While this confirms the findings of previous research that bringing pay and benefit up to market levels could influence engagement (e.g. Buckingham and Coffman, 2005), some other studies have reported that pay and benefits are not of great importance to employees (Kompasso and Sridevi, 2010). However, Kompasso and Sridevi (2010) argued that this might be the case in the developed economies of the world and may vary in developing economies. This study has indeed revealed that there is variance in terms of antecedents to engagement across the globe.

The strength of this study is that the use of in-depth interview gave room to the exploration of new themes emerging in order to provide a thorough understanding of the antecedents to employee engagement. A limitation of the study is that it only focused on just eight senior public secondary schools within three local government areas in Lagos State, Nigeria. Therefore, it may be that these results are not generalizable to a large proportion of teachers in public senior secondary schools across Lagos State and Nigeria as a whole. Also, the results may not be generalizable to the whole education industry and the whole of the public sector. In addition, the small sample may limit the generalisability of the results, especially in relations to junior public secondary schools and public primary school teachers. Therefore, further studies are required to include a larger and more diverse sample of teachers.

On the overall, it is recommended that for build employee engagement among teachers in senior secondary schools, the management of the schools need to understand the factors that influence their workers first. Also, while passion for the job could be identified at the point of recruitment and selection, management needs to pay attention to providing modern materials needed to perform the job, an enabling work environment that encourages co-workers support and relationship, training, and better pay and benefit packages. It is important for the management of each school to design its employee engagement strategy in relations to their peculiar needs.

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## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

#### A EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: CONCEPT AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

- 1.) Have you heard about employee engagement before? [prompt: Give a little texts meaning of engagement]
- 2.) How would you describe a fully engaged teacher? [Prompt: engagement 'v' commitment]
- 3.) Who is a teacher fully engaged to? (prompt question)

#### B EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: ANTECEDENTS

- 5.) How do teachers become fully engaged? [cognitive, emotional, and physical/behavioural]
- a) Ask follow-up questions on why they provided particular responses
- 6.) What is critical to achieving EE here in this school?
- a) Ask follow-up questions on why they provided particular responses

#### C EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: BARRIERS

- 7.) What challenges do teachers encounter in getting engaged? What are the barriers for EE in this school?
- a) In what ways do policies help or hinder/restrict teachers' efforts at becoming engaged?

#### D EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: DRIVERS

- 8.) What initiatives or measures do the school management takes to help enhance teachers' engagement?
- 9.) How effective are these measures?

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