

## Evaluation of academic engagement among faculty of two Mexican and Colombian Universities

### Evaluación del engagement académico de docentes en dos universidades de México y Colombia

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#### Abstract

In the last two decades, the New Public Gestion model has modified the objectives of the Universitarian Education. However, faculty has been able to face these new psychosocial consequences of their jobs, using among others, the Work Engagement concept "[that] is a positive mental state, satisfactory and related to work, characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gómez-Romá & Bakker, 2002 p.74)".

**Objective:** To evaluate and compare the work engagement of university professors from two institutions in Mexico and Colombia.

**Methodology:** It is an exploratory, cross-sectional study, an intentional sample of university professors was used from a public university (n=69) in Mexico and a private one in Colombia (n=69), the distribution was 49 full-time professors and 20 professors without a permanent contract for each University. The instrument that was used was the UWES scale by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003). The results show that in the global engagement index teachers show a high level of engagement (0.84) in Mexico and (0.85) Colombia with a slight variation in the Dedication dimension

**Contribution:** In addition to expanding the study of university teachers, it lays the foundation for intercultural studies on engagement in our region since it compares Mexican and Colombian teachers from two contexts of public and private higher education.

#### Engagement, Faculty, UWES

#### Resumen

En las últimas dos décadas nos enfrentamos al modelo de la Nueva Gestión Pública que ha modificado los objetivos de la educación universitaria. Sin embargo, los docentes han podido enfrentar estas nuevas consecuencias psicosociales derivadas de sus trabajos, entre otras cosas por medio del concepto engagement laboral que es: "un estado mental positivo, satisfactorio y relacionado al trabajo, caracterizado por vigor, dedicación y absorción" (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gómez-Romá & Bakker, 2002 p.74).

**Objetivo:** Comparar el engagement laboral de docentes universitarios de dos instituciones de México y Colombia.

**Método:** estudio exploratorio, transversal, con muestra intencionada de profesores universitarios (n=69) de una universidad pública (México) y una privada (Colombia, n=69); 49 tienen contrato indefinido y 20 contrato temporal. Se empleó la escala UWES de Schaufeli y Bakker (2003). Los resultados muestran que los docentes de ambos países puntuaron alto en el índice global de engagement 0.84 en México y 0.85 en Colombia, con una ligera variación en la dimensión Dedicación

**Contribución:** Además de ampliar el estudio de los docentes universitarios, sienta las bases para los estudios interculturales sobre engagement en nuestra región puesto que compara a docentes Mexicanos y Colombianos de dos contextos de educación superior público y privado

#### Compromiso, Facultad, UWES

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last few years we have witnessed a substantial change in the way organizations have been modifying the way they relate to their employees and their environment. Suffice it as an example that in our time, automation is leaving many workers unemployed, so it has been said that we are at the end of work as we know it (Rifkin, 1996). This new configuration of the way in which work is carried out has generated new paths that have allowed technology to be a nodal part of our development and our work with a social and personal cost that has been increased, and that we can be witnesses from the moment we perform our work supported on the internet, that way university teachers have to be immersed to perform a series of roles: as teachers, managers, authors of articles, researchers and experts in ICTs that involve more and more wear (López-Vilchez & Gil-Monte, 2015).

There comes a reflection that goes beyond the mere terrain of motivation since when investigating the subject of work engagement we place ourselves in a part of the research in Social Work Psychology (Segurado & Agulló, 2002) where the important thing is not only in the analysis within companies, but the social role that work has in the lives of professionals, as in this case to university teachers and their most significant relationships.

## 2. The role of the Universities

We can talk about different stages in the histories of the Universities, the most recent is when higher education schools are confronted with globalization, that is, with the information age, where in universities there is an intense exploitation of knowledge advanced, disintegration of communities and individualization of subjects (Fernández, 2009). In our Latin American universities the relationship between University and Society this relationship is mediated by something that is called "the third mission" and that is more focused on extension and dissemination (Cancino & Cárdenas, 2018), than in its counterparts, mainly Anglo-Saxon. On the other hand, university intellectual power and the rights associated with it are now confronted with the market, which by force of a series of depersonalized exchanges reorder functions, and therefore relations between peers and supervisors, this really is a novelty in the postmodern space of the university field (Fernández, 2009). However, the change has not occurred suddenly.

In Mexico in 1983, a deregulation in the field of forms of work, based on the Neoliberal model, will result in greater labor flexibility, which will lower the costs that are invested in the workforce (Salazar & Azamar, 2014), in addition to generating a new type of personnel hiring, with atypical jobs (Thirot, 2013). In the same decade, the evaluation of the academic performance of teachers by the government was launched (Urquidi & Rodríguez, 2010). The evaluation of the teaching work can highlight the importance and complexity of the activities related to the fulfillment of the teaching function, they imply a series of roles for the same person. We can also identify that this type of assessment within the national context is little valued and even less recognized (Canales & Gilio, 2008), but it is mandatory.

The Colombian case is not different from the Mexican one, it is mainly in the nineties, when mainly driven by the International Monetary Fund, a series of reforms based on the Neoliberal Model is started that will bring different consequences in the way in which the State It intervenes and organizes all its functions, which results in the fact that we now have labor flexibility as well as other forms of contracting that will lead to precarious work (Herrera, 2008, p.119 and Morales, 2010, p.42 cited in León-Jaramillo , Méndez-Solarte & Ruíz-Gutiérrez, 2015).

In addition, thanks to the New Public Management, in Colombia it happens that Education in the hands of the state begins to have a different objective from the third mission that we have mentioned, in order to take an increasingly closer step towards the economic model of University-Enterprices, where the demands of the Institutions towards the workers are increasing every day and at the same time the benefits that had been gained, are put into question (León-Jaramillo, Méndez-Solarte & Ruíz-Gutiérrez, 2015).

These reflections make us suppose that in both countries, more or less at the same time we began to generate and to live a series of changes in the way in which Education is understood and administered. To understand that the function of the universities must be mediated by the transfer of knowledge, following foreign models, and in this way reduce the various social challenges that have, and that although it is true that it works in some areas of Mexico, the reality is that in the regional universities, because they focus on these issues, they leave aside the opportunity to become active agents of their communities. (Gregorutti, Charles-Marcel, González, Avilés & Roel Cela, 2015).

Perhaps as a result of the pressures received from the market, as well as from the new organizational tendencies (Garrido-Pinzón et al., 2011), private and public universities have moved towards an organizational model of business education. In addition there is another type of consequence in this sense, since there are increasingly greater experiences of suffering in teachers mainly related to the incessant increase in workloads, physical and mental exhaustion, in addition to the uncertainty that implies not knowing if they will have an employment contract and the mental health problems derived from these circumstances (Chalfin, Pit Dal Magro & Budde, 2011).

In an investigation with teachers of a Technological University in Mexico, the researcher Rocha (2013) found that the characteristics that make the teachers' teaching satisfactory, implied having a teaching profile with a fixed contract with the University. On the other hand, they will present their research at least twice a year in academic events, publish at least once every three years and have a minimum of a graduate.

Teachers entering the class have a series of expectations regarding the preparation of their students to incorporate new knowledge. On the other, the students expect something different from the teacher, they even perceive him as someone outside the closest context in which they develop, and unfortunately this mismatch between the expectations between students and teachers is something that has become commonplace every day. The universities (Kumar & Rajaram, 2012).

According to the research of Guevara and Domínguez (2011) when analyzing the condition of full-time university teachers, in a Mexican Public University, their results showed a discontent with the teaching being, beyond the satisfaction of being projected and overcome. By the students, this disagreement expressed by the teachers is in virtue of the difficulties to satisfy their basic needs and in the limitations to develop potentialities.

As we will see later, for a teacher to feel that their quality of working life is satisfactory, not only has to do with the satisfaction of basic needs, but the fact that they have the possibility to take advantage of their knowledge and apply them. Sirgy (Lee et al., 2007), to which he will name aesthetic needs, which are as important as the basic ones and which go hand in hand with the elements that constitute the engagement.

Teachers are pointed out as the main protagonists in the educational work because with them begin the reforms (Rodríguez & Aguilar, 2018) as well as being considered as the main responsible for the educational transformation, which makes them the main characters at risk in their quality of life and the subject of engagement, since they are the first to pay attention to working conditions and how their performance will be affected (Terán, López & Restrepo, 2013).

In recent years, some emerging issues related to the field of health and the quality of working life have become more important, especially those that are linked to the so-called psychosocial risk factors, where one of these elements is the stress, burnout (Blanch, 2007, Botero, C., 2012, Brunsting, Sreckovick & Lane, 2014, Martín, Campos, Jiménez-Beatty, & Martínez del Castillo, 2007).

For the social psychology of work and organizations, the problem of work stress has theoretical relevance, because it condenses the complex relationships between working conditions and health, and practice, for its impact on the quality of life and also on the effectiveness, the efficiency, viability and sustainability of labor organizations (Blanch, 2007). The impact of work stress and its culmination in Burnout is felt at the individual level, in the chain of physiological, emotional, behavioral, cognitive and psychosocial disorders that usually accompany it (Blanch and Sahagún and Cervantes, 2010).

At the organizational level, it translates into a significant decrease in productivity and work performance, absenteeism and its derivatives, as well as unsatisfactory negative social interactions with customers, users, patients and professionals, of tension and labor conflicts, which in many cases lead to cases of resistance movements by workers and counter-resistance by employers (Botero, 2012; Brunsting et al., 2014; Torres da Paz, 2011; Viegas & Bianchetti, 2014). In addition, as Martos et al. (2018) puts it, the study of engagement as a counterpart of burnout is not only a matter of solving a problem, but of fostering, from the teachers' own experience, new ways of influencing their quality of life. lifetime.

However, we also recognize that it is important and necessary, not only to stay in a moment where teaching is going through a transition, and that the conditions in which teachers face are not the best, we can even infer that they have become more complicated.

This resistance on the part of employees has led to the identification that there are situations that encourage employees to want to be more committed to their jobs, which undoubtedly seems paradoxical, however we will realize how this process happens.

### 3. Engagement

From the year 2000, there begins to be a change in the way of understanding the work of Psychology, to give way to the terrain of what is now called Positive Psychology, where the importance that exists in the various organizations of the well-being of the workers and that at the same time subjective tools are used to analyze their experiences (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005), which led to a reflection on the role of work and what was given to call positive organizations.

Derived from these works there was a boom to what concerns us in our research, related to engagement. According to the comments made by Schaufeli (2013) the first time this term was used, which in some academic papers is called academic commitment in some Spanish-speaking works, it was on the part of the Gallup Organization at a point at the beginning of the decade of the nineties it was when it began to be used mainly when employing the perceptions of the employees on their places of work in a questionnaire that today is known as Q12.

However, academically speaking the first work that was carried out with this theme was that of Khan (1990: 264) who defined engagement as "taking advantage of the members of the organization of their own work roles: in engagement, people they use and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during the development of their roles".

This perspective, raised the need for the employee could be involved in the roles you have in your work, at the same time, set the background so that he was at the same time putting his whole being, at the service of work. Later and as a movement that had been processed to differentiate from the concept of burnout and pose it as the opposite to it. For the same reason, the work by Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá and Bakker (2002, p.74) define engagement as: "Engagement is a positive, satisfactory and work-related mental state, characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption.

More than a specific and momentary state, engagement refers to a more persistent and influential affective-cognitive state, which is not focused on an object, event, individual or particular behavior. The vigor is characterized by a great willingness to devote effort to work and persistence in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in the work and experiencing a sense of enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, challenge and meaning. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily immersed in work, so that time passes quickly and you experience distaste for having to leave work".

This situation will bring us to identify the three main elements that converge in the concept, such as Vigor, Dedication and Absorption, which will serve as indexes to build the concept of work engagement.

### 4. Investigations on Engagement in Mexico and Colombia

According to the work of León-Jaramillo, Méndez-Solarte & Ruíz-Gutiérrez (2015) the works in Colombia linked to the topic of engagement are recent, and from their perspective they are not necessarily related to the proposal made by the Blanch team (2008) on the consequences of the New Public Management in the psychosocial risks that run the university professors, from the public politics on the education.

The first work that has been recorded is that of Arenas-Ortiz, F. & Andrade-Jaramillo (2013) who worked in a Private Health Institution of the city of Cali, to identify the relationship between psychosocial risk factors with the engagement finding a positive relationship between both factors. Another of the works referred to was carried out by Benetti (2011 cited in León-Jaramillo, Méndez-Solarte & Ruíz-Gutiérrez, 2015) carried out in Cartagena de Indias, where he linked the beliefs of self-efficacy with work engagement.

In the case of Mexico, we can identify the works that have been carried out with peasants (López-Palomar, García-Cueva & Pando-Moreno, 2016); which is a novel job in the field of study. In relation to other types of employees, Ocampo-Bustos, Juarez-Garcia, Arias-Galicia, & Hindrichs, (2015) evaluated the engagement with restaurant employees, which is also considered a little explored group as the case of Contreras -Quevedo (2015) with employees of an oil and gas production plant.

On the other hand, in the area of human resources (Aguillón, Peña & Decanini, 2015) they analyze the case of store employees and finally in the revised bibliography it also implies the link between the burnout syndrome and the engagement in university professors (De Chávez- Ramírez, Pando-Moreno, Aranda-Beltrán & Almeida-Perales, 2014). This wide panorama of diverse workers gives us the possibility of being able to deepen with a population that needs to be more evaluated, at the same time that no work was found in America that compares university teachers from two countries.

#### 4. Methodology

It was a descriptive, cross-sectional study, where the work Engagement in University teachers was evaluated. The population was integrated with 138 teachers, 69 from each university (see table 1). The sample was chosen by convenience; it includes professors with the two types of contracts that exist in both universities, 49 professors who have a definitive contract and 20 temporary ones (see table 2).

The studied population consisted of a total of 138 professors, half were members of a Mexican public university and the other part were from a private one in Colombia, as shown in Table 1.

Country of origin	Number
Mexico	69
Colombia	69

**Table 1** Teachers by university  
*Source: Self Made*

Various sociodemographic and labor data were collected from the teachers through an ad hoc questionnaire that included questions to know the age, marital status, date of admission to the university, number of children and hours dedicated to work. For the estimation of the Engagement, the international version of the UWES Utrecht of Engagement in the Work of Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) was used in the translation into Spanish by the Integral Attention Module of the General Commissariat of Prevention and Social Reintegration of the State of Jalisco called: Welfare and Work Survey, conducted by Valdéz-Bonilla & Ron-Murguía (2011).

The scale is composed of items that measure three dimensions of work commitment with a Likert-type scale with response options coded numerically from 0 to 6. These options are the following: never or never until always or every day.

The scale includes three dimensions: vigor, dedication and absorption. It should be mentioned that the instrument is validated to be used in the Mexican population ( $\alpha=0.90$ ) (Villavicencio-Ayub, Jurado-Cárdenas, & Aguilar-Villalobos, 2014).

For the hypothesis test in this work, nonparametric tests were used. The validity of the instrument was verified with the Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha = 0.909$ ). The statistical analysis in general was carried out with the software SPSS version 22.

#### 5. Results

A sample of Mexican university professors and their Colombian counterparts was compared using the UWES scale.

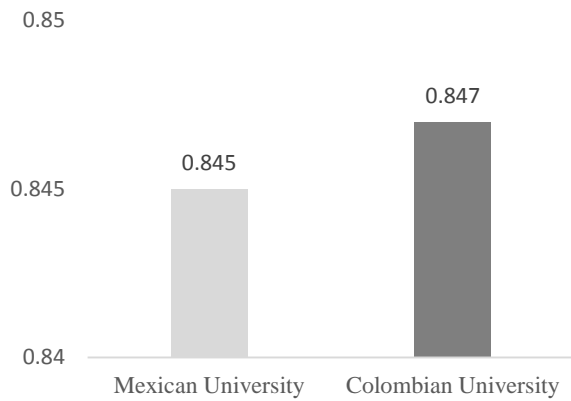
Origin	Full Time Teachers	Occasional teachers
Mexico	49	20
Colombia	49	20

**Table 2** Teachers by contract and university  
*Source: Self Made*

The sample of Mexican teachers includes 31 teachers and 38 teachers, while in the sample of Colombian teachers were 35 women and 34 men. The distribution of the age of the teachers is between twenty six and thirty years is 12%, between thirty and one years until thirty five is 26%, in the next block between thirty and six years to forty represents 18%, 17% is related to teachers between forty and one years until the age of forty-five, the rest of the teachers who are forty-six years old or more represent 27%. The average age of the teachers is 40.18 years.

In relation to seniority teaching classes is 9.75 years, in the range of years teaching 36% has from one to five years in teaching, those who have between six and ten years represent 26%, those who have between eleven and fifteen years are 18%, between sixteen and twenty years are 12% and those over twenty years represent 9%.

In terms of academic training, 13.8% have a bachelor's degree, 14.5% have a specialty, 60.9% have a master's degree and 10.9% have a doctor's degree. According to their civil status, 26.1% are single, married 66.7%, divorced 6.5% and in free union 0.7%. On the other hand, the reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.909. The global index of engagement in the respondents is shown in graph 1, which shows that the results are almost the same in both universities, with 0.845 and 0.847 for the Mexican and Colombian universities.



**Graphic 1** Global index of work engagement by university  
 Source: *Self Made*

These results agree with those found by Ruíz de Chávez-Ramírez, Pando-Moreno, Aranda-Beltrán & Almeida-Perales (2014) where, when evaluating university teachers in Mexico, they found a high level of engagement among professors, despite the levels of burnout. In table 3 we can identify the distribution by frequency of the dimensions of the labor commitment of Mexican university teachers.

Work engagement dimensions	Very high		High		Medium	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Vigor	11	42	44	46	14	11.5
Dedication	29	42	32	46.3	8	11.5
Absorption	8	11.5	41	59.4	20	28.9

**Table 3** Frequency distribution of Work Engagement in Mexican university teachers  
 Source: *Self Made*

In the preceding table (see table 3) the results are shown by frequencies of each of the dimensions. In relation to the Vigor, in the Very High quadrant we identify 42%, then 46% in a high level and in the medium level 11.5%. For the Dedication dimension, on the Very High scale, 42% is placed, followed by 46.3% on high and 11.5% on average. In relation to Absorption, 11.5% are located in the Very High quadrant, 69.4% in High and 28.9% in the middle.

In the test of statistical hypothesis, non-parametric tests were applied, because when performing the normality analysis the results obtained showed that there is no normal distribution of the variables, as a result it was observed that, in the Vigor and Absorption Scales, there is no statistically significant difference between Mexican and Colombian teachers surveyed. On the other hand, in the Dedication dimension, a statistically significant difference is observed between the two groups of teachers.

With the results obtained we infer that in relation to the experience of work engagement, the best rated scale is the Dedication with 86.3%, followed by Vigor that stands at 86% and finally Absorption which is the least punctuated with 70.9%. Below we will give an account of the distribution of frequencies in relation to Colombian teachers.

Work engagement dimensions	Very high		High		Medium	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Vigor	18	26	40	57.9	11	15.9
Dedication	39	56.5	24	34.7	6	8.7
Absorption	7	10.1	38	55	24	34.7

**Table 4** Frequency distribution of Work Engagement in Colombian university teachers  
 Source: *Self Made*

Table 4 shows the distribution by frequency of each of the elements that make up the Engagement. In the dimension of Vigor we find that 26% is at the very high level, followed by 57.9 that is high and 15.9 that is at a medium level. For the Dedication scale, 56.5 stands at the very high level, followed by 34.7% high and 8.7 in the middle. Finally, in the Absorption scale, 10.1% were identified, followed by 55% in high and 34.7% in the middle.

These results lead us to identify that the experience of work engagement in Colombian teachers, found in the dimension Dedication their highest score with 91.2%, then is the vigor with 83.9 and the last with 65.1 what is related to absorption. The previous results show that in both scales, the dimension of dedication is the one that scores the most, followed by vigor and finally absorption. Which helps us to understand that most of the teachers are in the highest quadrants, which agrees with Ruíz de Chávez-Ramírez's study, Pando-Moreno, Aranda-Beltrán & Almeida-Perales (2014), where Mexican teachers had high levels of engagement. In contrast, the study by León-Jaramillo, Méndez-Solarte, & Ruíz-Gutiérrez (2015) found that in the Colombian institutions of basic, secondary and media education, the levels of engagement were average.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the dimension of dedication is the one that best scores, since it is inferred that the teachers are continuously involved directly with their teaching activity, as well as with the institution. Which also agrees with the results obtained by Ocampo-Bustos, Juárez-García, Arias-Galicia & Hindrichs (2015) that worked with a sample of employees of a restaurant in Mexico.

In the case of Colombia, the study by Téllez-Zuluaga (2017) with a construction company found that the dimension that was best evaluated was also that of dedication. We therefore consider, like the results of Ford, Myrden and Jones (2015), that those employees who are committed to their work, enjoy better health and well-being.

In the research of these authors, related to the role conflict, the ambiguity and the engagement in the workers served as predictors of job satisfaction. However, as the literature points out, they did not serve to mediate between work stress and satisfaction as theory and other studies have shown (Orgambídez-Ramos, Pérez-Moreno, & Borrego-Alés, 2015). This last point is relevant, because we must also realize that in the face of ever-increasing demands on New Public Management, engagement appears as a resource more for the teacher than for the institution (León-Jaramillo, Méndez-Solarte, & Ruíz -Gutiérrez, 2015).

## 6. Annexes

We appreciate the support of the Secretary of Education through the PRODEP program that provided the resources for this investigation.

## 7. Conclusions

At the beginning of this work, we have analyzed the macrosocial characteristics in which the work of the university professor is immersed. The proposals derived from the trends of the New Public Management have placed a series of psychosocial complications to the work of the teacher. However, when analyzing the between teachers of a Mexican and a Colombian sample, we identify that their answers are at a high level.

This opens up the possibility of valuing the resources that each teacher has to be able to face the different demands that are presented in their work, at the same time that it places a reflection on the need for educational institutions to support the development of their workers. On the other hand, they also set the precedent of continuing with these investigations to identify those resources that allow teachers to have a positive status for the performance of their work and that also serves, as previously mentioned as an element of resistance to the vicissitudes of an increasingly demanding and exhausting context derived from government demands in the education sector.

It follows that, for future research, it will be relevant to expand the sample to identify and implement interventions both individually and at the group level, with which to complement what the teacher has been developing throughout his professional practice and make a synergy between the teacher and the institution.

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