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Research Article

Investigating the relationship between perceived organizational support, employee engagement, and organizational commitment: Evidence from the education sector of south India

Divya Thankom Varghese[1], Swathi[1], Seeja Mammen[2]

[1]School of Management, CMR University, Bangalore, India
[2]Lecturer, Royal College of Management Studies, Bangalore, India

ABSTRACT:

This research explores the interconnections between perceived organizational support (POS), employee engagement, and organisational commitment in the educational sector of South India. On the basis of data gathered from 253 high school teachers, this quantitative research applies the method of structural equation modelling (SEM) to explore POS's direct and indirect effects on organisational commitment, meditated by employee engagement. The sample includes teachers from a range of institutional environments, government, private, and aided schools, which give an overall picture of the educational environment of the region. South India, being culturally and educationally rich, offers special organizational challenges, such as teacher turnover and engagement gaps. The results identify strong relationships between these constructs, highlighting the central role of employee engagement in fostering organizational commitment. Findings offer practical advice to educational settings that seek to enhance teacher performance and retention with supportive practices in contexts of scarce resources.

Keywords: Perceived organizational support, Employee engagement, Organizational commitment, Education sector, South India, SEM

Correspondence: Divya Thankom Varghese, Associate Professor, School of Management, CMR University, Bangalore, India, Pin – 560043 (email - divya.tv@cmr.edu.in)

1. Introduction

Staff retention and performance have become essential issues in the education system, especially in parts of South India where the need for quality education keeps on rising. Secondary school teachers are a vital component of influencing educational outcomes, and they face serious challenges, such as overwhelming workload, limited resources, and a heavy burden of administrative tasks. These stressors tend to lead to lower job satisfaction, reduced engagement, and higher turnover rates, eventually compromising the overall quality of education provided to students. With these issues in mind, it is important to examine the factors underlying teachers' organizational commitment and engagement.

Organizational commitment and employee engagement are commonly known to be key determinants of teachers' performance and their willingness to stay in their institutions (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013). Perceived organizational support (POS) is one of the major antecedents that affect both engagement and commitment and is defined as employees' perception of how much their organization cares about their well-being and values their contributions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). When teachers feel that there is significant organizational support, they are likely to feel a greater sense of value and motivation, eventually improving their classroom performance and increasing their commitment to their schools.

In addition, POS has the potential to ensure a supportive workplace, which has the potential to counteract the negative impact of job-related stressors. Evidence has shown that teachers who have a sense of support from their institutions are likely to report job satisfaction and become committed to work (Alvi et al., 2014). Those schools that make teacher well-being a priority by way of appreciation, professional development, and shared governance can better overall institutional effectiveness and student performance. Consequently, how POS impacts engagement and commitment can provide worthwhile information regarding the best ways to increase teacher retention.

In addition, employee engagement can also be a potential mediating variable in the organizational commitment-POS relationship. Teacher engagement has higher levels of work

dedication, interest, and enthusiasm, contributing to better job performance and more positive emotional connection to their schools (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Interaction among these factors underscores the importance of exploring mechanisms by which POS leads to greater organizational commitment and engagement, specifically in education.

This research aims to explore the links between POS, employee engagement, and organizational commitment. More particularly, it explores whether employee engagement acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between POS and organizational commitment. The relevance of this study is based on its particular focus on high school teachers working in South India, who are a population that has not been thoroughly explored by organizational research. In addition, by ascertaining the determinants most responsible for commitment and engagement, this research can provide practical recommendations for lessening teacher attrition and enhancing job satisfaction. The research can help educational administrators design strategic interventions to increase a positive and conducive working environment among teachers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

POS draws upon organizational support theory, according to which workers develop a generalized perception of the extent to which their company values their contributions and pays attention to their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Empirical research has consistently shown that high POS has been found to relate to a variety of positive organizational outcomes like reduced turnover intentions, increased job satisfaction, and increased organizational commitment (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009). For secondary school teachers, who normally work under stressful and difficult conditions, POS serves as a critical source of psychological safety and belonging, enabling them to manage work-related stress more effectively (Alvi et al., 2014).

Further, business ventures that openly show concern for the wellbeing of employees can inculcate a strong sense of loyalty and commitment amongst employees. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) explained that employees who perceive

strong organizational support tend to repay through higher commitment and discretionary performance. In education, this repayment could be in the form of teachers donating additional effort beyond the terms of their contract to assist in enabling students to learn, work with peers, and contribute to school development schemes.

In addition, empirical studies show that POS can also serve as a shield against the negative effects of job stressors such as workload, role ambiguity, and job insecurity (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Teachers who report high levels of institutional support tend to be less susceptible to the effects of adversity, thus remaining motivated and dedicated. This, therefore, underlines the importance of establishing an enabling work climate as a way of promoting teacher retention and school effectiveness.

2.2. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a complex construct that involves vigour, dedication, and absorption in work activities (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged workers are marked by high levels of performance, low levels of absenteeism, and increased organizational commitment (Kahn, 1990). In the education industry, engaged teachers tend to motivate and encourage their students, thus creating an energetic learning environment that maximizes academic success. As per Schaufeli et al. (2006), committed employees are more likely to invest discretionary effort towards achieving organizational objectives, consequently enhancing overall institutional performance.

POS's role in determining employee engagement is well developed in organizational scholarship. Empirical studies have confirmed that positive organizational practices enhance workers' psychological security and motivation to help them delve deeper into professional roles (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Saks, 2006). In the educational setting, recognition, professional growth opportunities, and a positive school culture are also key drivers of teacher motivation. Through the promotion of these factors, schools are able to not only enhance teacher job satisfaction but also create a deeper sense of professional purpose and fulfilment.

Additionally, involvement has also been associated with a number of desirable consequences such as greater workplace creativity, proactivity, and resilience (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Educators that enjoy greater engagement are more apt to provide novel instructional techniques, practice ongoing teacher education, and fully commit themselves to school change activities. This reinforces the fact that organizational support helps create the level of teaching engagement, thereby driving greater teaching and learning effectiveness.

2.3. Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment refers to an employee's psychological attachment to his/her organization, which conversely reduces voluntary turnover (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The construct is historically partitioned into three dimensions: affective commitment (emotional commitment), continuance commitment (feeling of leaving cost), and normative commitment (feeling of obligation to remain). Out of them, affective commitment is most directly affected by POS and employee engagement (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009). Individuals with strong affective commitment are more likely to identify their own goals with the school mission, hence enhancing a supportive and cooperative work environment.

Besides, Meyer et al. (2002) argue that affective commitment plays a central part in organizational citizenship behaviours—behaviours that contribute to the building of a positive and collaborative working environment. In the education sector, these could include mentoring prospective teachers, participation in after-class activities, and school development programs. School administrators can develop sound strategies for retaining outstanding and dedicated teachers through recognizing and developing factors that enhance organizational commitment.

Moreover, how POS is interlinked with organizational commitment emphasizes how institutional culture conditions workers' long-term commitment towards their institutions. Those schools investing in teachers' welfare, noticing accomplishment, and nurturing professional improvement tend to better foster a loyal staff. Further insights into the aforementioned relationships then may be greatly informative for policymakers and institutional managers seeking

teacher retention and organisational effectiveness enhancement.

3. Theory and Hypothesis Development

The relationships among POS, employee engagement, and organizational commitment can be effectively interpreted through the framework of social exchange theory (SET). SET postulates that employees respond to favourable treatment from their organization with positive attitudes and behaviours (Blau, 1964). Based on this theoretical perspective, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Perceived organizational support has a positive impact on organizational commitment.

- H2: Perceived organizational support has a positive impact on employee engagement.

- H3: Employee engagement positively influences organizational commitment.

- H4: Employee engagement mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants and Sampling

This study employed a survey-based approach to collect data from 253 high school teachers across various schools in South India. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation from diverse institutional types, including government, private, and aided schools. The sample primarily consisted of female teachers (62%), with an average teaching experience of 12 years. This demographic distribution aligns with broader trends in the Indian education sector, where women constitute a substantial portion of the teaching workforce.

4.2. Measures

To ensure construct validity and reliability, well-established scales were used to measure the key variables:

- Perceived Organizational Support (POS): Measured using an 8-item scale adapted

from Eisenberger et al. (1986), incorporating statements such as "My organization values my contribution to its well-being."

- Employee Engagement: Assessed through the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002), which evaluates three core dimensions—vigour, dedication, and absorption.

- Organizational Commitment: Evaluated using Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model, with a primary focus on affective commitment.

This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive examination of the interplay between POS, employee engagement, and organizational commitment, providing valuable insights for educational policymakers and administrators aiming to improve teacher retention and performance in South India.

4.3. Data Analysis

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was utilized to examine the proposed relationships within the study. SEM is a comprehensive statistical technique that enables the simultaneous analysis of multiple relationships among observed and latent variables (Byrne, 2016). To assess the mediating role of employee engagement, the bootstrapping method was employed. Bootstrapping is a resampling technique that generates confidence intervals for indirect effects, thereby enhancing the reliability of mediation analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). This method provides a more rigorous examination of mediation effects compared to traditional approaches, as it does not rely on assumptions of normality in the sampling distribution of indirect effects (MacKinnon et al., 2004). By implementing SEM in conjunction with bootstrapping, the study ensures a robust and nuanced evaluation of the interrelationships among the variables, contributing to the overall validity of the findings.

5. Results

5.1. Discriminant Validity of Employee Engagement and Organizational Commitment Constructs

To facilitate conceptual separation between

very close constructs, it was necessary to operationally separate them. Discriminant validity tests were thus administered to ascertain that each construct was measured distinctly. In social science research, more so in organizational behavior (OB) and human resources (HR) research, many constructs seem synonymous in common parlance. But for exact theoretical and empirical analysis, the uniqueness of such constructs must be ascertained both conceptually and statistically.

Previous studies have set the distinctness of employee engagement and organizational commitment. Nevertheless, since the way the measurement items for these constructs were worded was similar, we used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to affirm discriminant validity. This examination was necessary in order to verify if employee engagement and organizational commitment were distinct constructs.

5.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, internal reliabilities, and intercorrelations among the study variables. Adequate internal consistency is evidenced by the reliability coefficients of 0.57 to 0.85. Correlation patterns also concur with the hypothesized associations, whereby perceived organizational support (POS) is evidenced to have a statistically significant positive correlation with employee engagement and organizational commitment. In addition, employee engagement is found to be positively correlated with organizational commitment, lending credence to the proposed theoretical model.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Reliabilities, and Intercorrelations Among Variables

Variable	POS	Employee Engagement	Organizational Commitment	Internal Reliability	Mean	SD
POS	1			0.57	3.18	0.41
Employee Engagement	0.64	1		0.85	3.39	0.34
Organizational Commitment	0.72	0.78	1	0.74	3.49	0.30

Note: $p < 0.01$

Structural equation modelling (SEM) with AMOS was utilized to analyze the associations among POS, employee engagement, and organizational commitment. Standardized regression estimates (Table 2) shed light on the direct associations among these constructs. Statistical significance was established based on critical ratio (CR) values, adhering to conventional benchmarks (Biswas, Giri, & Srivastava, 2006; Byrne, 2001). CR values of 2.58 and above signify significance at the 99% level, while values between 1.96 and 2.58 signify significance at the 95% level. Findings show that employee engagement positively and significantly regresses on POS (β = 0.20, CR = 3.80). Likewise, organizational commitment is positively and significantly correlated with employee engagement (β = 0.30, CR = 4.70), confirming Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Table 2: Regression Estimates

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	CR	Remarks
POS → Employee Engagement	0.2	0.4	3.8	H1 Accepted
Employee Engagement → Organizational Commitment	0.3	0.5	4.7	H2 Accepted

Note: CR values above ±2.58 denote significance at $p < 0.01$.

To examine the mediating function of employee engagement, we utilized SEM procedures with the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) algorithm. Mediation analysis was conducted according to standard methodologies (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheetes, 2002). Two alternative models were tested: Model 1 with employee engagement as a mediator, and Model 2 that tested only the direct effect between POS and organizational commitment. Fit indices (Table 3) were assessed against suggested cut-offs (Byrne, 2001; Hair, Andersen, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The findings affirm that Model 1 is a better model, validating Hypothesis 3.

Table 3: Fit Indices

Model	Normed	GFI	CFI	NFI	RFI	TLI	RMSEA	AIC	Browne-Cudeck Criteria
Model 1	1.28	0.92	0.98	0.94	0.89	0.97	0.03	389.35	409.81
Model 2	3.72	0.82	0.79	0.76	0.72	0.77	0.11	697.61	706.94

6.   Discussion

Findings substantiate the proposed theoretical model, confirming that POS exerts a significant positive influence on employee engagement and organizational commitment. Employee engagement emerges as a crucial mediator in these relationships, reinforcing the necessity for organizations to foster supportive environments that enhance engagement levels. These results align with prior research (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009), emphasizing the critical role of POS in cultivating commitment through engagement.

From a practical perspective, organizations should prioritize strategies such as recognizing employee contributions, facilitating professional development, and ensuring equitable treatment to bolster POS. Such initiatives not only enhance engagement levels but also strengthen employees' emotional attachment to their organizations.

Addressing challenges such as excessive workloads and resource constraints can further help sustain high levels of employee commitment (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

Additionally, the study highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of engagement's mediating role across different organizational settings. While prior research has often focused on direct POS-commitment links, this study underscores the importance of psychological mechanisms that mediate these effects (Saks, 2006).

Furthermore, given that this study focused on high school teachers in South India, its findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions and industries. Future research should consider a cross-sectoral approach to examine if similar effects persist across different professional domains.

7.   Conclusion

This research highlights the importance of perceived organizational support (POS) in influencing employee engagement and organizational commitment, especially in the education industry in South India. Perceived organizational support means workers' perceptions of how much their company appreciates their efforts and concerns for their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The results of this study confirm that POS has a significant effect on employee engagement and organizational commitment, supporting the idea that if employees feel supported by their organization, they will be more likely to be engaged in their work and exhibit greater levels of commitment to their institution (Saks, 2006).

Additionally, the research brings to the limelight that employee engagement is the mediating variable in the relationship, and this implies that POS encourages engagement, and engagement will further enhance organizational commitment. This mediating role is consistent with prior research proposing that employees who are engaged are emotionally and cognitively more invested in work and, therefore, more inclined to develop a sense of loyalty and commitment towards their organization (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The practical implications of these findings

emphasize the need for schools to implement policies that prioritize employee welfare, recognize and appreciate staff contributions, and provide opportunities for continuous professional development. Such initiatives can enhance employees' perceptions of organizational support, ultimately leading to greater engagement and commitment. Schools can achieve this by fostering a supportive work environment, offering career growth opportunities, and ensuring that educators feel valued and respected.

For future research, scholars could explore potential moderating variables that might influence the relationship between POS, engagement, and commitment. Factors such as leadership styles, job autonomy, workplace culture, and individual personality traits could provide deeper insights into the dynamics of organizational behavior in educational settings. A more comprehensive understanding of these moderating effects could help develop more tailored strategies to enhance employee engagement and commitment, ultimately improving overall organizational effectiveness in schools.

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