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The Role of Employee Passion for Work as an Antecedent of Employee Engagement.

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THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE PASSION FOR WORK AS AN ANTECEDENT OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT.

SUMMARY

This study explores employee passion for work as an antecedent to employee engagement among secondary school teachers within the Nigerian Public Education sector. The study focuses on empirically verifying an initial theoretical proposition in the extant literature. The paper adopts the case study approach with the use of semi-structured interviews for data collection and thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse the data. Findings revealed three main themes: positive reinforcement, values and identity and intrinsic motivation which form how employee passion for work emerges as an antecedent to employee engagement in the research context. Also, the paper recommends how public sector leaders should use this as a tool to build, maintain and sustain an engaged workforce.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a growing body of literature that recognises the importance of employee engagement as one of the most vital concepts fundamental to employees' motivation and productivity (e.g. Bailey, Madden, Alfes, and Fletcher, 2017; Gubman, 2004; Harter, Schmidt and Hayes,2002; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Shuck, 2011). As such, employee engagement has long been a question of great interest in various fields such as psychology, human resource development, medicine, education and so on (Kim, Kolb, and Kim, 2013; Shuck, 2011; Shokunbi, 2016). The past twenty-nine years have seen increasingly rapid advances in the field of employee engagement which includes the publication of the book titled "Employee Engagement in Theory and Practice" edited by Truss, Delgridge, Alfes, Shantz and Soane, in 2014. The book has thirty-eight most notable academics and practitioners in the field of employee engagement as contributors. The book built a bridge between psychological, HRM, and critical perspectives on employee engagement with practical implications for engagement theories (Truss et al., 2014). Recently, there is evolving agreement that employee engagement is a psychological state experienced by employees in relation to their work that is sufficiently different from other related concepts to be considered as worthy of inquiry in its own right (Truss et al., 2014). However, developing, maintaining and sustaining employee engagement have become a major challenge faced by many researchers and practitioners. Extensive research has shown that employee engagement has a significantly positive impact on performance, productivity, profitability, organisational success, individual well-being, reduced employee turnover as well as reduced absenteeism (Carter, Nesbit, Badham, Parker, and Sung, 2016; Harter et al., 2002; Kahn and Heaphy, 2014 in Truss et al., 2014; Meintjes and Hofmeyr, 2018; Saks, 2006).

However, the rapid advances in the field of employee engagement has only resulted into disparate and disconnected debates as well as divergent views about the best ways to conceptualise and measure the construct (Gruman and Saks, 2011; Shokunbi, 2016; Truss et al., 2016). Furthermore, there is debate around the antecedents of employee engagement and studies that can identify which, of the several potential antecedents matter the most, is still to be conducted (Shokunbi, 2016; Truss et al., 2016). The debate about the antecedents of employee engagement has continued and most recently, it has emerged in literature that passion for work may be an antecedent of employee engagement (Shokunbi, 2016). This notion is in contrast to earlier suggestions in extant literature that equates employee passion for work to employee engagement and present employee passion for work as an outcome of employee engagement (Gubman, 2004; Zigarmi, Nimon, Houson, Witt and Diehl, 2009).

However, much of the research up to now has focused only on employee passion for work as an outcome of employee engagement and not as a direct antecedent of engagement. Surprisingly, the effects of employee work passion on employee engagement have not received too much attention other than as a mediator between engagement and workaholism (e.g. Gorgievsk and Bakker 2010 in Albrecht, 2010). Also, the role of passion for work in the health impairment and motivational processes proposed by the job demands-resources model has been examined by Tre´panier, Fernet. Austin, Forest and Vallerand (2013). This indicates a need to understand the how employee passion for work or employee work passion influences employees' engagement to work.

This paper argues that employee passion for work is an antecedent to employee engagement and not otherwise. The main purpose of this study is to explore and understand employee passion for work as an antecedent to employee engagement among teachers in government owned senior secondary schools in Nigeria to empirically the theoretical proposition in the literature. This study is exploratory and interpretative in nature. It uses a qualitative case study approach

to investigate how employee work passion influences employee engagement through teachers' experience of the two constructs. Therefore, this study makes a major contribution to research on employee engagement and employee passion for work by demonstrating that the latter is an antecedent to engagement. It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a comprehensive review of employee work passion or employee passion for work as a concept. Also, the scope of this study is only limited to employee engagement as conceptualised by Kahn (1990) even though there are other conceptualisation. This is done to avoid the challenges of the diverse conceptualisations of employee engagement. Also, the reader should bear in mind that this study is based only on the experience of teachers in government owned senior secondary school in Lagos State, Nigeria. The paper first clarifies the concepts of employee engagement and passion for work before discussing the proposition of the latter as an antecedent of employee engagement to form the theoretical foundation for the study. This is followed by a discussion of the research methods used in collecting and analysing data before discussing the findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of the new perspective of passion for work as an antecedent of employee engagement and the implications of the study for research and practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

THE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The extant literature has revealed that there are several often inconsistent definitions of employee engagement so much that there is no agreement among the academics and the practitioners about the definition of employee engagement (e.g. Bailey et al., 2017; Gruman and Saks, 2011; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Shokunbi, 2016). In a recent narrative synthesis, Bailey et al. (2017) reported that they uncovered six different definitions of employee engagement. Although these six definitions are different, they all agreed that engagement is a psychological state (e.g. Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker, 2002; Saks, 2006; Swanberg, McKechnie, Ojha and James, 2011; Truss et al., 2014). Whilst this study acknowledges the existence of the six definitions reported by Bailey et al. (2017), as earlier confirmed, this study adopts Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement. This is important to avoid the inconsistency in the field of employee engagement in relations to its meaning, measurement and theoretical structure that have been conjoined (Shuck, 2019 in Yeoman, Bailey, Madden and Thompson, 2019). Also, this will particularly facilitate the understanding of employee engagement as a psychological state rather than an as a result we take from or that takes from an employee as a normative, exploitative product (Shuck, 2019).

The first serious discussion and analysis of employee engagement from an academic perspective emerged from the work of William Kahn in 1990. Drawing on role theory (Goffman, 1961) and job design theory (Hackman and Oldman 1980), Kahn (1990:694) defined personal engagement as "the harnessing of organisational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances". Shokunbi (2016) argued that this definition is important because it reflects the understanding of employee engagement through people's perspectives of their experience of the construct. This is because other definitions of the construct (e.g. Schaufeli et al., 2002; Saks, 2006; Swanberg, McKechnie, Ojha and James, 2011; Truss et al., 2014) have focused so much on its measurement at the expense of the processes and context from which employee engagement develops as an experience and thus depriving it of meaning (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013). Similarly, Shuck (2019) asserts that defining employee engagement by its measurement with little concern for the processes that influence it leaves the theoretical structure inadequately developed. This has amounted to a major challenge to understanding the full range and applicability of employee engagement because the context can influence what types

of behaviour are possible and/or important (Parker and Griffin, 2011). The choice of adopting Kahn's (1990) engagement theory for this study is because the it focuses on the processes and context from which employee engagement develops as an experience.

Kahn's (1990) work developed from the works of Freud and Maslow (psychologists; 1922; 1970), Goffman (sociologist; 1961), Slater (1966) and Smith and Berg (group theorists; 1987), who all recognised the natural resistance of an individual, about becoming a member of on-going groups and systems. The individual seeks to avoid total isolation by being in a constant state of flux towards and away from the group (Kahn 1990). Kahn (1990) coined this forward and backward flux as personal engagement and personal disengagement. Kahn (1990) postulated that employees' positive behaviours towards work role expressed cognitively, emotionally and physically, which are products of the conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability were important to fully understand why a person would become engaged to work.

The cognitive aspect of Kahn's (1990) engagement deals with the employees' beliefs about organisation factors such as, how it is led, by whom and the working conditions which exist within the organisation. The emotional aspect of Kahn's (1990) engagement deals with how employees feel about each of the three above-mentioned factors and if they possess a positive or negative attitude towards the organisation and its leadership. The physical aspect of Kahn's (1990) definition relates to the physical energies employed by employees in carrying out their work. This implies that individuals who apply personal energy into role performance become physically involved in tasks, cognitively alert, and emotionally connected to their work and colleagues (Kahn, 1990). In other words, employees who are engaged to their work express their feelings and thoughts, their innovation and creativity qualities, their beliefs and values, and their personal relations to others (Crawford, Rich, Buckman and Bergeron, 2014).

Kahn (1990) argued that employees' experiences of themselves and their work environment form the processes that influence the momentary psychological conditions that drive their willingness to personally engage in their work. Kahn (1990) suggested that employees may possibly ask themselves three questions - how meaningful is it for them to bring themselves to perform their role? How safe is it to do so? How available am I to do so? - and then, personally engage depending on their answers (Kahn, 1990). These questions form the three psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability, which reflect the basic logic of how people decide to engage to work (Crawford et al., 2014). This implies that people take up job roles they believe provide the resources needed to meet their responsibilities with clear and desired benefits as well as protective guarantees (Shokunbi, 2016). Employees do differ in their willingness to apply themselves to their work roles depending on its meaning to them, the safety they perceive in work situations; and their availability to carry out their work roles (Shokunbi, 2016). The combination of meaningfulness, safety and availability represents the conditions that influences employees' application and expressions of themselves more completely in their work roles cognitively, emotionally and physically (Kahn, 1992; Shokunbi, 2016). psychological meaningfulness is defined as the positive "sense of return on investments of self in role performance" (Kahn, 1990:705). People who experience meaningfulness feel worthwhile, useful, and valuable (Kahn, 1990). According to Kahn (1990; 1992), the main factors influencing meaningfulness include challenging tasks clearly delineated, varied and rather autonomous; roles that carry identities consistent with how people like to see themselves and that confer a sense of status; and rewarding interactions involving appreciation, feedback, and respect that allow individuals to feel valuable and cared for. Secondly, psychological safety is defined as a sense of being able to invest oneself in work role performances without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career (Kahn, 1990:708). Employees feel safe when work conditions are trustworthy, secure, predictable and clear in terms of behavioural consequences

(Crawford et al., 2014). Thirdly, psychological availability refers to "sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary for investing self in role performances" (Kahn, 1990:705). Kahn (1990) perceived that the main factors influencing psychological availability include physical energy, emotional energy, insecurity, and outside life. Theoretically, role workload, work-role conflict, and resource inadequacies influence how psychologically available employees are for role performances, which if positive, increases the level of engagement.

The evidence from Kahn's (1990) work suggests that employee engagement embodies the employment and expression of personal cognitive, emotional and physical energy in one's work role. However, this personal investment in role performances seems to depend on the psychological presence created by individuals' perceptions of meaning, safety and availability. These perceptions are influenced by antecedent factors which represent the conditions and processes that lead to the development of employee engagement. This raises the questions about what are the antecedents of employee engagement? The antecedents of employee engagement are conditions that precede the development of employee engagement – they come before an organisation enjoys the benefits of engagement-related outputs (Wollard and Shuck, 2011).

The search for the antecedents of employee engagement is relatively new (Wollard and Shuck, 2011). Though various studies are trying to find out the understanding of the antecedents of employee engagement, the literature on antecedents of employee engagement does not represent a lot of empirical research (Saks, 2006; Shokunbi, 2016; Wollard and Shuck, 2011). More often, engagement is discussed as a behavioural outcome (Shuck and Wollard, 2010) and little attention is given to antecedents that potentially influence the states of engagement, which are believed to lead to the behavioural manifestation of what can be understood as engagement (Wollard and Shuck, 2011). In their structured review of literature on the antecedents of employee engagement, Wollard and Shuck (2011) identified both individual and organisational antecedents as well as suggesting which antecedents are empirically or conceptually driven as identified in the review of literature. Eleven of the 21 individual antecedents were reported with empirical evidence while thirteen of the 21 identified organizational antecedents were reported with at least some empirical evidence (Wollard and Shuck, 2011). Wollard and Shuck (2011) called for more empirical studies on the conceptually driven antecedents of employee engagement to further deepen the understanding of the construct. However, recent trends revealed that researchers are mostly revalidating already empirically tested antecedents through the use of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2002) and the job demands – resources framework across different contexts. To confirm this, Bailey et al (2017) reported that UWES was the most widely adopted measure (N = 148) and has been validated for use in several languages. Also, sixty-five studies (38%) explained engagement in the context of the job demands–resources (JD-R) framework, including the majority of papers that used the UWES (Bailey et al., 2017). This trend indicates that academics are not doing more to explore, identify and understand other possible antecedent of employee engagement. Interestingly, the aim of this study is to explore and understand passion for work as a possible antecedent of employee engagement.

More recently, there has been suggestions that employee passion for work is an antecedent of employee engagement. In his qualitative study of teachers in government owned senior secondary schools in Lagos, Nigeria, Shokunbi (2016) identified and reported that passion for work was a major antecedent of employee engagement. Shokunbi (2016) reported that an employee will be engaged to his or her work role when he or she has passion for the job. The result from this study raises the question about the relationship between passion for work and

employee engagement. In recent years, several studies have highlighted the positive relationships of both engagement and passion with divergent results, such as performance (e.g., Salanova, Schaufeli, Xanthopoulou and Bakker, 2010; Vallerand, Mageau, Elliot, Dumais, Demers and Rousseau, 2008) and well-being (e.g., Mäkikangas, Bakker, Aunola, and Demerouti, 2010; Vallerand and Houlfort, 2003). In fact, more recently, Kocjan's (2015) attempt to disentangle the overlap between employee engagement and passion inevitably creates a sense of redundancy in the theoretical perspectives of both concepts, which further contributes to the risk of multiplication and fragmentation of concepts that positive psychology is facing today. However, the aim of this study is to explore, identify and understand if passion for work is an antecedent of employee engagement as suggested by Shokunbi (2016). Thus, having known the above, let us now consider clarify passion for work.

THE CONCEPT OF PASSION FOR WORK

Recently, there has been increased interest in the concept of passion for work, with a surge in the number of practitioner articles stressing the value of being passionate about one's job, and how companies can benefit from having passionate employees (e.g., Birkeland and Buch, 2015; Gorgievsk and Bakker 2010 in Albrecht, 2010; Ho and Astakhova, 2018; Ho, Wong and Lee, 2011; Perrewé, Hochwarter, Ferris, McAllister and Harris, 2013; Tre´panier et al., 2013; Zigarmi, Galloway and Roberts, 2018). The most established and supported by the largest body of research is the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand, Blanchard, Mageau, Koestner, Ratelle, Leonard, Gagne and Marsolais, 2003). A couple of other less established passion theories (Cardon, Wincent, Sing, and Drnovsek, 2009) have also been proposed, however, they were followed by considerably less empirical research and are thus less validated. It is necessary here to clarify what is meant by employee passion for work. Unlike numerous theories on employee engagement, only few conceptualisations of passion for work exist.

Specifically, passion has been studied in the context of many non-work activities such as gambling, romance, sports, and internet use, and has been demonstrated to lead to both positive and negative psychological and affective outcomes (Ho et al., 2010). However, research on the relationship between passion for work and employee engagement has been comparatively scarce and, with the exception of one study (Ho et al., 2010). Relatedly, while a relatively new line of study has introduced the concept of entrepreneurial passion in the entrepreneurship context, these developments have thus far been theoretical, with empirical tests yet to follow (Cardon et al., 2009). Therefore, as useful as these prior views are, they either fall short of providing a rigorous definition and conceptualisation of what passion really means, or fail to empirically demonstrate a link between passion and employee engagement.

In this study, we only concentrate on the definition of the notion of passion for work as proposed by Vallerand et al. (2003). In this study, we adopt passion for work as proposed by Vallerand et al. (2003). However, this study does not adopt the typology proposed in the extant literature (e.g. Gorgievsk and Bakker 2010 in Albrecht, 2010; Kocjan, 2015; Tre´panier et al., 2013; Vallerand et al. 2003; Vallerand 2010). This is particularly important to avoid the error of equating any of the proposed types of passion for work: harmonious passion and obsessive passion for engagement or burnout or workaholism (e.g. Gorgievsk and Bakker 2010 in Albrecht, 2010; Ho et al., 2010; Tre´panier et al., 2013). Thus, we only view passion at work as a proposed antecedents of employee engagement, which is the aim of this study.

Passion has been defined as a profound inclination toward a self-defining activity that one loves, that is highly valued, and in which a considerable amount of time and energy is invested (Vallerand 2010; Vallerand et al. 2003). Specifically, passion for work can be defined as a strong inclination toward the job, which is highly loved and valued, and in which a considerable

amount of time and energy is invested (Vallerand 2010). In their work, Vallerand et al., (2003) argued that activities that individuals like and engage in on a regular basis can become central features of their identities. Although Vallerand et al. (2003) proposed two types of passion: harmonious and obsessive passion (the dualistic model of passion), this study only focuses on passion for work as a process that leads to the development of employee engagement. Thus, we consider passion for work as a construct encompassing both affective and cognitive components that symbolise the strong feeling that an employee has towards his or her job.

The affective nature of passion for work seems to capture the strong, passionate feeling for and pleasure of the job. The cognitive nature of passion for work captures the perceived significance of the job to the individual, such that the job becomes internalised to the self and defines the individual's identity (Ho et al., 2010). Hence, to consider an employee as passionate, s/he must have strong love for the job as well as view the job as personally important to him or her prior to occupying the job position. For instance, an employee who is passionate about his or her job as a teacher would not only love the job but also consider it to be very important to his or her self-concept, such that s/he defines himself or herself as a teacher first and foremost, rather than by the other roles s/he may play (e.g. daughter, son, husband, wife, farmer, volunteer). Relating the above back to Kahn's (1990) position on psychological meaningfulness that lead to the development of employee engagement, will help form the foundation for passion for work as an antecedent of engagement.

Kahn (1990) argued that meaningfulness represents a sense of return on investments of self in role performances (Kahn, 1990). People who experience meaningfulness feel worthwhile, useful, and valued (Kahn, 1990). The roles include formal positions that offer more or less attractive identities, through fit with a preferred self-image, and status and influence (Kahn, 1990). According to Kahn (1990; 1992), the main factors influencing meaningfulness include challenging tasks clearly delineated, varied and rather autonomous; roles that carry identities consistent with how people like to see themselves and that confer a sense of status; and rewarding interactions involving appreciation, feedback, and respect that allow individuals to feel valuable and cared for. However, since passion for work refers to the strong inclination towards the job, which is highly loved and valued, and in which a considerable amount of time and energy is invested (Vallerand, 2010), it only suggests that passion for work may encourage the psychological condition of meaningfulness, which leads to the development of employee engagement. The meaning people attach to an activity – work role – might be as a result of the love and value the place on the activity. This love and value will then propel the people to invest the time and energy (Vallerand, 2010), which in can be linked to Kahn's (1990) assertion of investments of self in role performances. Since passion for work involves an employee having a strong affection for s/he job as well as view the job as personally important to him or her, it can be considered a factor that demonstrates meaningfulness. This suggests that the passion employees have for their jobs might influence what the job means to them as well as the extent to which they value the job and deem it worthwhile. Passion for the job as explained above suggests that the people's jobs could be meaningful when the roles carry identities consistent with how people like to see themselves, which describes a sense of status on their person (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) maintained that when employees are doing work that is challenging, clearly delineated, varied, creative and autonomous, they are more likely to experience psychological meaningfulness. Bringing passion for work into this context, the strong inclination an employee has for his or her work role, which makes the job personally important might be processing factor that makes the employees see the job as challenging, having a sense of competence, growth and learning.

Having created this possibilities of passion for work as a psychological meaningful antecedent of employee engagement, it will be imperative to empirically verify these possibilities. Also, with Shokunbi (2016) reporting the possibility of passion for work being an antecedent of employee engagement, it will be worthwhile and logical to explore this through a qualitative study. This is because even Kahn describes employee engagement as the experience people have through role performance. Therefore, since the research context here is Lagos, Nigeria, it is pertinent to explore peoples experience of passion for work as an antecedent to employee engagement within this context qualitatively to capture an original understanding of this relationship among Nigerian public sector employees. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore, identify and understand the role of passion for work as an antecedent to employee engagement through the understanding of workers' experience of how the strong inclination they have for their jobs gets them engaged at work.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Twenty-eight teachers from eight different state-owned senior secondary schools across three local government areas – Alimosho, Ikeja, and Lagos Island local government areas - in Lagos state, Nigeria were interviewed. It is important to point out here that the survey was not to test any hypothesis. It was only used to verify the results of interviews using. The criterion for participant selection was that participants must be subject teachers in one of the eight public senior secondary schools across the three local government areas mentioned above. The three local government areas were selected because they were easily accessible by the researcher. In addition, these twenty-eight teachers were the ones who showed interest in finding out more about the study and decided to take part in it.

PROCEDURE

Certain agreements had to be reached in order to fulfil the required research ethics. Israel and Hay (2006) argued that completing a research requires protecting others, minimizing harm and increasing the sum of good. To assure and ensure this, the researcher sought the consent of the Commissioner for Education in Lagos State to gain access to teachers across the eight schools. The researcher approached potential participants, invited their interests, informed them of the study, and gave a copy of the consent form and the statement of the study to teachers who agreed to participate in the study before making arrangements for an interview with each potential participants. All participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time. However, none withdrew from the study. Teachers' identities were made anonymous as pseudonyms were used to represent participants' names. These pseudonyms are only known by the researcher to ensure reflexivity (Reinharz, 1997). In ensuring confidentiality of results, the researchers avoided compromising commitment to morality and to the law and maintained the standard satisfactory for professional integrity (Social Research Association, 2003). This research is available for collegial review and the researchers adhered to professional integrity without any fear or favour (Social Research Association, 2003).

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to obtain information about teachers' experience on how passion for work encourages them to be engaged to work. In the interviews, questions were asked about teachers' understanding of engagement and passion, how they think their passion influenced them to be engaged at work and otherwise, even when there were changes to the job responsibilities. The interview questions were designed in a way that promotes open – ended responses from participants. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes

and an hour long, audio-taped with the consent of the participants and transcribed. The interview schedule is presented in the appendices.

The data collected were transcribed and analysed using the thematic analysis technique. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, it has been criticised on certain weaknesses. Although it encourages flexibility, this makes it difficult for researchers to decide what aspects of their data to focus on (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Besides, it has limited explanatory power that transcends mere description if it is not used within an established theoretical framework that anchors the analytic claims made (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, its advantages – flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2006); allowing the expansion of the range of study past individual experiences (Guest, 2012); interpretation of themes supported by data; applicability to research questions beyond individuals' experiences (Guest, 2012); allowing categories to emerge from data (Saldana, 2009) – encouraged the researchers to adopt it for data analysis. Thus, to address the disadvantages, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis guide was followed.

The first step in using thematic analysis is data familiarisation with the researcher(s) preparing the transcripts personally (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This helped the avoid losing important parts of the data which might be relevant to the study. Thus, the researchers personally transcribed the audio-taped interviews and got immersed and familiar with the data. The researchers repeatedly read the data to search for meanings, patterns and themes. This helped the researchers' shape their ideas and identification of possible patterns prior to coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006). While familiarising with the data, the researchers also took notes about what is in the data and what is interesting about them.

Code generation is the second step. This involves the production of initial codes from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Researchers generated codes that identify important features of the data relevant to answering the research question(s). This involves coding the entire dataset before organising the codes and all relevant data extracts for later phases of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researchers manually coded data using 'post-it' notes to identify fragments of data. At this stage, different codes were generated and collated for the next phase of theme searching.

Theme searching involved scrutinising the codes and collating data to identify important potential themes by collating data relevant to each theme by working with the data and reviewing the practicality of each theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Here, researchers used the names given to each code to organise them into main themes, and sub-themes, and all extracts of data that have been coded in relation to them. Researchers began to make sense of the meaning of individual themes without discarding anything at this stage. It is important to thoroughly scrutinise all the excerpts before determining whether the themes hold as they are or need to be combined, refined and separated, or discarded (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Researchers used Patton's (1990) dual criteria to define important themes for clear distinctions between themes while the data within the themes fit together meaningfully. This formed the basis for a detailed analysis of each theme developed by creating explanatory name, focus and scope of each of the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The final stage is the report production stage. This involves bringing together the analytic narratives and data extracts, and contextualising the analysis in relation to existing literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Researchers carefully completed this by embedding excerpts within the analytic narrative that describes the data and make argument relating to the research question – what is the role of passion for work as an antecedent of employee engagement? Reporting is done in the findings section which follows this section.

FINDINGS

The data analysis revealed three main themes: positive reinforcement, values and identity and intrinsic motivation. These themes support the notion that passion for work is an antecedent of employee engagement.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

An interesting theme revealed by this study is positive reinforcement. In their responses, participants reported that teaching is an enjoyable activity to them. Almost 93 percent of the participants reported teaching is more than just a pleasurable activity to them. Participants reported that having a sense of fulfilment and realisation of completing an activity they love, and enjoy doing represent the passion for that activity, which influences them to be engaged performing the activity. This was not unexpected because some of these are evident in the literature (Kahn, 1990; Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2010). Kahn (1990) argued that people having feelings of doing something worthwhile and valuable might influence engagement to work. In relations to Vallerand et al. (2003) and Vallerand (2010), an important criterion for what type of activity counts as a passion is one that people enjoy. This theme was greatly reported across almost all the participants. For instance, Rotimi, a male teacher with 18years of experience, said that *"this job I love it…from the onset I want to be a teacher because it is an activity I desire, love and enjoy doing…a job that you love you will be committed to it."*

Teachers reported how their desires and what they love doing influenced their choice of profession and performance of the teaching activity as their work role. Teachers reported that they are in their desired and loved job roles. This suggests that teaching is seen and considered a worthwhile activity by the research participants. This reflects Kahn's (1990) submission that people engage in activities which they feel worthwhile to them. The current study suggests that participant's desires and love for teaching as a worthwhile activity, made them apply and take up teaching roles. Also, this influenced them to apply and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally to their teaching roles (Kahn, 1990; Heaphy and Kahn, 2014 in Truss et al., 2014).

VALUES AND IDENTITY

Another significant theme from this study is values and identity. The research participants reported that the value they place on their jobs (teaching) and being identified and known as a teacher highlight the passion, which encourages them to be engaged their jobs. Interestingly also, almost 93% of the participants reported that the values they place on their jobs and the self – identity assumed, form their passion for the job and thus, engages them to the job. Teachers' job values such as the love for children, contributing towards the advancements and development of others, contributing towards the development of the community; represent the importance of the job to them. This importance forms the feeling of being identified as teachers and the basis of their passion for the job, which is an antecedent to engagement. This is not surprising because the extant literature opines that passion for work represents a person's strong feeling for an activity s/he loves, perceives as important and values so much to invest energy and time on regularly, which can become central features of their identities (Kahn, 1990; 1992; Tre´panier et al., 2014; Vallerand, 2008; 2010; Vallerand et al., 2010). In a submission that captures the values and identity that underlines a teacher's passion for the job and how it influences their engagement, Hammed, a male teacher with 16 years of experience said that "*I became a teacher because "I love children…I love to see the younger generation get better to develop the community…these two reasons make me love teaching". Similarly,* Bimbo, a female teacher for 23 years reported that "*I became a teacher to encourage these children that*

education is a good legacy and to change the perceptions of the people about education…you know all these built my passion for the job". This suggests that employees' passion for their jobs were based on certain objectives they value, which subsequently resulted in engagement. This demonstrates that participants' strong inclination toward a self-defining activity (teaching), that they love, and highly value (Vallerand, 2010) encourage them to apply and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally with a sense of returns on investments of selves in role performance (Kahn, 1990; 1992).

INTRINSIC IMPETUS

Another principal theme identified was intrinsic impetus. Teachers talked about how the joy of creating a change in people's perceptions towards education and other aspects of the society. This represents the intrinsic impetus that forms the basis of teachers' passion for their job and thus, engages them to the job. This theme was reported across the eight schools as again 93 percent of the teachers interviewed reported it. For instance, Dele, a male teacher with 23 years of experience noted that *"people only care about money…I mean trade…so, most parent and the pupils believe making money is better than coming to school…I became a teacher because I want to change this perception… teaching for me comes for the love I have for children to understand themselves and become better people through education".* Similarly, Bimbo, a female teacher with 28 years of teaching experience noted that *"parents are not interested in the education of their children…most of the children learn one trade or the other after school hours and over the weekends…their parents are responsible for this because they believed learning trade is better today…the need to change such perception made me become a teacher…and I love it".* This revealed that individuals' desire to assist others get better and change their perceptions towards education as well as contribute to societal development might drive passion for the teaching profession. This is similar to feelings of doing something worthwhile and valuable (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2010), which Kahn (1990) believes might influence engagement to work. Thus, the suggestion that the intrinsic impetus to achieve certain goals within the society could influence an individuals' passion to perform at the highest level within roles.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A review of the literature only presents data equating and/or presenting passion for work as an outcome of employee engagement (Gorgievski and Bakker, 2010 in Albrecht, 2010; Gubman, 2004; Ho et al., 2010; Tre´panier et al., 2013). In fact, the effort at disentangling the overlap between employee engagement and passion for work by Kocjan (2015) did not establish any antecedent relationship between the two constructs. The present study was designed to determine how passion for work serves as an antecedent to employee engagement in order to empirically verify the conceptual premise suggested by Shokunbi (2016). The current study found that passion for work is an antecedent to employee engagement within the research context. In this study, positive reinforcement, values and identity and intrinsic impetus were found to be the major themes driving for how passion for work precedes employee engagement.

However, these findings do not support previous research that equated passion for work to engagement and present passion for work as an outcome of employee engagement (Gorgievski and Bakker, 2010 in Albrecht, 2010; Gubman, 2004; Ho et al., 2010; Tre´panier et al., 2013; Zigarmi et al., 2009; 2011). A possible explanation for this might be because majority of the studies on passion for work and engagement have particularly focused on testing the Vallerand's (2008; 2010) passion model in relations to work as the latter did not initially relate the model to work. Furthermore, recent increasing attention to consolidate passion for work as a

construct might be an explanation for why it was never considered as an antecedent of employee engagement. The mass acceptance and consideration of passion for work and employee engagement as similar constructs that relates to burnout, workaholism and engagement (e.g. Gorgievski and Bakker, 2010 in Albrecht, 2010; Gubman, 2004; Ho et al., 2010; Tre´panier et al., 2014; Zigarmi et al., 2009) explain the reason for limited studies focusing on passion for work as antecedent to employee engagement.

The purpose of the current study was to explore and understand passion for work as an antecedent to employee engagement among teachers in government owned senior secondary schools in Nigeria to empirically the theoretical proposition in the literature. The research has shown that passion for work is a major influencing factor for employee engagement among the research participants. Taken together, these findings suggest a role for passion for work in influencing and promoting employee engagement. These findings have significant implication for the understanding of how passion for work plays the role of an antecedent to employee engagement, which represents the principal theoretical implication for this study. The contributions of this study has been to confirm the role of passion for work as an antecedent of employee engagement and to explore and understand the argument that passion for work represents a precursor to engagement. This study has confirmed the findings of Shokunbi (2016) which found that passion for work was among the major antecedents of employee engagement. Also, this study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the role of passion for work as an antecedent of engagement, and particularly lays the groundwork for future research into this conceptual premise. A limitation of this study is that it only focuses on teachers in government owned senior secondary schools (only eight) without considering teachers in government owned junior secondary schools and even private secondary schools. Also, since the study was limited to only 28 teachers from eight government owned senior secondary schools, the findings are only representative of these research participant and cannot be generalised across all government owned senior secondary schools or the universal set of all teachers in Nigeria. The scope of this study is limited in terms of the non-inclusion of the typologies of passion. In spite of these limitations and the fact that the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the findings have suggested that the strong inclination toward an activity that people love, find important and in which they spend time and energy on a regular basis propel them to the state of engagement. Further work needs to be carried out in order to validate these findings and the suggestion that passion for work is an antecedent of employee engagement as earlier mentioned. In future studies, it would be useful to consider if the typologies of passion as created by Vallerand (2010) might lead to the state of employee engagement. Taken together, the findings from this study implies that both academics and practitioners have to take a step back from the present arguments that passion for work and employee engagement are similar or that passion for work is an outcome of employee engagement or the next phase of employee engagement. Managers and stakeholders in public education need to start including questions that will indicate employees' passion for work from the point of recruitment in order to help how to maintain and sustain the engagement of the employees while on the job.

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