



Comparison of public and private primary school teachers' employee engagement and organisational commitment

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ABSTRACT

Background: Public primary school teachers receive more stable remuneration and service benefits (e.g., pension, housing allowances, bonuses, and medical aid) than teachers in most private schools. However, private school teachers perform better in local and international assessments than their public school counterparts.

Purpose of the study: There is limited research on how public and private primary school teachers differ in terms of employee engagement and organisational commitment in South Africa, which are associated with low learner outcomes and widespread teacher resignations. This study aimed to determine the empirical differences between public and private primary school teachers' employee engagement and organisational commitment. Moreover, this study ascertained the relationship between employee engagement and organisational commitment and assessed whether teachers' biographical variables influence employee engagement and organisational commitment.

Design/methodology/approach: A quantitative correlational research design was used. Data were collected using both simple random and convenient sampling methods. The employee engagement questionnaire and organisational commitment scale were self-administered to 300 participants in a rural educational circuit in South Africa.

Findings: The results revealed that public and private primary school teachers differed on only two employee engagement subscales. No significant differences were observed between public and private primary school teachers regarding organisational commitment. Significant relationships were observed between some dimensions of employee engagement and organisational commitment. Significant associations were observed between some dimensions of the measured constructs and biographic variables.



Recommendations/value: Workplace intervention initiatives should focus on addressing work-related and organisational issues efficiently, as this could impact employee engagement and organisational commitment. This study is deemed the first of its kind where public and private primary school teachers were compared on the two constructs simultaneously in South Africa and, therefore, contributes to the literature.

Managerial implications: In addressing low learner outcomes and teacher retention, this study encourages continued interventions that promote teacher engagement and commitment.

Keywords

Employee engagement; Organisational commitment; Private primary school teachers; Public primary school teachers; South Africa

JEL Classification: O15

1. INTRODUCTION

The education system plays a pivotal role in sustaining the continuous supply of a skilled workforce in a country through formal training (Rothmann & Hamukang'andu, 2013). In this context, primary education (Grades R – 7) serves as the bedrock of the entire education system and is a prerequisite for continuous development (Hamid *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, learners at the primary education level are required to have a solid foundation in their studies with the help of their teachers in order to ensure academic success at secondary and tertiary education levels.

According to Bibiso *et al.* (2017) and Sezen-Gultekin *et al.* (2021), quality teaching and learning at the primary education level cannot be attained without the dedication and commitment of teachers. Similarly, Fouché *et al.* (2017) asserted that quality education is dependent upon factors such as teachers' well-being, engagement, performance, and retention. In terms of teacher engagement, a recent report by Sezen-Gultekin *et al.* (2021) noted that engaged teachers demonstrate behaviours that may lead to desirable outcomes for the employing organisation. Engaged teachers who remain actively involved in their work roles are highly satisfied and committed; thus, they have a low turnover rate compared to their disengaged counterparts (Paulik, 2020; Shibiti, 2020). This literature emphasises the link between teacher-employee engagement and positive work attributes such as commitment, satisfaction, retention, and performance (Fouché *et al.*, 2017; Pieters & Auanga, 2018; Paulik, 2020; Shibiti, 2020; Sezen-Gultekin *et al.*, 2021).

Previous literature reflected that employee engagement and organisational commitment are influenced by individual factors such as age, gender, qualification, job category, and experience (Martin & Roodt, 2010; Martins & Nienaber, 2018). However, studies exploring

these important factors have produced divergent findings (Martin & Roodt, 2010; Rahati *et al.*, 2015; San & Tok, 2017; Paulik, 2020), suggesting the need for further studies. Studies by Jackson and Rothmann (2006), Pitsoe (2013), and Shibiti (2020) further proffered that a teacher's work role is often affected by factors resulting in high levels of stress and strain: complex education policies, excessive workload, high expectations to deliver; remuneration; working conditions; and limited resources coupled with personal and family issues. High levels of stress and strain have been reported to negatively affect teachers' engagement and performance; this may lead to their intention to leave the teaching profession (Hakanen *et al.*, 2006; Fouché *et al.*, 2017; Moremi, 2019).

Comparatively, public school teachers receive more stable remuneration and service benefits (e.g., pension, housing allowances, bonuses, and medical aid) than their counterparts in most private schools (Mckay *et al.*, 2018; Kelly, 2019). A possible reason for this disparity is that private schools depend mainly on school fees and donations, whereas the government finances public schools. Moreover, private schools in rural areas tend to remunerate their teachers poorly based on the low-income levels in such areas. Thus, one would expect public primary schools to produce the much-needed learner outcomes; however, public primary schools seem to have lower learner outcomes (in most local and international assessments) than private schools (OECD, 2011; Department of Basic Education, 2014; Van der Berg *et al.*, 2017). This raises the question of whether private primary school teachers are more engaged and committed than their counterparts in public schools. While teachers face numerous challenges, as noted above, anecdotal evidence suggests that a lack of dedication and commitment on the part of public school teachers may account for this anomaly (Passionate South African Principal, 2015). This view concurs with that of Paulik (2020), who posited that a teacher's engagement is the one factor that tends to compensate for the experience of excessive work demands that often result in negative outcomes. In the same vein, a study by Moremi (2019) found that private primary school teachers were more engaged than their public counterparts. Similarly, the study of Naik and Singh (2013) proffered that private secondary school teachers achieved higher commitment mean scores than those in the public domain. It is important to note, however, that Naik and Singh's (2013) study was conducted in India, which does not reflect the multicultural and racial diversity of South African society.

The study of Moremi (2019), which appeared to be the only local study comparing public and private primary school teachers' engagement and burnout, did not, however, consider the organisational commitment construct. This, therefore, demonstrates two important directions. First, there is limited research in the present literature regarding how public and private primary

schools differ in terms of employee engagement and organisational commitment. Next, there is the need to further explore this vital area in the context of South African education. Moreover, the state of the South African basic education sector is currently experiencing low learner performance, a shortage of qualified teachers, the migration of teachers, widespread resignations, and increased absenteeism (Pitsoe, 2013; Centre for Development & Enterprise, 2015). Thus, teacher engagement and commitment have become increasingly essential factors to consider in the pursuit of educational goal attainment and teacher retention. This study, therefore, contributes to both the academic and professional literature by examining the differences between public and private primary school teachers relevant to the study constructs. This study also provides information pertaining to the relationship between the two main constructs, as well as the correlations with biographic variables within the study sample predicated on a South African basic education context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review focused on the conceptual definition and dimensions of employee engagement and organisational commitment constructs. Next, the differences between public and private primary school teachers as pertaining to the study concepts and biographic variable association, as well as the theoretical relationship between employee engagement and organisational commitment within the workplace, are discussed.

2.1 Employee engagement

Kahn (1990) explored the conditions that allowed individual employees to be engaged (direct or use their personal selves) or disengaged (withdraw or defend their personal selves). This initial introduction of the concept focused on the theory that individual employees at work may exert themselves at different levels (physically, psychologically, and cognitively) in their task execution and continue to maintain the boundaries between their personalities and the tasks they perform (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990:694) described personal engagement as the "harnessing of organisational members' selves to their work role" and personal disengagement as the "uncoupling of selves from work roles." Kahn's approach reflects individuals' free will to determine how to apply themselves in their work roles. Thus, within the educational context, engaged teachers are more likely to apply themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally while performing their assigned teaching tasks, whereas the opposite may be true for disengaged teachers.

Theorists, such as Maslach *et al.* (2001), defined employee engagement as employees' involvement, energy, and efficacy, which is the reverse of the three burnout dimensions

(exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy). The premise of this theory is that, despite high job demands and time-management pressure that may lead to burnout, some employees experience high degrees of activation and pleasure in confronting the demands of their job (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Similarly, Paulik (2020) studied the psychological factors associated with employee engagement among a sample of teachers in the Czech Republic and concluded that, despite the high teaching job demands, teachers in the study continued to demonstrate a relatively high level of employee engagement.

Schaufeli *et al.* (2002), however, argued that employee engagement is a distinct construct and should be defined and measured independently from the burnout tradition as proposed by Maslach *et al.* (2001). Employee engagement is, therefore, defined as a positive psychological state of mind characterised by three distinct but related dimensions: *vigour* (i.e., perseverance in difficult work situations); *dedication* (i.e., intense psychological identification with work); and *absorption* (i.e., being deeply immersed in a work role). The premise of this approach is that employee engagement denotes an enduring and pervasive affective-cognitive condition that does not exclusively focus on a specific individual, object, behaviour, or event (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Within the educational context, it is assumed that teachers with a high level of vigour demonstrate enthusiasm for their work roles. Moreover, a high degree of dedication demonstrates a strong affiliation with the work role, whereas those with a strong absorption are fully occupied with their work role without noticing events in the immediate surroundings.

While previous definitions reflect a measurement based on the level of individual engagement, Nienaber and Martins (2015:405) defined employee engagement as “engaged employees at both the individual and organisational levels”. Additionally, Nienaber and Martins (2015:405) further argued that employee engagement means that “employees are fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about their work, and so take positive action to further the organisation’s reputation and interests.” This approach proposes a simultaneous measurement of employee engagement at the individual and organisational level, given that the latter provides strategic direction which determines employees’ job roles. In turn, employees work to promote the strategic agenda of the organisation; thus, there is an inter-reliant relationship between the parties.

Nienaber and Martins (2014; 2015) maintained that employee engagement consists of six unique but related dimensions: 1.) organisation strategy (i.e., employees’ feelings and views about leadership, rewards, job design, information sharing, and the opportunities available for personal development within the organisation); 2.) organisation customer service (i.e., employees’ perceptions of treatment of customers to encourage their loyalty and attain

organisational objectives); 3.) team (i.e., employees' awareness and strong identification with the support system available within the organisation); 4.) immediate manager (i.e., a sense of a supervisory support system that promotes employee performance in the workplace); 5.) individual level of satisfaction (i.e., employees' sense of joy at work and their willingness to be at work); and 5.) individual level of commitment (i.e., employees' sense of affiliation and preparedness to support the organisation).

Considering the divergent theoretical definitions of employee engagement in the literature, it is evident that the construct is profoundly entrenched in employees' psychology. It is a personal choice which reflects how employees would apply themselves to their job roles and, thus, link to the motivating potential of the work context. Employee engagement is also regarded as a recipe for organisational success since engaged employees exhibit behaviours that may lead to desirable outcomes for both the employees and the employer (Sezen-Gultekin *et al.*, 2021). Within the educational framework, teacher engagement studies reveal that engaged teachers remain actively involved in their work roles and are highly satisfied and committed, which demonstrates their intentions to remain in the profession and go the extra mile to support learners academically. Contrariwise, disengaged teachers remain dissatisfied and frustrated with their assigned roles, show high turnover intentions, underperform at work, and have a negative impact on the performance of their colleagues within the school environment (Paulik, 2020; Shibiti, 2020; Sezen-Gultekin *et al.*, 2021).

2.1.1 Public vs private primary school teachers' engagement

Previous literature (Robinson *et al.*, 2004) has suggested that employees in professional fields have a higher employee engagement than those in supporting roles. Thus, given that teachers are part of the professional workforce, it is assumed that their engagement levels will be higher. This perception concurs with recent findings in the teacher engagement literature that reported high engagement scores among teachers (Fouché *et al.*, 2017; Moremi, 2019; Paulik, 2020; Shibiti, 2020; Sezen-Gultekin *et al.*, 2021). In terms of public versus private primary school teacher engagement, a study by Moremi (2019) found significant differences between public and private primary school teachers' employee engagement mean scores. In particular, private primary school teachers obtained higher mean scores than those in the public domain, suggesting that private primary school teachers are more engaged than their counterparts in public schools.

2.1.2 Employee engagement vs biographic variables

The literature indicates different findings concerning the association of employee engagement with biographic variables such as age, gender, qualification, and experience. Employee engagement is believed to increase slightly with age (i.e., employees above 40 years of age may feel more engaged than their younger counterparts) (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). However, the results found in the literature have been inconsistent. Some researchers, such as Kumar *et al.* (2020), discovered a strong correlation between age and employee engagement; however, other studies found a weak (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2019) to no correlation (Rameshkumar, 2019; Paulik, 2020). Moreover, the findings in the literature regarding gender and employee engagement have also been inconsistent. While earlier studies reported significant gender differences in employee engagement scores (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), the studies of Martins and Ledimo (2016), as well as Kumar *et al.* (2020), reported no significant gender differences. This implies that men and women do not differ significantly when it comes to employee engagement.

Furthermore, there appear to be contradictory findings in the literature regarding employee engagement and qualifications. Studies by Martins and Ledimo (2016) and Kumar *et al.* (2020) reported no significant differences in employee engagement attributed to qualifications. Conversely, Martins and Nienaber (2018) reported a significant association between qualifications and employee engagement. However, it is assumed that a higher education qualification could enhance employees' identification with their work roles. Thus, it is believed that a higher qualification could equally increase employee engagement among primary school teachers, but there seems to be a paucity of analysis in the teacher engagement literature in this context. Additionally, experience in work roles may enhance employee engagement because when employees are conversant with the work activities, they may become more confident in engaging with their work roles. This perspective is supported by Martins and Nienaber (2018), who reported a significant association between employee engagement and experience. However, more recent studies relayed no significant association between employee engagement and experience (Rameshkumar, 2019; Kumar *et al.*, 2020; Paulik, 2020), suggesting inconsistent findings in the present literature, which demonstrates the need for further analysis concerning this issue.

2.2 Organisational commitment

An organisational commitment construct relates to an employee's level of acceptance of an organisation. The organisational commitment research movement is ascribed to the work of Becker (1960), who proposed the side-bet theory to explain the reasons an individual may

become committed to an organisation. This theory argues that commitment occurs when an individual ties extraneous interests to a consistent pattern of action by making a side bet (Becker, 1960). The side-bet theory denotes the accrual of personal investments in the employing organisation that the individual values. The premise of this theory is that individuals tend to engage in a consistent pattern of activity due to certain side bets that they have made and which would be lost when the individual halts the activity (Becker, 1960). For example, a teacher unwilling to lose the side bets, such as seniority, reputation, connections, and economic benefits due to their magnitude coupled with the lack of possible alternatives, may decide to remain committed to teaching due to the threat of loss.

Allen and Meyer (1990), Meyer and Allen (1991) as well as Meyer *et al.* (1993), proposed the three-component model. This is a multi-dimensional model employed to explain the reason why an individual employee may decide to become committed to an organisation and the possible consequences that such a decision could have on the entire organisation. Thus, they defined commitment as the psychological state that holds the individual to an organisation (i.e., makes the individual less likely to leave). This definition suggests that teachers who are loyal to teaching are eager to proceed in a certain direction and, at times, are reluctant to change strategies as they feel compelled to remain in their current jobs. The premise of the model is that an individual may become committed to the organisation based on three different states of mind, such as a desire, a need, and an obligation (Meyer *et al.*, 1993). These three states of mind are labelled as dimensions of commitment: *affective commitment* (the individual's desire to remain in the organisation); *continuous commitment* (the individual's perceived cost associated with leaving an organisation); and *normative commitment* (the individual's feeling of moral duty to remain in an organisation) (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer *et al.*, 1993; Meyer, 2017).

Furthermore, the theorists argued that the nature of the psychological state is relative and different for each of the above dimensions. Therefore, these dimensions must be considered as distinguishable dimensions of organisational commitment rather than mere types of the construct, given that employees may experience the three dimensions to varying degrees simultaneously. For example, a teacher may simultaneously feel a stronger desire and need to stay in the teaching profession but feel less obliged to do so, whereas another colleague can feel neither a desire nor a need but has a higher moral duty to remain. The theorists contend that these dimensions interact to influence an individual's behaviour within an organisation. It is also argued that these dimensions of commitment appear to develop independently from others due to different antecedents; hence, they have a distinct impact on

work-related behaviours (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer *et al.*, 1993). Therefore, Meyer *et al.* (1993) suggested that it is essential to consider employees' commitment profiles in order to better understand their commitment-relevant behaviours.

Studies in the teacher commitment literature demonstrate that teachers can be committed to the profession, the learners, and the school (Bibiso *et al.*, 2017; Naik & Singh, 2013; Sezen-Gultekin *et al.*, 2021). While commitment to the teaching profession relates to teachers' positive feelings towards teaching, commitment to learners relates to teachers' devotion and willingness to assist learners in achieving positive academic outcomes. Similarly, commitment to school relates to teachers' identification with the school's core values and objectives; thus, they will work towards achieving such objectives. Previous research identified teacher commitment as an important factor towards learners' and schools' success (Bibiso *et al.*, 2017). Committed teachers remain loyal and undertake activities that promote the success of learners and the school. In this regard, a study by Bibiso *et al.* (2017) reported a positive link between teachers' commitment and learners' academic achievement in their analysis, suggesting teachers' commitment enhances their performance, which, in turn, improves learners' academic outcomes.

2.2.1 Public vs private primary school teachers' organisational commitment

Since organisational commitment is influenced by personal and organisational factors, it is assumed that employees in different types of jobs may not experience the same levels of organisational commitment because conditions in their jobs vary and are likely to influence their commitment. However, the literature presents inconsistent results. For example, while the study of Rahati *et al.* (2015) reported no significant differences between employees in different jobs and their organisational commitment, Bullock *et al.* (2015) found a higher organisational commitment among public sector employees than those in the private sector. A pattern of reverse scores was reported within the education context by Naik and Singh (2013), who reported significant differences between public and private secondary school teachers' organisational commitment. Of particular importance, private secondary school teachers obtained higher organisational commitment mean scores than public school teachers. This suggests that private school teachers are more committed to their teaching profession than those in the public domain.

2.2.2 Organisational commitment vs biographic variables

Biographical variables, as predictors of organisational commitment, have also been considered in the literature. A review of the literature (Martin & Roodt, 2010) revealed that

organisational commitment is believed to increase as employees mature, predicated on age and their resulting experience. However, the findings concerning age and organisational commitment have been inconsistent. While some studies found a significant positive association between age and organisational commitment (Martin & Roodt, 2010), other studies reported a weak (Meyer *et al.*, 2002) or no significant association (San & Tok, 2017; Rameshkumar, 2019). In terms of gender, the findings have been mixed and range from a significant correlation (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) to no significant correlation (Sehunoe *et al.*, 2015; Mitonga-Monga & Flotman, 2017), implying the need for further analysis to clarify the inconsistency in the current literature.

Further, organisational commitment is believed to decrease as employees' qualifications increase (Martin & Roodt, 2010). This may be attributed to the fact that employees with higher qualifications have more job prospects than those with lower qualifications (Martin & Roodt, 2010). The association between organisational commitment and employee qualification in the present literature ranges from positive (Salami, 2008) to negative (Martin & Roodt, 2010; Rahati *et al.*, 2015) to no significant association (Sehunoe *et al.*, 2015). In terms of employees' experience and organisational commitment, experience may influence employees' commitment, given that longer-serving employees have accumulated experience and may occupy supervisory or mentorship roles. Moreover, they may have developed close ties with the organisation and its members and, thus, may become more committed. However, the reported findings in the current literature range from positive (Salami, 2008; Rahati *et al.*, 2015) to no significant association (Rameshkumar, 2019).

2.3 Theoretical link between employee engagement and organisational commitment

Based on the available literature, employee engagement and organisational commitment are widely accepted as being two different constructs. Employee engagement is often considered not as an attitude but as the extent to which the employee is immersed and pays attention to the performance of his/her work (Saks, 2006), while organisational commitment is regarded as an individual employee's "attitude and attachment" to the employing organisation (Saks, 2006:602). These employees become emotionally attached to the organisation and feel obliged to remain even if there is a desire to leave.

Despite conceptual differences, these constructs are deemed to be positively related to each other in the literature. Several studies indicate that employee engagement may be an antecedent of organisational commitment, in the sense that individual employees who experience an intense engagement in their work roles tend to identify with the employing

organisation (Jackson *et al.*, 2006; Rameshkumar, 2019). In this regard, previous studies report a significant positive association between employee engagement and organisational commitment (Sehunoe *et al.*, 2015; Jones, 2018). These reports are consistent with those in the teacher commitment literature. Both Pieters and Auanga (2018) and Sezen-Gultekin *et al.*, (2021) found a significant positive association between employee engagement and organisational commitment among sampled teachers. These reports imply that teachers who feel engaged with their teaching roles are bound to be more committed to the employing organisation. Likewise, those who remain committed are likely to feel more engaged in their teaching roles than those who are less committed. This perspective is supported by both Saks (2006) and Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), who affirmed that employees who are engaged are more likely to stay with the employing organisation because they feel attached to it as compared to the less engaged who may have a higher intention to leave the organisation.

Given the discussion from the literature review, the following research hypotheses and objectives were formulated:

Research hypotheses:

- H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between employee engagement and organisational commitment among sampled primary school teachers.
- H2: Public and private primary school teachers differ significantly in terms of their employee engagement and organisational commitment.
- H3: Biographical variables influence employee engagement and organisational commitment among sampled primary school teachers.

Research objectives will aim:

- to determine a significant relationship between employee engagement and organisational commitment based on a sample of primary school teachers within an educational circuit;
- to assess the differences between public and private primary school teachers in terms of employee engagement and organisational commitment;
- to assess whether biographical variables significantly influence employee engagement and organisational commitment among sampled primary school teachers.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study followed the positivist quantitative research approach. This approach aims to measure the study variables by collecting numerical data using a questionnaire and statistical analysis to address the research question, objective, or hypothesis (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2010). More specifically, a correlational design was used in this study. This approach was appropriate because it explains the linear relationship between two or more variables without any indication of connecting the effect of one variable on another (Salkind, 2012). It is also a powerful design, given that it illustrates whether the variables have something in common and if they do, it denotes correlation (Salkind, 2012).

3.1 Sampling strategy

A two-phased sampling process was followed. First, simple random sampling was utilised to select 20 schools so as to obtain teachers' participation and access to a sufficient sample. In the second phase, a convenience sampling approach was employed to obtain the participation of teachers in both private and public primary schools. The availability and willingness of participants to participate in the study represented a prime factor. A sample size of 300 primary school teachers ($n=300$) out of the study population ($N=1190$) was invited to participate in the study. The sample size met the recommendations for factor analysis according to other literature (Williams *et al.*, 2010; Osborne, 2014). All 300 questionnaires distributed to participants were returned in good order (100% response rate). The participants' biographical details are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Biographic characteristics of participants

| Item | Category | Frequency | % |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|------|
| Type of school | Public | 240 | 80 |
| | Private | 60 | 20 |
| Gender | Male | 99 | 33 |
| | Female | 201 | 67 |
| Age | < 30 years | 68 | 22.7 |
| | 31-40 years | 98 | 32.7 |
| | 41-50 years | 88 | 29.3 |
| | 51-60 years | 42 | 14 |

| | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-----|------|
| Teaching Experience | 61 + years | 4 | 1.3 |
| | < 1 year | 40 | 13.3 |
| | 1-5 years | 92 | 30.7 |
| | 6-10 years | 57 | 19 |
| | 11-15 years | 39 | 13 |
| | 16-20 years | 27 | 9 |
| | > 21 years | 45 | 15 |
| Job level | Principal | 12 | 4 |
| | Deputy principal | 11 | 3.7 |
| | HOD | 20 | 6.7 |
| | Teacher | 257 | 85.7 |
| Qualifications | Grade 12 | 39 | 13 |
| | Teachers diploma/National diploma | 98 | 32.7 |
| | Bachelors degree/B Tech PGCE | 119 | 39.7 |
| | Honours degree/PGDE | 42 | 14 |
| | Master's degree | 2 | 0.7 |

Source: Study results

Table 1 shows that the study sample consisted of 80 percent public and 20 percent private primary school respondents. There were 33 percent male and 67 percent female respondents, while the largest age groups (32.7%) were between 31 and 40 years, followed by 41-50 years (29.3%). Furthermore, 22.7 per cent were 30 and younger, while the lowest response rate was 61+ years (1.3%). The variable on teaching experience indicated that the majority of respondents had worked for 1-5 years (30.7%), followed by 6-10 years (19%). This was followed by more than 21 years (15%), 11-15 years (13%), and 16-20 years being the lowest (9%). The respondents' qualifications ranged from a bachelor's degree/B Tech PGCE (39.7%) followed by a teacher's diploma/national diploma (32.7%), honours degree/PGDE (14%), to a master's degree (0.7%).

3.2 Data collection and measuring instruments

A survey questionnaire was used to collect the data. The biographical data section gathered information about each participant's age, gender, school type, qualifications, and teaching experience. The Employee Engagement Questionnaire (EEQ) developed by Nienaber and Martins (2014) was adapted to measure teachers' engagement in the workplace. The instrument measured six dimensions of employee engagement: organisation strategy; organisation customer service; team; immediate manager; individual-level satisfaction; and individual-level commitment. Each dimension offered a five-point Likert scale with a total of 50 items with statements such as: "I feel positive about my work"; "Our school management communicates the vision and mission to us"; and "My team continuously strives to improve performance in line with our school objectives" (Nienaber & Martins, 2015). This self-report instrument was chosen because it is specifically designed for the South African context, which is the focus of the present study. The reported α range was between 0.89 and 0.95 (Nienaber & Martins, 2015; Martins & Nienaber, 2018).

The Organisational Commitment Scale (OCS) developed by Meyer *et al.* (1993) was also adapted to measure teachers' commitment to the employing organisation. The self-report instrument measures the three dimensions of organisational commitment: affective commitment (e.g., "I am enthusiastic about teaching"); continuance commitment (e.g., "It would be costly for me to change my profession now"); and normative commitment (e.g., "I am in teaching because of a sense of loyalty to it") on a seven-point frequency rating scale with a total of 18 items (Meyer *et al.*, 1993). This instrument has, by far, received the largest empirical validation in the literature, with a reported α ranging between 0.74 and 0.94 (Mitonga-Monga & Flotman, 2017; Meyer *et al.*, 1993).

3.3 Data analysis

The statistical data analysis was conducted using the SPSS 23 programme. A factor analysis was performed to explore the groupings of items and their correspondence to the original theoretical measuring instruments for the sample data. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using the principal axis factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation. A minimum loading of 0.40 or above was set for cross-loadings based on the recommendations in the literature (Osborne, 2014). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO) of sampling adequacy for the R-matrix and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to assess the suitability of using the research data for factor analysis. The obtained KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity for EEQ and OCS were 0.943 and 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), 0.834 and 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), respectively, suggesting sufficient confirmation to carry out a factor analysis. The EFA analysis identified a five-factor

solution with eigenvalues >1 for the EEQ, explaining 57.28 percent of the total variance in the data. The largest factors were relabelled: Team and communal focus; Individual-level satisfaction and commitment; Relationship with school management; Energy/Activity; and Strategic focus. The EFA analysis also identified a four-factor solution with eigenvalues >1 for the OCS, explaining 59.03 percent of the total variance in the data. The first factor was renamed Normative Commitment, the second Continuance Commitment, the third Negative Affective Commitment, and the fourth Positive Affective Commitment.

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the measuring instruments. Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were performed to describe the data. Depending on the distribution of the research data, either the Pearson product-moment correlation or the Spearman rho correlation coefficients were used to ascertain the relationships between the study variables. In this study, $p \leq 0.05$ and $p \leq 0.01$ were used for statistical significance levels, while the practical significance of the correlation coefficients was interpreted in light of Cohen's (1992) guidelines: 0.1 (small effect); 0.3 (medium effect); and 0.5 (large effect). Furthermore, the independent sample t-test was used to examine whether there were significant differences between public and private teachers as well as gender on the measuring instruments. The t-test aimed to determine whether an observed variance between the means of the two groups was large enough to be ascribed to the change in some variable or if it simply occurred by chance (Welman & Kruger, 2001). The results of the t-test analysis were interpreted in terms of the guidelines provided by Cohen (1992), who suggested significant values of 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 to be small, medium, and large practical effects for t-test analysis.

3.4 Ethical consideration

The participating university granted ethical clearance for this study. Participants voluntarily participated in the study by signing an informed consent document. Thus, the anonymity and confidentiality of the data were guaranteed.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 2 reports on the descriptive statistics, alpha coefficients, and Spearman correlations of the EEQ and OCS instruments. The Cronbach alpha coefficients of all the subscales were above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), suggesting an acceptable reliability of the measuring instruments. Table 2 shows that the reliability coefficients for the EEQ subscales: team and communal focus; individual-level satisfaction

and commitment; relationship with school management; energy/activity; and strategic focus were 0.94, 0.92, 0.92, 0.75, and 0.86, respectively. Also, the reliability coefficients for the OCS subscales: normative commitment, continuance commitment, negative affective commitment, and positive affective commitment were 0.82, 0.83, 0.72, and 0.81, respectively. The mean scores were all above 3.5 (except for the negative affective commitment M=2.3444 SD=1.42803), indicating the positive side of the scales and suggesting that, overall, both employee engagement and organisational commitment are positive within the study sample.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, alpha coefficients, and Spearman correlations of the EEQ and OCS

| item | Mean | SD | α | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---------------|---|--------|----------|------|--------|--------|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| OCS Subscales | 1. Normative Commitment | 4.7233 | 1.60818 | 0.82 | - | | | | | | | |
| | 2. Continuance Commitment | 4.6987 | 1.58036 | 0.83 | .424** | - | | | | | | |
| | 3. Negative Affective Commitment | 2.3444 | 1.42803 | 0.72 | - | - | - | | | | | |
| | 4. Positive Affective Commitment | 5.5078 | 1.41695 | 0.81 | .503** | .347** | - | - | | | | |
| EEQ Subscales | 5. Team and communal focus | 4.0323 | 0.61093 | 0.94 | .340** | .290** | - | .368** | - | | | |
| | 6. Individual level satisfaction and commitment | 4.0358 | 0.75199 | 0.92 | .341** | .253** | - | .500** | .611** | - | | |
| | 7. Relationship with school management | 3.9750 | 0.85191 | 0.92 | .371** | .290** | - | .408** | .790** | .581** | - | |
| | 8. Energy/Activity | 3.5387 | 0.85244 | 0.75 | .272** | 0.094 | - | .285** | .443** | .511** | .403** | - |
| | 9. Strategic focus | 3.7422 | 0.99992 | 0.86 | .298** | .177** | - | .278** | .608** | .611** | .657** | .450** |

SD, standard deviation; α , Cronbach's alpha; **. $p \leq 0.01$ statistically significant; *. $p \leq 0.05$ statistically significant; $r \leq 0.29$ practically significant (small effect); $r \geq 0.30 < 0.49$ practically significant (medium effect); and $r > 0.50$ practically significant (large effect) (Cohen 1992:157).

Source: Study results

An inspection of the correlations between employee engagement and organisational commitment subscales in Table 2 reveals that team and communal focus recorded a positive and significant association with normative commitment ($r=.340$; $p<0.01$; medium effect), continuance commitment ($r=.290$; $p<0.01$; small effect), and affective commitment ($r=.368$; $p<0.01$; medium effect). Team and communal focus also recorded a significant negative association with negative affective commitment ($r=-.239$; $p<0.01$; small effect).

Furthermore, individual-level satisfaction and commitment recorded a significant positive association with normative commitment ($r=.341$; $p<0.01$; medium effect), continuance commitment ($r=.253$; $p<0.01$; small effect), and positive affective commitment ($r=.500$; $p<0.01$; large effect) as well as a significant negative association with negative affective commitment ($r=-.289$; $p<0.01$; small effect).

Relationship with school management showed a significant positive correlation with normative commitment ($r=.371$; $p<0.01$; medium effect), continuance commitment ($r=.290$; $p<0.01$; small effect), and positive affective commitment ($r=.408$; $p<0.01$; medium effect) as well as a significant negative association with negative affective commitment ($r=-.241$; $p<0.01$; small effect).

Energy/activity presented a statistically significant positive association with normative commitment ($r=.272$; $p<0.01$; small effect) and positive affective commitment ($r=.285$; $p<0.01$; small effect). A statistically significant positive association was found between strategic focus and normative commitment ($r=.298$; $p<0.01$; small effect), continuance commitment ($r=.177$; $p<0.01$; small effect), and positive affective commitment ($r=.278$; $p<0.01$; small effect). Lastly, strategic focus revealed statistically significant negative correlations with negative affective commitment ($r=-.170$; $p<0.01$; small effect). The results reflected in Table 2 illustrate that there was no significant association between the energy/activity subscale of employee engagement and continuance commitment and the negative affective commitment subscales of organisational commitment.

4.2 Comparison between public and private primary school teachers on the EEQ and OCS subscales

An independent sample t-test was performed to compare public and private primary school teachers on the measuring scales. The descriptive statistics are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Group descriptive statistics between public and private primary school teachers on the EEQ and OCS subscales

| Instrument Subscales | School type | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--|-------------|-----|--------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Normative commitment | Public | 240 | 4.6844 | 1.67545 | 0.10815 |
| | Private | 60 | 4.8792 | 1.30554 | 0.16854 |
| Continuance commitment | Public | 240 | 4.7658 | 1.59508 | 0.10296 |
| | Private | 60 | 4.4300 | 1.50291 | 0.19403 |
| Negative affective commitment | Public | 240 | 2.4236 | 1.46767 | 0.09474 |
| | Private | 60 | 2.0278 | 1.21710 | 0.15713 |
| Positive affective commitment | Public | 240 | 5.4722 | 1.48608 | 0.09593 |
| | Private | 60 | 5.6500 | 1.09686 | 0.14160 |
| Team and communal focus | Public | 240 | 3.9919 | 0.62911 | 0.04061 |
| | Private | 60 | 4.1939 | 0.50506 | 0.06520 |
| Individual level satisfaction and commitment | Public | 240 | 4.0184 | 0.78791 | 0.05086 |
| | Private | 60 | 4.1056 | 0.58723 | 0.07581 |
| Relationship with school management | Public | 240 | 3.9500 | 0.85858 | 0.05542 |
| | Private | 60 | 4.0750 | 0.82409 | 0.10639 |
| Energy /Activity | Public | 240 | 3.4483 | 0.88180 | 0.05692 |
| | Private | 60 | 3.9000 | 0.60562 | 0.07819 |
| Strategic Focus | Public | 240 | 3.7319 | 0.99225 | 0.06405 |
| | Private | 60 | 3.7833 | 1.03757 | 0.13395 |

Source: Study results

The t-test results (Table 4) show that private and public primary school teachers differed significantly on only two employee engagement subscales, namely, team and communal focus ($t(298)=-2.307, p=0.022$) and Energy/Activity ($t(298)=-3.750, p=0.000$). Inspection of the mean scores (Table 3) reveals that private primary school teachers obtained a higher mean score on team and communal focus ($M=4.1939, SD=.50506$) and energy/activity ($M=3.9000, SD=.60562$) subscales than public primary school teachers (team and communal focus ($M=3.9919, SD=.62911$) and energy/activity ($M=3.4483, SD=.88180$)), respectively. Further inspection of the t-test table demonstrates that public and private primary schools did not differ significantly on all four dimensions of organisational commitment, suggesting that respondents felt the same on the measured subscales.

Table 4: Independent sample test for public and private primary school teachers on the EEQ and OCS subscales

| Subscales | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|---------|
| | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Normative commitment | -.839 | 298 | .402 | -.19479 | .23224 | -.65182 | .26224 |
| Continuance commitment | 1.475 | 298 | .141 | .33583 | .22766 | -.11219 | .78385 |
| Negative affective commitment | 1.929 | 298 | .055 | .39583 | .20519 | -.00796 | .79963 |
| Positive affective commitment | -.869 | 298 | .386 | -.17778 | .20460 | -.58043 | .22487 |
| Team and communal focus | -2.307 | 298 | .022 | -.20197 | .08755 | -.37427 | -.02968 |
| Individual level satisfaction and commitment | -.802 | 298 | .423 | -.08715 | .10860 | -.30088 | .12658 |
| Relationship with school management | -1.017 | 298 | .310 | -.12500 | .12296 | -.36697 | .11697 |
| Energy /Activity | -3.750 | 298 | .000 | -.45167 | .12044 | -.68868 | -.21465 |
| Strategic Focus | -.356 | 298 | .722 | -.05139 | .14454 | -.33583 | .23306 |

$p < 0.05$, statistically significant.

Source: Study results

4.3 Comparison between male and female respondents on the EEQ and OCS subscales

The differences between male and female respondents on the measured employee engagement and organisational commitment instruments were investigated utilising an independent samples t-test. The descriptive statistics are reported in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for gender groups on EEQ and OCS subscales

| Subscales | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--|--------|-----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| Normative commitment | Male | 99 | 4.5758 | 1.61761 | 0.16258 |
| | Female | 201 | 4.7960 | 1.60256 | 0.11304 |
| Continuance commitment | Male | 99 | 4.4848 | 1.55185 | 0.15597 |
| | Female | 201 | 4.8040 | 1.58745 | 0.11197 |
| Negative affective commitment | Male | 99 | 2.2660 | 1.39888 | 0.14059 |
| | Female | 201 | 2.3831 | 1.44405 | 0.10186 |
| Positive affective commitment | Male | 99 | 5.3973 | 1.42990 | 0.14371 |
| | Female | 201 | 5.5622 | 1.41092 | 0.09952 |
| Team and communal focus | Male | 99 | 3.9910 | 0.64298 | 0.06462 |
| | Female | 201 | 4.0526 | 0.59511 | 0.04198 |
| Individual level satisfaction and commitment | Male | 99 | 3.9773 | 0.81099 | 0.08151 |
| | Female | 201 | 4.0647 | 0.72152 | 0.05089 |
| Relationship with school management | Male | 99 | 3.9470 | 0.82609 | 0.08303 |
| | Female | 201 | 3.9888 | 0.86604 | 0.06109 |
| Energy /Activity | Male | 99 | 3.4364 | 0.86490 | 0.08693 |
| | Female | 201 | 3.5891 | 0.84385 | 0.05952 |
| Strategic Focus | Male | 99 | 3.6633 | 1.01964 | 0.10248 |
| | Female | 201 | 3.7811 | 0.99032 | 0.06985 |

Source: Study results

Table 5 shows that female respondents obtained slightly higher mean scores on all employee engagement subscales. However, further examination of the t-test in Table 6 reveals that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents on all the measured employee engagement subscales. The results suggest that male and female respondents do not differ significantly in their employee engagement.

Additionally, the t-test results (Table 6) show that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents on all organisational commitment subscales. The results imply that male and female respondents do not differ significantly with regard to their organisational commitment—feelings of desire, a need, and moral responsibility to remain in the teaching profession.

Table 6: Independent sample test for gender groups on the EEQ and OCS subscales

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---|-------|------------------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|---------|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Normative commitment | Equal variances assumed | 0.008 | 0.927 | -1.116 | 298 | 0.265 | -0.22026 | 0.19738 | -0.60870 | 0.16817 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1.112 | 193.494 | 0.267 | -0.22026 | 0.19801 | -0.61080 | 0.17027 |
| Continuance commitment | Equal variances assumed | 0.000 | 0.986 | -1.649 | 298 | 0.100 | -0.31913 | 0.19349 | -0.69991 | 0.06164 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1.662 | 199.130 | 0.098 | -0.31913 | 0.19200 | -0.69774 | 0.05948 |
| Negative | Equal variances assumed | 0.308 | 0.579 | -0.667 | 298 | 0.505 | -0.11709 | 0.17550 | -0.46247 | 0.22829 |

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| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|-------|-------|--------|---------|-------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| ffective commitment | Equal variances not assumed | | | -0.674 | 200.769 | 0.501 | -0.11709 | 0.17361 | -0.45943 | 0.22524 |
| Positive affective commitment | Equal variances assumed | 0.175 | 0.676 | -0.948 | 298 | 0.344 | -0.16488 | 0.17401 | -0.50733 | 0.17756 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -0.943 | 192.802 | 0.347 | -0.16488 | 0.17480 | -0.50966 | 0.17989 |
| Team and communal focus | Equal variances assumed | 0.819 | 0.366 | -0.822 | 298 | 0.412 | -0.06167 | 0.07505 | -0.20937 | 0.08603 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -0.800 | 182.246 | 0.425 | -0.06167 | 0.07706 | -0.21371 | 0.09037 |
| Individual level satisfaction and commitment | Equal variances assumed | 1.937 | 0.165 | -0.946 | 298 | 0.345 | -0.08740 | 0.09235 | -0.26914 | 0.09433 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -0.910 | 176.184 | 0.364 | -0.08740 | 0.09609 | -0.27704 | 0.10223 |
| Relationship with school management | Equal variances assumed | 0.026 | 0.871 | -0.399 | 298 | 0.690 | -0.04184 | 0.10475 | -0.24798 | 0.16431 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -0.406 | 203.586 | 0.685 | -0.04184 | 0.10308 | -0.24507 | 0.16140 |
| Energy /Activity | Equal variances assumed | 0.465 | 0.496 | -1.462 | 298 | 0.145 | -0.15269 | 0.10447 | -0.35828 | 0.05290 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1.449 | 190.878 | 0.149 | -0.15269 | 0.10535 | -0.36049 | 0.05511 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|--------|---------|-------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| Strategic Focus | Equal variances assumed | 0.196 | 0.658 | -0.959 | 298 | 0.338 | -0.11779 | 0.12279 | -0.35944 | 0.12385 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -0.950 | 190.110 | 0.343 | -0.11779 | 0.12402 | -0.36243 | 0.12684 |

$P < 0.05$, statistically significant

Source: Study results

4.4 Spearman correlation between age, experience, qualification, and the study instruments

The correlation between respondents' ages, teaching experience, qualifications, and the measuring instruments is presented in Table 7. The non-parametric Spearman's rho was used since the factors were not normally distributed.

Table 7: Correlation between age, teaching experience, qualification, and measuring instruments

| Spearman's rho Instruments | | Teaching Experience | Age | Qualification |
|----------------------------|--|---------------------|--------|---------------|
| OCS Dimensions | Normative Commitment | 0.107 | .160** | -0.039 |
| | Continuance Commitment | .241** | .268** | 0.073 |
| | Negative Affective Commitment | -0.019 | -0.011 | -0.107 |
| | Positive Affective Commitment | 0.044 | 0.034 | -0.014 |
| EEQ Dimensions | Team and communal focus | -0.005 | 0.063 | -0.031 |
| | Individual level satisfaction and commitment | -0.026 | 0.056 | 0.019 |
| | Relationship with school management | 0.027 | 0.099 | -0.085 |
| | Energy /Activity | -.212** | -0.101 | -.133* |
| | Strategic Focus | 0.058 | .126* | -0.077 |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

$r < 0.29$ (small effect); $r > 0.30 \leq 0.49$ (medium effect); and $r \geq 0.50$ (large effect) (Cohen 1992:157).

Source: Study results

Table 7 reveals that age was positively correlated with normative commitment ($r=0.160$ $p<0.01$) and continuance commitment ($r=0.268$ $p<0.01$). This suggests that age is related to the need and obligation to continue in the teaching profession, but only with small practical importance. Strategic focus reflected a significant positive correlation with age ($r=0.126$ $p<0.05$), suggesting that age aligns with a high strategic focus. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that age was not related to negative affective commitment, positive affective commitment, energy/activity, relationship with school management, individual level satisfaction, and team and communal focus.

A practically small but statistically significant correlation was found between teaching experience and continuance commitment ($r=0.241$ $p<0.01$), implying that teachers with experience tend to have a high need to remain in teaching with only a small practical effect. The results reflected no statistically significant association between teaching experience and normative commitment, negative affective, and positive affective commitment subscales. Additionally, the results depicted a statistically significant negative association between teaching experience and the energy/activity subscale of employee engagement ($r=-.212$ $p=0.01$). This suggests that more teaching experience is accompanied by lower scores on energy/activity, but only with a small practical effect. Moreover, the results revealed no significant association between teaching experience and team and communal focus, individual-level satisfaction and commitment, relationship with school management, and strategic focus.

Qualification recorded no statistically significant association with normative commitment, continuance commitment, negative affective commitment, and positive affective commitment subscales. This means that respondents' qualifications do not influence their experiences concerning organisational commitment. The results further indicated a practically small and statistically significant negative association between energy/activity and respondents' qualification ($r=-.133$, $p<0.05$), suggesting that, as respondents' qualifications increase, their sense of energy/activity in the work roles decreases, but only with a small practical significance. Lastly, no statistically significant association was recorded between qualification and the remaining employee engagement subscales: team and communal focus; individual-level satisfaction and commitment; relationship with school management; and strategic focus.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study determined the empirical differences between public and private primary school teachers' employee engagement and organisational commitment, the relationship between the main constructs, and the relationship between teachers' biographic variables and the study constructs. First, the validity and reliability of the measuring instruments were tested through EFA. The EFA test resulted in five distinct but related factors for EEQ and four distinct factors for OCS, which differed slightly from the original theoretical scales, but were deemed relevant to the study context. The reliability estimates obtained for EEQ were between 0.75 and 0.94, and OCS ranged between 0.72 and 0.83, suggesting excellent reliability of the instruments in measuring both constructs when compared to the alpha threshold of 0.70.

Second, this study revealed that the respondents achieved relatively higher mean scores on the measured employee engagement instruments. This implies that the teachers were engaged in their teaching roles, which affirms the previous literature that some teachers do not suffer burnout despite the high job demands and pressure in teaching; instead, these teachers may experience high degrees of activation and pleasure in confronting high job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Paulik, 2020). The findings equally demonstrate that respondents attained relatively higher mean scores on the organisational commitment instrument (except for negative affective commitment), demonstrating that teachers were more positive and committed to their teaching profession. High teacher commitment scores have also been reported in previous literature (Pieters & Auanga, 2018; Sezen-Gultekin *et al.*, 2021).

Third, the findings revealed that public and private primary school teachers differed significantly on only two subscales ("team and communal focus" and "energy/activity"), while private primary school teachers scored higher on these subscales than those in public primary schools. These results demonstrate that private primary school teachers have a strong sense of belonging; they also feel strong and vigorous and are more inspired in their teaching roles than their counterparts in public primary schools. The present findings provide partial support for the study of Moremi (2019), who reported that private primary school teachers recorded higher employee engagement mean scores than public primary school teachers.

In terms of organisational commitment, the study's findings demonstrate that teachers in public and private primary schools do not differ significantly in their organisational commitment experience. This implies that the respondents' feelings of strong desire, need, and moral duty to remain in the teaching profession are not related to either teaching in public or private

primary schools. Moreover, these findings are not consistent with what researchers anticipated; thus, H2 can only be partially accepted. Additionally, this study's findings are inconsistent with other previous literature (Naik & Singh, 2013). To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this is the first time public and private primary school teachers have been compared concurrently on both study constructs in the South African educational context, thereby providing further insight into the constructs involving both academic and professional literature.

Fourth, the researchers anticipated that employee engagement and organisational commitment would be significantly related within the study sample, and the findings further demonstrated statistically significant positive correlations between employee engagement (team and communal focus; individual-level satisfaction and commitment; relationship with school management; and strategic focus) and organisational commitment (positive affective, normative, and continuance). The energy/activity subscale was positively related to only positive affective and normative commitment subscales. The strongest positive correlations were observed between the subscales: individual-level satisfaction and commitment and positive affective commitment ($r=.500$; $p<0.01$; large effect). This suggests that the more respondents are satisfied with their teaching activities, the more attached they will be to the employing organisation with a large practical significance. The study further denotes that negative affective commitment was negatively related to all employee engagement subscales (except the energy/activity subscale, which recorded no association). A possible reason could be that engaged respondents identify mentally, physically, and emotionally with their teaching work; in turn, this may motivate them to remain in the organisation. Thus, they are less likely to have ill feelings towards the organisation, whereas disengaged employees may hold the opposite view. Therefore, the overall findings suggest that primary school teachers who feel engaged in their teaching roles are not only prone to be more committed to the organisation, but may also work to promote the organisation. Likewise, those who remain committed are likely to feel more engaged in their teaching roles than those less committed. However, this finding should be interpreted with some level of caution given that the strength of association between some dimensions and the obtained effect sizes was relatively small. Based on the findings, H1 can be partially accepted. Also, the present findings partially support previous studies, which reported a statistically significant association between employee engagement and organisational commitment (Jones, 2018; Pieters & Auanga, 2018; Sezen-Gultekin *et al.*, 2021).

Fifth, in terms of gender, the findings revealed that no statistically significant gender differences exist with regard to employee engagement scores. The results imply that male and female respondents do not differ significantly in their employee engagement, which is consistent with the findings from Martins and Ledimo (2016) and Kumar *et al.*, (2020) . Additionally, no significant gender differences were observed for organisational commitment. This suggests that male and female respondents were indifferent regarding their feelings of desire, need, and moral responsibility to remain in the teaching profession. This is understandable given that teaching duty loads, service benefits, and resources are allocated based on teachers' expertise and speciality, not gender; thus, they may be less inclined to feel resentful. Previous studies have also documented no significant gender association with organisational commitment (Sehunoe *et al.*, 2015; Mitonga-Monga & Flotman, 2017).

The findings further revealed that age was weakly related to the strategic focus subscale of employee engagement. This implies that a higher age corresponds to respondents' feelings and views about leadership, rewards, job design, information sharing, and opportunities for growth in teaching. As such, this study partially supports previous studies that reported weak to no significant correlation between age and employee engagement (Rameshkumar, 2019; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2019; Paulik, 2020). The present findings also reveal that age was positively related only to normative commitment and continuance commitment subscales, albeit with minimal effect. This suggests that the higher the respondents' ages, the more they would feel the need and moral duty to remain in teaching. A possible reason that older respondents remain tied to teaching is because they have fewer job prospects elsewhere, have family and financial commitments, and the fact that they would sacrifice the benefits accrued in their teaching career. The study observed no significant association between age and both the positive and negative affective commitment subscales, thereby providing partial support to those studies that recorded weak (Meyer *et al.*, 2002) to no significant association (Rameshkumar, 2019).

The findings demonstrated that teaching experience was negatively related to only the energy/activity subscale of employee engagement. A possible reason could be that the respondents have been in teaching for longer periods; therefore, they may have less drive and pleasure in their teaching roles. It should be noted that these findings are not consistent with previous studies that found no significant association between employee engagement and experience (Rameshkumar, 2019; Kumar *et al.*, 2020; Paulik, 2020). A significant positive correlation was, however, observed between teaching experience and the continuance commitment subscale (the remainder showed no association). This demonstrates that long-

serving respondents have accrued personal and professional investments in the school environment and would not want to lose such investments compared to newly-employed teachers. This finding partially supports that of Salami (2008) and Rahati *et al.*, (2015), who reported a significant positive association between employees' experience and organisational commitment.

This study also revealed that respondents' qualifications were negatively related to only the energy/activity subscale of employee engagement. This suggests that, when the respondents' qualification increases, their sense of identification, activation, eagerness, and pleasure in their teaching roles decreases, but only with a small practical significance. The present findings do not agree with that of Martins and Nienaber (2018), who reported a significant positive association between qualifications and employee engagement. No significant association was observed between qualification and the remaining subscale of employee engagement, thereby providing partial support to previous literature (Martins & Ledimo, 2016; Kumar *et al.*, 2020). Although previous studies suggest that higher qualification leads to decreased organisational commitment (Martin & Roodt, 2010), given that employees with higher qualifications have more job prospects elsewhere; however, the present findings prove the opposite. No statistically significant association between qualification and organisational commitment was observed, which is also consistent with Sehunoe *et al.*, (2015). Hence, contrary to what researchers expected, the current findings in terms of biographical variables and the study constructs (employee engagement and organisational commitment) appear to be mixed; thus, H3 can only be partially accepted.

6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To date, there appear to be limited studies comparing public and private primary school teachers' employee engagement and organisational commitment within a South African context concurrently. The present study has several managerial implications. Firstly, this study provides educational policyholders with insight into teachers' work-related behaviours and attitudes. The findings show that sampled teachers were engaged in their teaching roles and committed to their employing organisation. Therefore, stakeholders in education may give due consideration to teacher education. Also, this study points to the fact that engaged teachers are fully engrossed, keen, and committed to the teaching profession and, thus, engage in activities to promote the success of the learners and the school. This suggests that teacher engagement and commitment should be deemed essential factors in an effort to address lower learner academic outcomes and teacher retention.

Secondly, the fact that the findings revealed a significant association between sampled teachers' biographical variables and the study construct implies that those individual variables play key roles in the teachers' sense of engagement and commitment. Thus, education practitioners, policyholders, and managers both in the public and private sectors need to consider those multi-biographical variables that influence teachers' engagement and commitment in the school environment.

Thirdly, the present study revealed that the sampled private primary school teachers were more engaged (on two engagement subdimensions) than their counterparts in the public domain. This revelation requires swift intervention, given the investments the government makes in the public education sector. Therefore, education policyholders, practitioners and managers can develop an appropriate intervention programme that focuses on improving efficient job design and job resources, teamwork, leadership training and mentoring, performance management systems, reward and benefit systems, and employee continuous development and training. This may help sustain employees' momentum and confidence in their work roles and the employing organisation, thereby creating engaged and committed employees in both the public and private sectors. Subsequently, this, in turn, could ensure higher positive organisational outcomes, for example, higher productivity (in this case, higher learner performance) and lower employee turnover intentions (lower levels of teachers' intention to leave and fewer absences due to sick leave).

7. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The study was limited to sampled primary school teachers in a South African educational circuit; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to the general South African public. Due to the exploratory nature of the present study, it is recommended that the study be replicated and expanded to include a large, diverse sample of teachers that would be representative of the population of primary school teachers in South Africa so as to allow for the generalisability of the results. Lastly, the EFA analysis produced new factors for the study instruments, which are quite different from the original theoretical scales (Meyer *et al.*, 1993; Nienaber & Martins, 2014). Thus, it is recommended that the adapted instruments for teachers be amended and a follow-up study be conducted to improve and further validate the psychometric properties of the employee engagement and organisational commitment measuring instruments.

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