

Exploring Teacher Engagement on the Example of Polish FL Teachers



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Abstract In the self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation results from autonomy, competence and relatedness. This motivation is compared to engagement which entails active participation and involvement. It integrates affective, cognitive and behavioural components. Teachers and learners, in order to get engaged in the learning-teaching process, need to be emotionally involved, they ought to activate thinking processes, as well as they should take actions. For both teachers and learners, the willingness to get engaged, arrives when they feel safe and accepted as part of the group or staff as well as when they have responsibilities for their own learning and teaching. To explore teacher engagement in the educational process, a survey was designed to research involvement of the participants in different activities at their institutions. The study consists of a questionnaire administered to in-service teachers. The investigation will probe the perception of engagement of the respondents in four dimensions of engagement: cognitive, emotional, social with students and social with colleagues at work. The results will inform teacher training programmes on how to prepare trainees so that they can achieve self-realisation in the profession through engagement.

Keywords Teacher engagement · Wellbeing · Self-efficacy · Self-realisation

1 Introduction

Engagement can be represented by a condition of increased attention and involvement which is realized in the cognitive, social, affective and behavioural dimensions (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). The concept of engagement can be compared to motivation and it may be defined as active participation and involvement (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020, p. 2). According to these authors, engagement is an active, holistic

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and practical construct. It entails active contribution of the participants in the teaching-learning process, it combines a variety of factors influencing the educational context as well as it advocates practical aspects which are favourable for both the learners and the teachers. Engagement is also considered one of the factors influencing wellbeing in the PERMA model along with positive emotions, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). This construct may be related to the concept of flow as conceptualized by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) who describes it as the way “people have used to describe the sense of effortless action they feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 29).

There are two theories which feed understanding of engagement: the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). The self-determination theory refers to relational engagement and it claims that a person will achieve the state of wellbeing by accomplishing the three needs: the need for relatedness, the need for competence and the need for autonomy (Patrick et al., 2007). Relatedness can be interpreted as the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and it indicates the drive to establish relations with others but also connection with the task a person is involved in. The need for competence “reflects the need to feel effective in one’s efforts and capable of achieving desired outcomes” (Patrick et al., 2007, p. 434). The need for autonomy indicates a need to have own will to perform actions, to accept own behaviours and to be the creator of own activities.

Kahn (1990) identified three psychological aspects related to engagement: meaningfulness, safety and availability. Meaningfulness is the feeling which individuals may have about the relevance and usefulness of their activities so that they may experience the conviction about their value at work. Safety implies the state of a person in which they feel comfortable about their position at work and they do not fear any threat of their self-image and status. Availability entails access to physical, emotional and psychological resources while performing certain duties at a given point in time. Engagement is claimed to be significantly fixed with some changes occurring over time and it corresponds to both trait-like as well as state-like factors (Dalal et al., 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002a, b). It means that both more permanent individual differences as well as experiencing engagement at certain moments, may be qualified as realisations of this construct.

2 Work Engagement

Work engagement is a construct within the strand of motivation which represents investment of personal resources in tasks involved in a certain professional role (Christian et al., 2011). Work engagement influences a person’s motivation in performing in the profession and stimulates their commitment to it. Most approaches to work engagement indicate cognitive, physical and affective involvement in work related tasks (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002a, b). Kahn (1990) conceptualized

work engagement as a physical, emotional and cognitive activity. Workers who are cognitively and physically engaged get involved, remain focused and expend effort in work-related tasks, while if they are also emotionally engaged, they receive affective rewards from their work. The concept of work engagement was also explored by Schaufeli et al. (2006) as a cognitive and affective state. Schaufeli et al. (2002a, b), explained work engagement as "... a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption" (p. 74). Vigour is understood as "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties"; dedication entails "a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" while absorption is interpreted as "being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work" (Schaufeli et al., 2002a, b, pp. 74–75).

Work engagement can be represented by a person's engagement and job satisfaction on accomplishment of certain job-related tasks. However, work engagement is different from job satisfaction as it incorporates work pleasure (dedication) and activation (vigour, absorption), while job satisfaction is a more passive concept (Bakker, 2011). Bakker et al. (2011) indicate two dimensions of work engagement, i.e. energy and involvement. Work engagement is also varied from work-related flow as it is a long lasting activity while flow may take place for shorter periods of time. Work engagement is a wider concept than motivation because it involves a cognitive activity (absorption) and an affective activity (vigour) as well as motivation (dedication). A similar concept to work engagement is job involvement which entails cognitive involvement of an individual and their care about the job (Paullay et al., 1994). Bakker and Xanthopoulou (2009) point to four reasons which explain in what way, engaged workers perform better than non-engaged ones. Such employees reveal positive emotions (gratitude, joy and enthusiasm), they are healthy, creative in their own job and personal resources, as well as encourage engagement in other workers in their environment.

2.1 The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was designed by Schaufeli et al. (2002a, b) with the aim to estimate work engagement operationalized by the worker's attitude to their duties with vigour (emotional), dedication (cognitive) and absorption (behavioural) which was the reverse of burnout. Vigour in this instrument may be interpreted as worker's absorption and dedication to work as well as accomplishment of their responsibilities with investment of significant energy. Dedication is realized by the worker's enthusiastic approach to work. Absorption results from the presence of vigour and dedication at work. The UWES is based on a self-report of 17 items composed of 6 items referring to vigour, 5 items related to dedication and 6 items intended to explore absorption. The UWES provides a definition of work engagement as a stable state of mind but not a personality trait (Seppälä et al., 2009,

p. 461). A worker is estimated to be on a spectrum between two extremes of “burnt out” or “engaged”. Work engagement researched by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale is mainly employed in the business setting (Bakker et al., 2011).

The concept of work engagement has also been transferred to the school setting and UWES student form was developed (Schaufeli et al., 2002a, b). The work engagement scale was adjusted to students by focusing on attendance to class and study tasks. Schaufeli et al. (2002a, b) applied the scale to Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch students to assess relationship between UWES-SF and academic performance. This scale was administered to Turkish high school students to investigate the mediating role of work engagement between academic procrastination and academic responsibility of the subjects (Çapri et al., 2017). However, the UWES did not incorporate some aspects specific for the teaching profession, such as, for instance, relationship of the teacher and the students. Student engagement has been researched quite extensively (Hiver et al., 2021; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020), however teacher engagement is still a potential area for further investigation.

3 Teacher Work Engagement

Teacher engagement may be interpreted as participation in a goal-oriented activity (Perera et al., 2018). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale does not cover all the aspects which are relevant for the teaching profession, therefore, the Teacher Engagement Scale was developed. In particular social relationships with other teachers but also with the students, seem to be particularly relevant for enhancing engagement of teachers (Cinches et al., 2017). In their study, the researchers found out that teacher effectiveness variables (professionalism, instructional delivery, student engagement, learning environment and assessment) together with teacher engagement variables (student-teacher relation, improving pedagogy and participating in teaching-learning decisions), contribute to student engagement. Teacher engagement has been identified as a construct incorporating four dimensions (Klassen et al., 2013), cognitive engagement, emotional engagement and social engagement with students and colleagues. Cognitive engagement involves vigour, persistence and focusing attention on teaching. It may be compared to physical engagement and absorption in the UWES. Emotional engagement entails positive affect of teachers at work. It is related to dedication in UWES. Social engagement corresponds to caring for students and colleagues in the educational context as well as commitment and connection to them.

Effective teaching results from teachers who are motivated and engaged in their educational tasks, cognitively and emotionally, but also socially. Teacher engagement may influence learning achievement of the students and it may foster teacher’s effectiveness (Klassen et al., 2012). Engaged teachers can manage more successfully work-related stress and prevent burnout. They assume also active roles at school as well as participate in its life. Engaged teachers “often (1) experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy, and enthusiasm; (2) experience better

psychological and physical health; (3) create their own job and personal resources (e.g., support from others); (4) transfer their engagement to others” (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 193).

The construct of teacher engagement has been researched in relation to self-efficacy, job satisfaction and teacher personality. Teachers Work Engagement Scale (Klassen et al., 2013) was also designed to explore the construct in a more systematic way.

3.1 Teacher Self-Efficacy, Job Satisfaction and Engagement

Teacher self-efficacy is a construct which encompasses three areas (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001): self-efficacy for classroom management, self-efficacy for instructional strategies and self-efficacy for student engagement. Affective experiences may enhance self-efficacy beliefs which, in turn, influence further involvement in goal-oriented activities and thus may also be related to engagement (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy may be interpreted as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) revealed that higher self-efficacy indicated greater work engagement in Norwegian teachers and Simbula et al. (2011) proved that self-efficacy fosters work engagement in Italian teachers. Job satisfaction may also be related to engagement. According to Lent and Brown (2006), job satisfaction can be defined as a cognitive and affective state which derives from a positive evaluation of experiences at work-related tasks. Work satisfaction may result from the following variables: personality and affective traits; work-related efficacy, work conditions and engagement. Work satisfaction may be anticipated in those people who are engaged in work-related tasks and the ones who believe that they can accomplish these tasks (Lent & Brown, 2006). Work engagement of the teachers may affect favourably their perception of satisfaction at work. Participation in goal-oriented activities, representing engagement, may, therefore, result in achieving work satisfaction (Lent & Brown, 2006). According to research, teachers who are engaged tend to be satisfied with their work (Høigaard et al., 2012; Klassen et al., 2012).

3.2 Teacher Personality

The Big Five approach to personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992) suggests that this construct is composed of traits: conscientiousness, neuroticism, extraversion, openness and agreeableness. Conscientiousness is understood as the disposition to be disciplined, organized and geared towards achievement. Neuroticism reveals emotional stability, control of impulses and the level of anxiety. Extraversion indicates the degree of sociability, assertiveness and talkativeness. Openness is represented

by curiosity as well as a drive for novelty and variety. Agreeableness implies a feature of being helpful, cooperative and sympathetic in relations with other people.

According to research conducted by Dufy and Lent (2009) as well as Lent et al. (2011), teacher personality may have an influence on work engagement and satisfaction achieved on the job. Li et al. (2017) in their study observed that Chinese teachers who were willing to take the initiative were also more engaged in their work. Conscientiousness, one of the Big Five aspects of personality, includes the tendency to initiate new activities. Teachers with high conscientiousness and perseverance may be more committed to various tasks in their profession (van Daal et al., 2014). Burns and Machin (2013) investigated teachers in Norway as far as neuroticism and extraversion is concerned, and the participants of the study who were characterized by high extraversion and low neuroticism, experienced more positive emotions while teaching. As far as agreeableness is concerned, Cano-Garcia et al. (2005) revealed that teachers who display the feature, are more inclined to personalize their relationships with others which may contribute to better rapport with colleagues at work and students. Openness is another feature of personality, which may indicate more sense of connection with other teachers and the learners as well as it may enhance engagement at work (Kokkinos, 2007). Higher levels of engagement may be observed in teachers who are characterized by lower neuroticism, higher conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and openness (Perera et al., 2018).

3.3 *Teachers Work Engagement Scale*

Klassen et al. (2013) developed the Teacher Engagement Scale which measures engagement in four dimensions: cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, social engagement with students and social engagement with colleagues. For the group of researchers, social engagement should be considered particularly important in the teaching profession. As Klassen et al. (2013) indicate, “although workers in many settings must engage socially with colleagues, teaching uniquely emphasized energy spent on the establishment of long-term, meaningful connections with the clients of the work environment (i.e., students) in a way that characterizes the job of teaching... teacher-student relationships may play *the* primary role in fostering students engagement and positive student outcomes” (Klassen et al., 2013, p. 35). In the Teacher Engagement Scale, each of the four dimensions is operationalized in four sentences. Cognitive engagement is researched by means of the following statements: “I try my hardest to perform well while teaching”, “While teaching, I really ‘throw’ myself into my work”, “While teaching, I pay a lot of attention to my work”, “While teaching, I work with intensity”. Emotional engagement is revealed in the following statements: “I am excited about teaching”, “I feel happy while teaching”, “I love teaching”, “I find teaching fun”. Social engagement with students is investigated in the following statements: “In class, I show warmth to my students”, “In class, I am aware of my students’ feelings”, “In class, I care about the problems of my students”, “In class I am empathetic towards my students”. Social

engagement is explored by means of the following sentences: “At school, I connect well with my colleagues”, “At school, I am committed to helping my colleagues”, “At school, I value the relationships I build with my colleagues”, “At school, I care about the problems of my colleagues”. The responses to these statements were to be marked on a Likert scale from 0 (never) to 6 (always).

International validation of the Engaged Teachers Scale was carried out in the North American context (Klassen et al., 2012) and in Turkey (Yerdelen et al., 2018). The Engaged Teachers Scale was also administered to teachers in Indonesia (Kristiana & Simanjuntak, 2021) and was proved to be applicable to measuring engagement of Indonesian teachers of special educational needs students, regarding teacher experience as a variable.

4 The Study

The aim of the research was to explore engagement among Polish foreign language teachers. For this study, the analysed data was collected from a survey created in the Google Forms application. The name of the survey was “A study on foreign language teacher engagement”.

The survey was available online in October 2021. It was much more difficult to collect the responses to this questionnaire compared to the one administered in 2019 on teacher wellbeing (Szulc-Kurpaska, 2021). Either the topic was less stimulating for the respondents or the teachers got a bit overwhelmed by the number of online surveys which have been uploaded in the English language teachers’ interest group on Facebook.

4.1 Research Questions

The present study was designed in order to answer the following research questions:

- How engaged teachers of a foreign language are in teaching?
- Which dimension of engagement (cognitive, emotional, social with students and social with colleagues) are participants most engaged in?
- What justification do the participants of the study provide for their choices in the questionnaire?

4.2 The Participants

The sample of respondents included 107 teachers of foreign languages at all educational levels with teaching experience from 0 to more than 20 years. There were $n = 92$ women who responded to the questionnaire (86%) and $n = 15$ men took part

in the study (14%). Most of the respondents were experienced teachers (n = 50) with more than 20 years of professional practice (46.7%). The next numerous group was constituted by teachers with 11–15 years of experience (n = 18) which contributed in 16.8% to the total number of participants. Teachers with 6 to 10 years of professional experience equalled n = 16 people and this indicated 15%. 15 teachers represented 16–20 years of experience in the profession and this resulted in 14%. The smallest group of respondents n = 8 belonged to the group of young teachers with 0 to 5 teaching experience and they amounted to 7.5% of all the participants in the study (see Fig. 1).

The sum of the number of teachers from each educational level does not make up 107 because many of the respondents have worked at more than one school. The findings from this question indicate that majority of teachers participating in this study have been teaching at different levels of education and this experience may have affected their engagement in the profession (see Table 1).

Your teaching experience

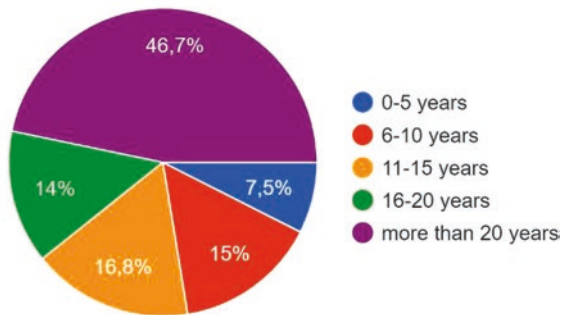


Fig. 1 The teaching experience of the respondents

Table 1 Educational level at which study participants worked

Educational level	Number of teachers	Percentage
Pre-primary	25	23.4%
Grades 1–3 of the primary school	40	37.4%
Grades 4–6 of the primary school	41	38.3%
Grades 4–8 of the primary school	55	51.4%
Secondary school	67	62.6%
Technical school	24	22.4%
University	55	51.4%

4.3 *The Instrument*

The questionnaire implemented in the research study was based on Klassen et al. (2013) and one open ended question was added to it with the consent of the authors of the instrument. In the closed questions the participants could choose on a Likert scale options 0 (never), 1 (rarely), 2 (on occasion), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often), 5 (frequently) and 6 (always). The time expressions were explained by the researcher in a more approachable way by specifying the frequency more precisely: 1 (rarely - a few times a year or less), 2 (on occasion – once a month or less), 3 (sometimes – a few times a month), 4 (often – once a week), 5 (frequently – a few times a week), 6 (always – every day). In the open question the participants were asked to choose one statement which they felt most emotional about and reflect on it in a 100 word paragraph, to develop the idea of the statement and provide more thoughts on it. The analysed data included gender of the participants (female, male), their teaching experience (concluded in 5 time intervals of: 0–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–15 years, 16–20 years and more than 20 years), types of education stages they have been teaching (pre-primary, lower primary 1–3, upper primary 4–6, upper primary 4–8, secondary, technical school, university; there was a multiple choice possibility) and responses from a questionnaire, that consisted of 16 closed questions and 1 question that required a longer response. All of the questions, excluding the last one from the questionnaire, were obligatory.

5 Analysis of the Data

5.1 *The Quantitative Analysis*

All statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS programme. The analysed data included gender, teaching experience and closed responses to the questionnaire. The ‘gender’ variable was nominal and consisted of 2 described levels (female - 1, male - 2). The ‘teaching variable’ was ordinal and consisted of 5 described levels (0–5 years - 1, 6–10 years - 2, 11–15 years - 3, 16–20 years - 4, more than 20 years - 5). Each question of the questionnaire was a quantitative variable and consisted of 6 levels (never - 0, rarely - 1, on occasion - 2, sometimes - 3, often - 4, frequently - 5, always - 6). Moreover, following the manual of the questionnaire, there were 4 more variables created; cognitive engagement (‘CE’), emotional engagement (‘EE’), social engagement with students (‘SE_students’) and social engagement with colleagues (‘SE_colleagues’).

The ‘CE’ was a computed variable from variables representing questions 4, 8, 11 and 15.

The ‘EE’ was a computed variable from variables representing questions 2, 5, 10 and 13.

The ‘SE_students’ was a computed variable from variables representing questions 3, 6, 14 and 16.

The ‘SE_colleagues’ was a computed variable from variables representing questions 1, 7, 9 and 12.

The statistical analyses included a series of descriptive statistics.

Engagement According to the Four Variables

The descriptive statistics of all the variables of the sample (n = 107) is listed in Table 2.

The scores of all the variables are generally high and the highest one was received by cognitive engagement (M = 20.94), then social engagement with students (M = 20.88), next was emotional engagement (M = 18.88) and the last one was social engagement with colleagues (M = 18.26).

Engagement According to the Gender of the Participants

The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘CE’ of the females of the sample (n = 92) and the males of the sample (n = 15) is listed in Table 3.

The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘EE’ of the females of the sample (n = 92) and the males of the sample (n = 15) is listed in Table 4.

The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘SE_students’ of the females of the sample (n = 92) and the males of the sample (n = 15) is listed in Table 5.

The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘SE_colleagues’ of the females of the sample (n = 92) and the males of the sample (n = 15) is listed in Table 6.

In all the four dimensions, the female respondents’ scores were higher than the males’ ones. The highest, i.e. the most frequent dimension for female participants

Table 2 The descriptive statistics of all the variables of the sample (n = 107)

Variable (n = 107)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness statistics	Kurtosis statistics
Cognitive engagement ‘CE’	20.94	2.88	8	24	-1.50	3.80
Emotional engagement ‘EE’	18.88	4.65	0	24	-1.32	2.34
Social engagement with students ‘SE_students’	20.88	2.81	12	24	-.96	.32
Social engagement with colleagues ‘SE_colleagues’	18.26	4.35	5	24	-.86	.41

Table 3 The descriptive statistics of the variable 'CE' of the females and the males of the sample

Variable level	N	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness statistics	Kurtosis statistics
Females	92	21.14	2.63	8	24	-1.64	5.774
Males	15	19.73	4.00	11	24	-.80	-.24

Table 4 The descriptive statistics of the variable 'EE' of the females and the males of the sample

Variable level	N	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness statistics	Kurtosis statistics
Females	92	19.10	4.08	4	24	-1.02	1.36
Males	15	17.53	7.29	0	24	-1.19	.74

Table 5 The descriptive statistics of the variable 'SE_students' of the females and the males of the sample

variable level	N	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness statistics	Kurtosis statistics
Females	92	21.21	2.57	13	24	-.99	.39
Males	15	18.90	3.44	12	24	-.37	-.501

Table 6 The descriptive statistics of the variable 'SE_colleagues' of the females and the males of the sample

Variable level	N	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness statistics	Kurtosis statistics
Females	92	18.33	4.31	5	24	-.82	.35
Males	15	17.90	4.78	6	24	-1.17	1.24

Table 7 The mean values of the four dimensions of engagement for the female and male respondents

Dimension	Female	Dimension	Male
Social with students 'SE_S'	M = 21.21	Cognitive 'CE'	M = 19.73
Cognitive 'CE'	M = 21.14	Social with students 'SE_S'	M = 18.90
Emotional 'EE'	M = 19.10	Social with colleagues 'SE_C'	M = 17.90
Social with colleagues 'SE_C'	M = 18.33	Emotional 'EE'	M = 17.53

was social engagement with students ($M = 21.21$), while for the male participants the most frequent dimension was cognitive engagement ($M = 19.73$). The second dimension in terms of frequency of occurrence in female respondents was cognitive engagement ($M = 21.14$) and in the case of male respondents, was social engagement with students ($M = 18.90$). The third dimension as far as the score is concerned for female teachers was emotional engagement ($M = 19.10$) and for the male teachers it was social engagement with colleagues ($M = 17.90$). The dimension which was least frequent in female participants was social engagement with colleagues ($M = 18.33$) and for the male participants, it was emotional engagement ($M = 17.53$). The mean values of the four dimensions of engagement for female respondents and female respondents are presented in Table 7.

The difference between the female and male teachers may have resulted from the small number of men compared to women who took part in the present study.

Engagement According to the Teaching Experience of the Participants

The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘CE’, considering the teaching experience of the participants is listed in Table 8.

The mean values for all the groups of participants are high which implies that they are frequently cognitively engaged in teaching, the most engaged cognitively turn out to be teachers with 0–5 years of experience in the profession (M = 22.13), while least frequently engaged cognitively tend to be respondents with more than 20 years of teaching (M = 20.54).

The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘EE’, considering the teaching experience of the participants is listed in Table 9.

The mean values for all the groups of participants are relatively high (but not as high as for the dimension of cognitive engagement) which implies that they are frequently emotionally engaged in teaching, the most engaged emotionally turn out to be teachers with 0–5 years of experience in the profession (M = 20.25), while least frequently engaged cognitively tend to be respondents with 16–20 years of teaching (M = 18.27).

The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘SE_students’, considering the teaching experience of the participants is listed in Table 10.

Table 8 The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘CE’ according to the teaching experience of the participants

Variable level	N	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness statistics	Kurtosis statistics
0–5 years	8	22.13	2.64	18	24	–.80	–1.61
6–10 years	16	21.00	3.32	11	24	–2.01	5.14
11–15 years	18	21.33	2.00	18	24	.08	–.91
16–20 years	15	21.13	4.12	8	24	–2.62	7.80
More than 20 years	50	20.54	2.62	14	24	–.59	–.29

Table 9 The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘EE’ according to the teaching experience of the participants

Variable level	N	Mean (M)	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness statistics	Kurtosis statistics
0–5 years	8	20.25	4.10	13	24	–.82	–.41
6–10 years	16	19.44	6.50	0	24	–2.35	5.51
11–15 years	18	18.83	4.64	7	24	–1.05	.92
16–20 years	15	18.27	5.09	4	24	–1.53	3.60
More than 20 years	50	18.68	4.02	10	24	–.50	–.72

Table 10 The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘SE_students’ according to the teaching experience of the participants

Variable level	N	Mean (M)	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness statistics	Kurtosis statistics
0–5 years	8	21.88	2.10	19	24	–.15	–2.14
6–10 years	16	20.80	3.19	12	24	–1.51	2.52
11–15 years	18	21.11	2.45	16	24	–.55	–.49
16–20 years	15	21.27	3.04	13	24	–1.70	3.01
More than 20 years	50	20.60	2.90	14	24	–.66	–.78

Table 11 The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘SE_colleagues’ according to the teaching experience of the participants

Variable level	N	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness statistics	Kurtosis statistics
0–5 years	8	19.00	4.90	11	24	–.67	–.79
6–10 years	16	18.40	4.53	10	24	–.52	–.98
11–15 years	18	19.28	3.63	13	24	–.32	–1.04
16–20 years	15	17.27	4.48	5	24	–1.60	3.00
More than 20 years	50	18.04	4.50	6	24	–.95	.52

Table 12 The mean values of the four dimensions of engagement for teachers depending on their experience

Engagement	0–5 years	6–10 years	11–15 years	16–20 years	More than 20 years
‘CE’	22.13	21.00	21.33	21.13	20.54
‘EE’	20.25	19.44	18.83	18.27	18.68
‘SE_S’	21.88	20.80	21.11	21.27	20.60
‘SE_C’	19	18.40	19.28	17.27	18.04

The mean values for all the groups of participants are high which implies that they are frequently socially engaged with students, the most engaged socially with students turn out to be teachers with 0–5 years of experience in the profession ($M = 21.88$), while least frequently engaged cognitively turn out to be respondents with more than 20 years of teaching ($M = 20.60$).

The descriptive statistics of the variable ‘SE_colleagues’ considering the teaching experience of the participants is listed in Table 11.

The mean values for all the groups of participants are relatively high (but not as high as for the dimension of cognitive engagement and social engagement with students) which implies that they are frequently socially engaged with colleagues, the most engaged socially with colleagues turn out to be teachers with 11–15 years of experience in the profession ($M = 19.28$), while least frequently engaged socially with colleagues tend to be respondents with 16–20 years of teaching ($M = 17.27$). The mean values of the four dimensions of engagement for the participants depending on their teaching experience are presented in Table 12.

The difference between the younger and more experienced teachers may have resulted from the small number of respondents with 0–5 years of experience compared to other groups of teachers who took part in the present study.

5.2 *The Qualitative Analysis*

Out of the 107 participants, 54 responded to the open ended question 17 in which they were to write a reflection on one of the statements from 1 to 16 from the questionnaire in order to develop the idea implied in it. This equals half of the teachers who participated in the survey (50.04%). The majority of the teachers who decided to answer this question represented the group with over 20 years of experience ($n = 29$).

Statements chosen most often by the participants of the study to reflect on are presented in Table 13 below.

Among the teachers who responded to the open ended question in the survey, majority commented on the statements referring to the social engagement with students ($n = 24$), the second numerous group of teachers elaborated on the statements concerning emotional engagement ($n = 21$). The most often selected statement of all the points in the questionnaire was “I love teaching” ($n = 11$) belonging to the

Table 13 The number of teachers responding in the open ended question to one of the statements

Number	Statement	Number teachers
Cognitive engagement		7
4	I try my hardest to perform well while teaching	2
8	While teaching, I really ‘throw’ myself into my work	1
11	While teaching, I pay a lot of attention to my work	1
15	While teaching, I work with intensity	3
Emotional engagement		21
2	I am excited about teaching	7
5	I feel happy while teaching	2
10	I love teaching	11
13	I find teaching fun	1
Social engagement with students		24
3	In class, I show warmth to my students	3
6	In class, I am aware of my students’ feelings	6
14	In class, I care about the problems of my students	7
16	In class, I am empathetic towards my students	8
Social engagement with colleagues		4
1	At school, I connect well with my colleagues	2
7	At school, I am committed to helping my students	1
9	At school, I value the relationships I build with my colleagues	1
12	At school, I care about the problems of my colleagues	0

emotional engagement. The second most popular statement was “In class, I am empathetic towards my students (n=8) representing social engagement with students. The third most frequently chosen statement was “I am excited about teaching” (n = 7) from the group exploring emotional engagement and “In class, I care about the problems of my students” (n = 7) investigating social engagement with students. Cognitive engagement statements were described by 7 teachers and social engagement with colleagues were least often written about by the respondents who decided to engage in the open ended question of the survey (n = 4). None of the participants responded to the statement “At school, I care about the problems of my colleagues”, operationalizing social engagement with colleagues.

Positive Comments about Engagement

Three teachers thanked for the possibility of taking part in the study because by filling in the questionnaire, they had an opportunity to realise how much they appreciate being a teacher. Another three respondents feel happy while teaching: one of them (0–5 years of teaching) wrote: *I am a happy teacher thanks to my students and my colleagues* and she is also excited about teaching. The other two (more than 20 years of teaching) who chose sentence 5 added: *Being a teacher means spending time with younger generation which is inspiring*, and the second one expressed the following feeling: *This career has been the most rewarding experience for me. It is like the air I breathe. Tired, sleepy, or sick I've always found comfort and peace in teaching. **I am who I am because of teaching.** Teaching makes my life complete.* Most of the teachers expressed their dedication to the profession: *Teaching is utmost creativity and fuel for life. Students are the greatest inspiration.* The respondents provided their reason for the love for the profession: *I love teaching because it enriches me.* Or another respondent commented: *Teaching is and has always been my life. ... In spite of the mistreatment and disappointment, this job is bound to bring at times – it is still among my best choices in life.* Two teachers (6 to 10 years of teaching) and one teacher (more than 20 years of teaching) cannot imagine themselves doing anything else. One teacher (more than 20 years of teaching) indicated engagement with students and teachers as important: *At the school where I teach we value relations not only with our students but also among teachers and so it has become a priority for teachers to be a team.* However, one teacher (more than 20 years of teaching) noted that: *Students help me to grow both intellectually and emotionally, but I don't feel any deep relation with my colleagues.* Sometimes although there are not too many contacts with colleagues, the atmosphere at school is nice: *I help if I'm asked to and I know I've got a few people I can ask for help if there is a need.* Yet another participant (more than 20 years of teaching), indicated some evidence for a flow during classes: *I have noticed in the past few years that I can be really engaged in the classroom working with the students, and for me, once I enter the classroom, **I find myself in a different world.*** A respondent (6–10 years of teaching) confessed her dedication: *When in the classroom, I am wholeheartedly devoted to the students.* One more comment about love for the profession from a

teacher (more than 20 years of teaching) is: *I love teaching and my job, especially since I have realized that I can make a difference in my Students' life* or another teacher (more than 20 years of teaching) admitted: *I intend to provide my students with a life-changing experience*. The respondents also mention the importance of the affective factors in the teaching and learning process: *Without emotions, noticing feeling and care, learning is impaired*. One teacher (more than 20 years of teaching) even corrected statement 3 by saying: *I would say that I feel (usually) warmth... rather than just try to show it to my students*. One respondent (11 to 15 years of teaching) keeps in touch with students after graduation and remarks: *It is very rewarding to find that even after the years, they remember my engagement into their education*. For another teacher (more than 20 years of teaching) there is a difference in young people coming to school at present: *These days students who enter secondary education are more and more vulnerable and that is why, teachers should become more attentive and empathetic towards their feelings and emotions*.

However, quite a few teachers point to the difficulties to manage emotions of students: *Being empathetic towards students is simply a must in the teaching profession, but it is harder and harder to do that mainly due to students growing feeling insecurity and rapid mood swings in the classroom*. One more teacher explains why teaching is not fun: *It requires a lot of effort on the part of the teacher to create and run a really successful lesson. Teaching is like acting – you leave the stage exhausted. But it can be a very rewarding job if you accept the effort involved*. Another respondent (more than 20 years of teaching) indicated that *to be a teacher is a mission: sometimes impossible, but still a mission*. One teacher (6 to 10 years of teaching) commented on the concept of intensity in teaching (cognitive engagement): *Before intensity was connected to knowledge, now is about relations with my pupils*. Another participant (6–10 years of teaching) stated: *I just want to be good at my work no matter what I do for a living. In my opinion, professionalism has nothing to do with love, excitement, fun and one's feelings*.

Negative Comments About Engagement

All the statements in the questionnaire were positive in the way they were formulated, however not all the responses in the open ended questions had this optimistic note. One teacher wrote: *I find teaching still exciting and worth my every effort but after working over 20 years in public institutions, I feel burnt out with the paper work and changing rules. I also feel the disrespect from the society towards teachers now much more than in the past. I also feel humiliated when my students earn more than me in their first summer job. That is why, I am going to change my job soon...* Yet another negative comment was delivered by a respondent with 6 to 10 teaching experience: *Every year I feel more discouraged to teach in Polish schools. I don't blame students or my colleagues who are great people. I really like working with them. The main reason is money and almost "voluntary" work at schools*.

Several teachers mention tiredness as the experience that they have in teaching, as one of them (more than 20 years of teaching), admitted: *As for the feelings of*

excitement and fun while teaching, it is not so much a question of how often, but rather how far into the semester... towards the end of the semester or the whole year, I believe not just me but many teachers feel less enthusiastic... Yet another participant raised the same problem: *Sometimes I feel tired of teaching because the Polish government doesn't motivate teachers.* Or another comment from a teacher with 11 to 15 years of experience: *Sometimes it's hard to be excited about teaching, because teachers have too much work to do.* One teacher (11 to 15 years of teaching), complained about the time devoted to preparations for lessons: *I spend far more time preparing stuff for a class than actually teaching, which makes me question the whole concept of me being a teacher.* On the same note, one teacher (more than 20 years of teaching) stated: *Although I do my best, prepare for every class, I still find teaching my students hard and unrewarding experience.* Yet another teacher (more than 20 years of teaching), while referring to two statements: 4 and 15 included in cognitive engagement, is still slightly anxious every time she opens the classroom as she is never 100% sure that she has prepared the lesson to the best of her knowledge and abilities. However, when she can observe the students benefiting from the lesson, she declares: *I believe I can fly, to quote a musician, and it gives me power to try again and again.*

Three teachers referred to engagement as related to wellbeing: *I do believe teachers should set some boundaries to protect their emotional state and wellbeing although in some situations, they are the only people students can trust.* Another teacher confessed that: *Our job involves teaching but also giving psychological support in many cases.* One teacher expressed worries about getting back to teaching face to face after 18 months of “teaching to a black screen”: *How do students feel about that? How will we all cope?* One participant (20 years of teaching), observed that: *After pandemics and lockdown, students are not as willing to cooperate as they were before.*

Some teachers indicate problems in handling students' negative opinions and interpretations: *It's hard to accept without judging.* One more comment from a respondent (0–5 years of teaching) who reflected on her relations with students: *I try to do my best and build a great relationship with students but it is hardly ever mutual.* Yet another participant (6–10 years of teaching) referred to being empathetic to students: *Sometimes they tell me after class about their problems and that makes it easier to cooperate with them and set boundaries, but often they keep it to themselves and simply look bored or ignorant.* Relationships with colleagues are quite often not so close: *People just enter and leave.* Similarly to the findings in Szulc-Kurpaska (2021), one teacher (over 20 years of teaching) wrote: *I like working with pupils/students, but I hate schools/institutions.* Or one more comment from a respondent (11 to 15 years of teaching) with the same problem is as follows: *I like teaching as English is my passion, but in the school teaching environment it is often really hard to take pleasure from it all the time.* And another comment from a participant (0–5 years of teaching) pointing to teacher dedication but also commenting on conditions of work: *Teaching is something that I feel created for, however the Polish reality is very difficult and demanding for a teacher.*

6 Discussion

- How engaged teachers of a foreign language are in teaching?

Majority of the respondents in the survey turned out to be experienced teachers with 20 and more years of experience (n = 50, 46.7%). They also constituted the majority in the group of 54 teachers who decided to respond to the open ended question in the survey (n = 29). The teachers who took part in the study reveal high engagement in all four dimensions included in the questionnaire: cognitive, emotional, social with students and social with colleagues. Female participants of the study revealed generally higher scores on all the four dimensions than male respondents which may indicate that women get engaged in teaching more often than men. Younger teachers with 0–5 experience reveal higher scores on all the four dimensions of engagement compared to other groups of respondents. The teachers with high scores on the Teachers Engagement Scale may have represented a personality which predisposed them to active participation and involvement in the profession. They may have remained in the profession due to this capacity.

- Which dimension of engagement (cognitive, emotional, social with students and social with colleagues) are participants most engaged in?

The most frequently experienced dimension of engagement in the sample of 107 teachers turned out to be cognitive engagement, then the next in the frequency of occurrence was social engagement with students, the third most often revealed engagement was emotional engagement and the least frequent dimension of the four, was social engagement with colleagues. Women tend to engage most frequently socially with students while men engage cognitively most often. Female teachers engage least often socially with colleagues while male teachers engage emotionally least often of all the four dimensions. Participants with the shortest teaching experience turned out to be engaged cognitively most frequently, while respondents with the longest experience in the profession, indicated that they are least often cognitively engaged compared to the other groups of teachers who took part in the study. Teachers with the shortest teaching experience are engaged emotionally most frequently, while participants with the experience 16–20 years admitted to be least often emotionally engaged in relation to the other groups of teachers under investigation. Participants with the shortest teaching experience turned out to be engaged socially with students most frequently, while respondents with the longest experience in the profession indicated that they are least often socially engaged with students compared to the other groups of teachers who took part in the study. Teachers with 11–15 teaching experience are engaged socially with colleagues most frequently, while participants with the experience 16–20 years admitted to be least often socially engaged with colleagues in relation to the other groups of teachers under scrutiny.

- What justification do the participants of the study provide for their choices in the questionnaire?

The greatest number of teachers who responded to the open ended question, elaborated on one of the statements representing social engagement with students ($n = 24$) and the statements indicating emotional engagement ($n = 8$). Most commonly chosen statement “I love teaching” ($n = 11$) and “I am empathetic towards my students” ($n = 8$) indicate that the teachers who took part in the study, are passionate about their profession and care about their students.

In the open ended statements, most of the respondents expressed positive views on their engagement with students. These responses also indicate love for teaching considered quite often to be dedication and the best choice in life which makes the authors of these comments, happy in the profession. However, quite a number of participants who decided to elaborate on one of the statements in question 17, revealed some negative views on their teaching experience. They complained about tiredness, long time spent on preparation for lessons, difficult conditions at school, problems with managing emotions of the learners, feeling psychological pressure for being responsible for learners’ wellbeing, teaching during lockdown due to pandemic and after it.

7 Conclusions

The study aimed at exploring engagement of teachers, revealed high levels of this construct in teachers who decided to fill in the online questionnaire. An explanation of this finding can be that only engaged teachers participated in the study in all the groups of respondents, irrespectively of the number of years of teaching, and the ones who are less active, did not take part in it. Nearly half of the teachers who completed the questionnaire belong to the group of experienced teachers with more than 20 years of practice in this profession. The fact that they responded to the invitation to take part in the survey, may indicate that they are still engaged in teaching. With experience, they reveal more frequent social engagement with the students. They seem to be dedicated to the profession and they love teaching. As the majority of the participants have been teaching for more than 20 years, it may indicate that engaged teachers do not suffer from burnout and they remain in the profession for longer. There seems to be a lot of positivity in the open ended responses of the participants who took the challenge to reflect on one of the statements of the questionnaire. This feeling results predominantly from interaction with the students, less so from contacts with the colleagues at schools. Some negative statements were also expressed in the open ended responses, mainly concerning conditions of work and the amount of additional responsibilities, teachers have to cope with. Several reflections referred also to the difficulties in managing emotions of the learners.

The statements in the Teachers Engagement Scale are declarative and that is why, the findings refer to what the teachers believe about their engagement. Therefore, they display teachers’ opinions rather than facts indicating their engagement. Had the statements been exemplary of what the teachers actually do, perhaps the findings would be more credible, e.g. “I take part in projects with students”, “I take part

in projects with colleagues at school”, “I talk to students during breaks”, “I offer extra lessons for students”, “I talk to colleagues at school during breaks”, “I share materials with my colleagues at school”, “I search for authentic materials to supplement the course book”, “I attend workshops and teacher training courses”. But this change would need some validation of the instrument to operationalise the construct of engagement in terms of specific actions and activities, the interpretation of which would be then the role of the researcher.

Taking into consideration the findings of the present study, there appears a need to introduce more classes on psychology, especially positive psychology, to teacher training programmes to enhance motivation and engagement of novice teachers in the profession (Williams et al., 2021). In particular, there is a need for incorporating a component of teacher wellbeing as teacher engagement, being one of the elements of it, may increase the level of job satisfaction, assist educators in achieving self-realisation and prevent teachers from burnout. Happy and satisfied teachers stimulate wellbeing of the learners and foster the learning outcomes (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). The area of engagement which offers potential for growth, results from establishing positive work relationships with both the students as well as the colleagues at schools. Encouraging teacher trainees to share materials and ideas, create lesson plans together, prepare tests and discuss marking of them, cooperate in projects and joint presentations, participate in webinars, may enhance engagement and the sense of belonging to the group. Such habits of working in a team can then be transposed to their future educational environments to introduce a school culture of collaboration. Soft skills of communicating with other professionals turn out to be vital for successful and satisfying functioning in the school context.

Many activities suggested by Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) designed for students, can be easily adapted for teacher trainees to stimulate their engagement in the profession. Also the ideas on enhancing engagement identified by Mercer et al. (2023), can be incorporated into teacher training programmes to promote wellbeing with special focus on engagement. In further exploration of the construct of teacher engagement, it would be recommended to design a research study investigating teacher personality and the perception of self-efficacy of teachers in connection to their engagement.

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