

Vigor, Dedication and Absorption:  
Work engagement among secondary school English  
teachers in Indonesia

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## Vigor, Dedication and Absorption: Work engagement among secondary school English teachers in Indonesia

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### **Abstract**

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma, & Baker, 2002). Research suggests that it is one indicator of achievement. This paper investigates the work engagement among a sample of 152 secondary school English teachers in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, sampled from a competency-based integrated training course. Data were collected using the short form of the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES 9; Schaufeli et al, 2002). Reliability in the Indonesian context was high (alpha=.91 overall; alphas=.76, .83, .79 respectively, for component vigor, dedication, and absorption subscales). Results suggest that teachers' work engagement is generally high (overall  $M=5.04$  on the 7-point scale;  $M_s=4.99, 5.44, 4.71$  respectively, for component vigor, dedication, and absorption subscales). Findings are interesting in the context of low student English achievement in this region and implications are suggested in relation to teachers' continuing professional development and enhancement of student achievement.

Key words: work engagement, teachers' work engagement

### **A. Introduction**

Research in work engagement has been done in various professions, including teaching. Many have come to suggest that work engagement or sometimes also referred to as job engagement, has been identified as having correlation with both positive and negative aspects of work achievement (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007; Milner & Hoy, 2002). Work engagement might be influenced by factors like job resources (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007), personal factors, and other factors like student behaviour, collegial and administrative supports and

parental demands and government policy (Day, 2000; Louis, 1998; Riehl & Sipple, 1996; Tsui & Cheng, 1999).

In terms of teaching profession, issues in work engagement have also received important responses nowadays due to the worldwide high attrition and turnover among teachers. In the USA, for example, Ingersoll has reported that up to fifty percent of teachers leave the teaching profession in the first ten years of their career (Ingersoll, 2001). Li Feng (2005) emphasizes that among those who stayed, only a quarter retired while half of them left for other careers (Feng, 2005). Teacher turnover and attrition also happen in other western countries with an estimated 25%-40% of beginning teachers leaving their job (Ewing & Smith, 2003). This is also due to the beliefs that teachers' work engagement is a factor of students' achievement.

### **1. The Indonesian context**

Compared to the number from other countries like USA and other western countries, cases of teachers switching career, or teachers leaving their jobs in Indonesia is not very high. It is also a very rare case to switch career from non-teaching to teaching because being a teacher in Indonesia context starts very early on in one's educational history. Primary and secondary school teacher education programs start as soon as one graduates from senior high school. When one wants to be a primary or secondary teacher, there is no other way than entering a teacher college, or a university especially designed to prepare teachers. Because there is an age limitation on registering in these teacher colleges which are normally owned by government, then the decision to take on a teaching career occurs at the end of high school.

In addition, teacher retention is not a relevant issue when for teachers in Indonesia. As explained previously, there are few cases of teacher quitting teaching, except as a result of death or retirement. Once recruitment is made, cases of quitting teaching due to bad evaluation results are very rare. Although the teaching profession might be as stressful as in other countries, it seems that not many people talk about teacher stress and further effects of

the stress on the job of teachers in Indonesia. In most cases, teachers will remain in teaching until retirement day no matter how stressful their work becomes.

Unlike teacher attrition and turnover which do not seem to be a significant issue in Indonesia, teachers' work engagement is an important aspect of teachers and worth investigating. This is due to the fact that quality teachers are viewed to be important assets in the context of education in Indonesia. Furthermore, although the teacher profession traditionally has a high social status in Indonesia, it provides for neither high financial satisfaction nor high academic recognition. The term traditionally here is meant to refer to the value in the society, especially the society with Javanese culture where teachers are considered know everything and have social wisdom so that people come to seek for advice to their problems.

## **2. Being a teacher in Indonesia**

Based on the Law No. 14/2005 about teachers and lecturers (*Undang-undang No. 14 tahun 2005 tentang Guru dan Dosen*) Section IV Item No. 8, to become a teacher one should have a teaching degree or a four-year teaching diploma ("Undang-Undang Guru dan Dosen," 2005). As stated previously, therefore, planning to become a teacher in Indonesia should start as soon as one graduates from the senior high school. When one decides to be a teacher, s/he should be enrolled in a university designed specifically to educate teachers.

Based on their job status and tenure, there are three groups of teachers in Indonesia. The first group is the part time teachers. This teacher status is usually an initial status for most teachers in Indonesia. It is usually a stepping stone toward a more secure work position either as a government employed or a full time private teacher. A teaching career usually starts from this status, and teachers could stay either very short or very long before they get a fixed position either as civil servant or full time private teachers. Some part-time teachers might get their fixed position before they have completed five years of teaching in this position, but some other teachers might spend

more than twenty years in this position. Part time teachers can work in either public or private schools. This group of teachers earns very little salary, but the expectation of being recruited as a government employed teacher prevents them from quitting teaching.

The second group of teachers is the civil servant teachers who are recruited and paid by the government. Being a government employed teacher seems to be the ultimate pursuit of being a teacher in Indonesia. A teacher can only get the position as a government employed teacher after passing the recruitment test conducted every year. Some teachers might have to sit on this test several times, some other teachers who are quite lucky can pass the first test they sit on. Other unlucky teachers, even cannot pass the test after several tries and have to give up the position due to age limitation.

The responsibility of civil servant teachers, according to Law No 14 2005, covers the main duty which consists of planning, executing and evaluating teaching processes, giving academic consultancy and training, and additional duty that usually deals with administrative work. The Law further regulates that apart from the administrative works, teachers should teach for minimally 24-hour and maximally 40-hour teaching sessions in a week. Although being a civil servant teacher does not provide for high financial return when compared to other profession, it does to some extent provide for relatively high social status, especially in non-urban area and in society with Javanese cultural background. This teacher status also offers a life long salary package, including a retirement pension.

The third group of teachers is the full time private teachers who are employed by a private education foundation and usually teach in private schools. After spending some time as a part time teacher or after being unsuccessful in several government teacher recruitment tests, a teacher does not usually stop teaching, but rather continues the part-time teaching job or works as a full time teacher in a private school. This however does not necessarily mean that being a full time private teacher always comes as a final choice. Some teachers begin their teaching career and are intent on

teaching in private schools, especially in both academically and financially good private schools. Financially, some private teachers are well-off while others are quite poor, depending on the schools they work in.

Although few teachers are leaving their jobs, further questions concerning their actual engagement in their profession seem to be intriguing. This is because there seems to be no guarantee that staying in a profession the whole one's life means that they are enjoying the profession, feel devoted and highly committed to the profession. Sticking with the job and being engaged in it seem to be two different things. Watt, Richardson, and Tysvaer (2007) for example have suggested that high levels of engagement were found even among those who planned to have careers other than their whole life teaching career. This paper, therefore, will seek to explain the levels of teacher engagement in the particular context of junior secondary school English teachers in Yogyakarta province of Indonesia.

## **B. Review on the Literature**

Work engagement has been defined as job engagement which is an employee's interest in, enthusiasm for and investment in his or her job (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Further, Kirkpatrick has argued that empirical studies have revealed that job engagement is associated with various positive behaviors and outcomes for both employees and the organization.

Scaufelli et al looked at work engagement in a different construct and defined it as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Roma, & Bakker, 2002). *Vigor* is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in ones work and persistence in the face of difficulty. *Dedication* is ones' sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. *Absorption* refers to the state in which one is highly concentrated and happily engrossed in works so that s/he feels time passes quickly and it is difficult to detach from work. Engaged teachers, therefore, feel strong and vigorous at work, enthusiastic and optimistic about the work they do and are very often immersed in that work.

Further Schaufeli et al (2006) state that work engagement is not a momentary and specific state, it is a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behavior.

Research has suggested that the level of work engagement in general is affected by personal characteristics, the work place (Brown, 1996; Kahn, 1990, in Kirkpatrick, 2007) and the characteristics of the work, including job status and job demands (Mauno et al., 2007). Teachers' engagement might be affected by their personal characteristics like identity, self-esteem, and the sense of efficacy. Therefore, teachers with clearer identity, higher self-esteem, and higher sense of efficacy tend to be more engaged in their job.

## **C. Methods**

### **1. Participants**

The target population of this study was junior secondary school English teachers in Yogyakarta province of Indonesia. The sample was selected based on the requirement that the teacher participants should be English teachers from all four districts and one municipality in the province. To become research subjects, teachers should have attended the Competency-based Integrated Training (CBIT). The training was initiated by the Ministry of National Education and was conducted by either the national office of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) or by the province or district offices of MoNE. This training was conducted as one activity to prepare teachers for the newly devised competency-based English curriculum in the country. The materials presented in this training covered teachers' English skills, the philosophical bases of the newly issued Curriculum 2004 which was the initial version of Curriculum 2006 together with the regulation supporting the implementation, and the specific instructional strategies and assessment recommended in the implementation of the curriculum.

Upon the selection and recruitment of the teacher participants, among 186 selected teachers, 152 teachers completed and returned the questionnaire, giving the response rate of 82%.

## **2. Measures**

Teacher work engagement in this research was measured using the short form of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES 9) developed by Schaufeli et al (Scaufeli et al, 2002). This measure is a three-factor scale consisting of nine items aiming to measure the three dimensions of work engagement- *vigor*, *dedication* and *absorption*. Three items were used to measure each of the dimensions. Items used to address the vigor dimension of work engagement include statements like (V1) *At my work, I feel bursting with Energy*, (V2) *At my job, I feel strong and vigorous*, and (V3) *When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work*. Participants' dedication to the job of teaching was measured using items such as, (D1) *I am enthusiastic about my job*, (D2) *My job inspires me*, and (D3) *I am proud of the work that I do*. Absorption aspect of the teachers was also measured using a three-item subscale consisting of statements like (Ab1) *I feel happy when I am working intensely*, (A2) *I am immersed in my work*, (A3) *I get carried away when I am working*.

All nine items were anchored in a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

## **3. Procedure of data collection**

All samples were directly contacted by the researcher at the teacher forum meetings in the four districts and municipality in Yogyakarta province between January – February 2007. In the meetings, teachers who fit the sample criteria were invited to participate in the research and were asked to fill in the work engagement questionnaire. Participation of the teachers was voluntarily.

The questionnaire was presented to the teachers together with other sub-scales of teaching efficacy, including the three OSTES sub-scales

(Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Statements were presented in both the English and Indonesian translation versions. This translated version was aimed to provide a back up in case there was a difficult concept in the English version. Teachers, however, were asked to answer in the English version, considering that they were English teachers.

#### **4. Data analyses**

##### **4.1 Research variables**

In the administration of the survey, participants' demographic data were collected along with the collection of the work engagement data. The collection of these demographic data was aimed at investigating whether or not there were effects of those demographic data on the work engagement of the participants. Those demographic data consisted of participants' gender, ages, educational background, teaching experiences, work status, types of school, and the districts where the teachers were teaching. Educational background in this research was mainly focused on whether the participants had English teaching education background. Work status referred to whether the teachers were civil servant employed by government, full-time private teachers or part-time teachers. Schools referred to whether the teacher participants were teaching in public or private schools. Districts referred to the districts and municipality where the teachers were teaching.

All those six demographic data were investigated to see their main effects as well as their interaction effect. Due to the computer-power limitation, however, only main effects and two-way interaction effects could be computed. The collected data were then analyzed using the SPSS statistic package version 14. The analyses on the data covered the descriptive statistics, and the Multifactor-multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). MANOVA was used in considerations that this research sought to investigate not only the main effects of the independent variables, but also the interaction effects in the data. By using MANOVA it is hoped that the analysis would be able to compare groups formed by the categorical independent variables within the sample. Besides, by applying the post-hoc test,

MANOVA has the ability to provide the possibility of looking further to identify certain independent variables which provide the most effects in differentiating a set of dependent variables.

#### **4. 2 Findings**

Descriptive analyses on the sample revealed that among the sample group of 152 teachers, 52 (34.2%) teachers were male and the other 100 (65.8%) were female teachers. Those teacher sample ranges in their ages from 23 – 57 years old, with 21 (13.8%) teachers having less than five years teaching experience, 68 (44.7%) with five to fifteen years and 61 (40.1%) with more than fifteen years teaching experience. One hundred and nineteen (78.3%) teachers were civil servant teachers, ten (6.6%) were fulltime private teachers and twenty (13.2%) were part time teachers. One hundred and nineteen (78.3) teachers taught in public schools and the other 33 (21.7%) in private schools. The sample teachers were drawn from four districts and one municipality in the province, 22 (15.5%) from Yogyakarta City, 27 (17.8%) from Sleman regency, 33 (21.7%) from Kulonprogo regency, 25 (16.4%) from Bantul regency, and 45 (29.6%) from Gunungkidul regency.

Results suggest that the work engagement among the junior secondary school English teachers in Yogyakarta province of Indonesia is generally high (overall Mean=5.04, SD=1.13 on the 7-point Likert-type scale;  $M=4.99$ ,  $SD=1.13$  for vigor,  $M=5.44$ ,  $SD=1.08$  for dedication, and  $M=4.71$ ,  $SD=1.03$  for absorption). The reliability of the data is also high (alpha=.91 overall; alphas=.76, .83, .79 respectively, for component vigor, dedication, and absorption subscales).

**Table 1**  
**Frequency Distribution of Teacher Sample**

Independent Variables	Value labels	N	%
Gender	Male	52	34.2
	Female	100	65.8
	Missing	0	0
Ages	<30	14	9.5
	31-40	72	51.8
	41-50	41	27
	>50	12	7.9
	Missing	13	8.6
English teaching Education Background	Yes	144	94.7
	No	5	3.3
	Missing	3	1.9
Teaching Experiences	Less than 5 years	21	13.8
	5 – 15 years	68	44.7
	More than 15 years	61	40.1
	Missing	2	1.3
Teacher status	Part time teachers	20	13.2
	Civil servant	119	78.3
	Full time private teachers	10	6.6
	Missing	3	1.9
Schools	Public	119	78.3
	Private	33	22.7
	Missing	0	
Districts	Yogyakarta City	22	14.5
	Sleman	27	17.8
	Kulon Progo	33	22.7
	Bantul	25	16.4
	Gunung kidul	45	29.6
	Missing	0	

Multifactor multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed that there were no significant main effects found in the data. There was no significant differences in work engagement between male and female teachers ( $F(57, 152)=0.176, p>0.05$ ). The participants' ages did not have significant effects on subjects' work engagement ( $F(177, 139)=0.983, p>0.05$ ). Education background had also no significant effect on the work engagement of the teacher sample ( $F(57, 149)=0.131 p>0.05$ ). This means that both teachers with or with no English teaching education background engage equally with their job. Teaching experience had no significant effect in on subjects' work engagement ( $F(116, 150)=0.305, p>0.05$ ). There were

no differences in work engagement among teachers with different status ( $F(116, 149)=0.613, p>0.05$ ). Types of school where the teachers were teaching did not contribute significant differences in the level of teachers' work engagement ( $F(57, 152)=0.442, p>0.05$ ). The districts where teacher sample are teaching have no significant effects on the work engagement of the teachers ( $F(177,152)=0.914, p>0.05$ ). Furthermore, Multivariate analysis of variance did not find any interaction effects among the variables.

#### **D. Discussion**

It is quite surprising to some extent that there are no significant effects of any independent variables on the work engagement of the teacher sample.

Generally speaking, there are expectations that there would be differences in work engagement between male and female teachers, although research has not yet come to a suggestion that there are gender differences in teachers' work engagement. In the Indonesian context, males are expected to provide the main financial support to the family. Given that teaching profession does not provide good financial returns, responsibility to provide living for male teachers will to some extent be a factor potentially raising differences in the teacher engagement. While female teachers might feel secure with the low income and enjoy their teaching position due to their limited financial necessity, in this case to provide additional financial support to the family, male teachers will have to find other jobs to provide livings for the family. The responsibility to do the duty of the other job(s) will take a certain amount of time, efforts and energy of male teachers from the teaching profession. Male teachers, therefore, will be potentially less engaged in their teaching work. Data on the engagement of junior secondary school English teachers, however, tell a different story. There is no significant contribution of gender on the differences in work engagement among the teachers.

Difference in ages is also a potential cause of differences in work engagement among teachers. Older teachers might show either lower engagement due to the more responsibilities they have, or higher engagement level due to their more settled profession. However, this is not

the case based on the data. Differences in ages do not stimulate differences in the level of engagement of the teachers in this province.

Furthermore, the researcher also anticipated to see the influence of teacher status in work engagement. As previously mentioned, government employed teachers have a more secure position given there are not many cases of teachers losing their jobs after gaining this professional status. Although one might argue that a secure position will bring about higher level of engagement, it can come up with a completely different fact. In the Indonesian context, it was supposedly to happen that after a teacher gained this secure position as a civil servant, s/he would be less engaged in the teaching profession and started to look for and engage with the second or third jobs. This anticipation is relevant when referring to the Annual report of the Commission for human Rights in Education suggesting that:

“Teachers traditionally had high social status in Indonesia but teaching is today a low-paid and low-prestige profession. As the World Bank has put it, “the GOI’s –Government of Indonesia’s- implicit policy on teachers’ (and all civil servants’) salaries has been to keep official salaries low, keep working hours to a minimum, and to allow teachers to hold second and third jobs (Tomasevski, 2002)”.

Data on teachers’ work engagement collected from the sample, however, do not support the assumption. There is no difference in work engagement of teachers who are civil servant from those who are not.

The districts where the teacher sample taught was supposedly to have a certain contribution on the teachers’ work engagement. Those districts with positive policy towards teachers and teacher development program were also expected to have positive contribution compared to those with less positive ones. Research has suggested that work engagement to some extent is boost by opportunities and resources (Mauno et al., 2007; Oplatka, 2004). Differences in resources provided by different districts should contribute differences in work engagement of teachers in those areas. The data again, however, reject this theoretical assumption. There is no significant

differences of teachers' work engagement due to different districts where they teach.

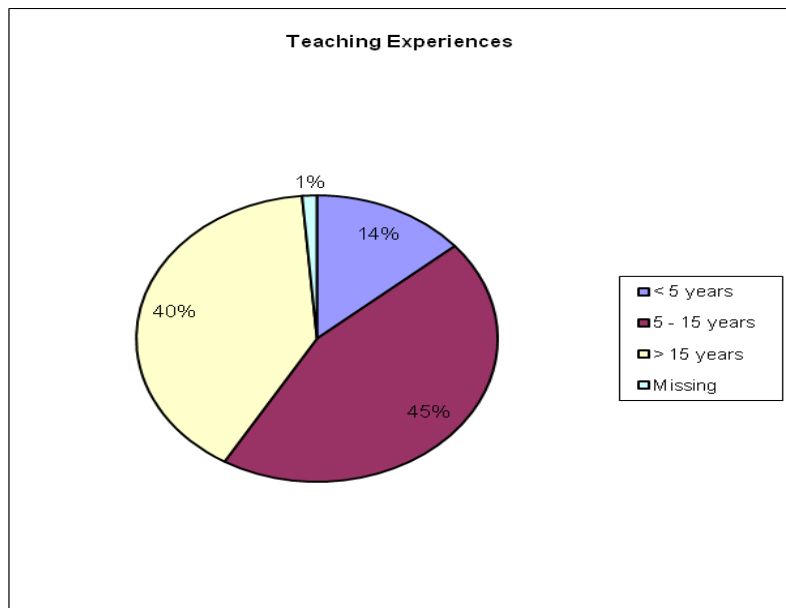
Regarding the fact that there are no differences in the results of either main or two-way interaction effects, it is, therefore interesting and worth asking the question concerning; what makes teachers remain highly engaged in the teaching profession?

### **1. Motivation for choosing teaching as a profession**

Research has suggested that there are three types of motives driving people to choose teaching as profession. Although they vary among individuals, such motives can in general be classified into extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic motives (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992). Extrinsic motives include both material, such as salary and pension and psychological benefits like job security and longer vacation. Intrinsic motives usually deal with the perceived nature of teaching profession. Many people still believe in the respected nature of teaching profession, such as the honor of being a teacher, and teaching as a caring and noble profession. Altruistic motives cover such motives like the willingness to work with children, the desire to influence the future generation and helping students to gain successes.

It is quite unfortunate however that most studies in motives for choosing teaching as a profession were done among either pre-service teachers (Thom, 1992; Yong, 1995) or beginning teachers (Brown, 1992; Watt, Richardson, & Tysvaer, 2007), with less attention being paid to the motives in relation to the level of engagement of experienced teachers or teachers who have been in the profession for relatively long time, for example more than fifteen years. It is therefore not very relevant to look at the level of engagement of the junior secondary school English teachers in Yogyakarta in a way suggested by the previous research. However, it is true that there must be something that makes these teachers remain highly engaged in the profession.

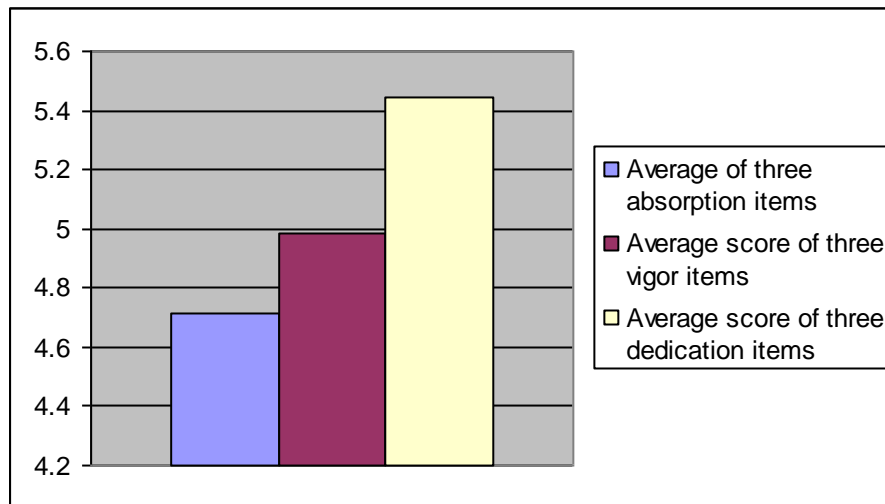
Figure 1: Range of teacher participants' teaching experience



Another interesting finding relates to the fact that the average mean score of three items measuring the dedication dimension (5.44) is the highest compared to the average of the other two work engagement dimensions (see figure 2). This is interesting when we look back at the definition of dedication proposed by Schaufeli et al (2002) which indicates that it is related to the sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. The data suggest that teachers in the sample feel the significance of themselves and the work that they are doing, they are enthusiastic about and inspired by what they are doing, proud of what they are doing and feel the challenge of their profession.

When looking at the finding, it seems to be appropriate to propose that there is a different strong drive for choosing teaching apart from the low financial return and job prestige.

Figure 2: Level of engagement among three dimensions of work engagement



## 2. Social and religious aspects of teaching profession in Yogyakarta, Indonesia

First interpretations of why teachers remain engaged in their profession in Indonesia when factors such as gender, age, educational background and other independent variables do not have any contribution, might relate to the intrinsic social and cultural embodiment of teaching profession in this society. It is reasonable to argue that it is the intrinsic natures of teaching profession that provides such high levels of vigor, dedication and absorption. These intrinsic values are apparently due to the socio-cultural and religious aspects of the profession that are held by the teachers. At this stage, it is interesting because previous studies of pre-service teachers in Brunei Darussalam, a country which highly resembles the community profile in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, revealed different findings. In a study conducted in Brunei, Yong (1995) suggested that it was extrinsic motives that functioned as the main determinant of the sample in entering teaching profession (Yong, 1995). This could be true in the context of the research where among the fourteen reasons listed, none was related to the social and religious aspects of the participants.

In the present research with participant living in Yogyakarta with a strongly Javanese culture and where most members of the society are

Moslems giving consideration to the socio-religious aspect seems to be important. In this Javanese-rooted area, teaching profession still commands a positive social image for those who choose to be teachers. Especially in the Yogyakarta context, for most members of the society, teachers are still considered respected figures, to which society can rely on the role modeling. The strong role-model function of teachers is shown by the famous acronym derived from the Javanese word for teacher, *guru*. *Guru* in Javanese means *digugu* and *ditiru*. *Digugu* means that what teachers say is something the society needs to listen to and to obey, while *ditiru* means that the society can take what the teachers do in the society as models for their behaviors.

Furthermore, perceived role-model function of teachers seems to be a code of conduct for the teachers themselves in doing not only their academic tasks, but also in behaving in the society. From this, it can be inferred that teachers themselves will consider themselves as society role-models or at least that the society will keep eyes on whatever they do. They thus will make themselves socially acceptable, and build a good image for the society.

In relation to their work engagement, teachers will set their own norm that being a less engaged teacher is not something that the society expects from them. This perceived role-model will keep them highly engaged because teachers believe that the society expect them to do so.

Secondly, religion seems to be an important factor related to the high level of engagement among teachers in Yogyakarta. As most of the people in Yogyakarta are Moslems, Islamic teachings concerning the duty of spreading knowledge among human being seems to be of great influence. Although the Koran does not explicitly refer to teachers in general, it repeatedly highlights the importance of spreading knowledge and the honor of having 'useful' knowledge, which means that the knowledge is shared with other. Teachers seem to consider the teaching profession not just as a profession, but as a way to achieve a better life in the life after death. This idea seems to be a strong determinant of why teachers remain highly engaged in the province.

## E. Limitation and direction for future research

Results of the present study provide insight into the social and religious aspects of teachers' work engagement. It suggests that in a certain context like that of Indonesia, the role of social and religious norms need to be taken into consideration in seeking for factors related to teachers' work engagement. However, such factors need to be verified in a larger scale of research involving more participants. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data will enrich our understanding on the important issue in teachers' work engagement. Longitudinal research would also provide insights into whether there are changes over the course teachers' careers.

Social aspects like society perception and beliefs should also be taken into account in the future research. Specific and detailed religious influences among the participants would also be worth investigating to provide for a further explanation of what happens with the work engagement among teachers.

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