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A Study on Employee Experience and Employee Engagement in Select Private Undergraduate Colleges of Mysore City

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Abstract: ***In recent years, employee experience and engagement have been recognized as key factors influencing the effectiveness of higher education institutions. Faculty members are critical to the quality of education, student satisfaction, academic continuity, and the reputation of private undergraduate colleges; therefore, the levels of experience and engagement of faculty members should be systematically investigated. This study analyzes faculty experiences at select private undergraduate colleges in Mysore City; assesses the difference between faculty expectations and their current experiences; and analyzes how faculty experiences relate to engagement. A descriptive and analytical research design is used, with primary data collected from 116 faculty members through a structured questionnaire using stratified random sampling technique. Results suggest that faculty experience in their role is more moderate than above average and that faculty expectations greatly exceed their current experiences. Additionally, faculty experience was found to be significantly related to faculty engagement. Findings suggest that improved faculty engagement can be accomplished by strengthening work environment, leadership support, recognition of effort, providing career advancement opportunities, and developing work/life balance; thus, improving the effectiveness of private higher educational institutions.***

Keywords: Employee experience, employee engagement, higher education, private colleges, faculty retention, institutional effectiveness

1. Introduction

Higher educational institutions are becoming more reliant on having motivated and engaged employees in order to achieve high standards of excellence in teaching, maintaining student satisfaction, and in preserving the credibility of their institutions. This is particularly true for private colleges since they face the dual challenge of trying to meet the competing demands of academic excellence while also addressing the various pressures from the competition, regulatory agencies, changes in student expectations, and reduced resources. In this type of environment, how employees view the quality of their day-to-day work experience is no longer strictly an administrative matter but can be seen as a strategic concern. As such, employee experience and employee engagement are closely related and can influence the amount of satisfaction, loyalty, and retention faculty members have toward their institution.

Employee experience refers to the way in which an employee perceives their overall experience with the institution through their interactions with various elements within the institution as work environment, the quality of their relationship with the administration, the quality and frequency of communication from the administration, the amount and type of recognition received, and career opportunities. Employee engagement is defined as the degree to which an employee mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally commits themselves to their role and manifests this by demonstrating **vigour, dedication**, and **absorption** in their work. Faculty members who are engaged at work are more likely than their disengaged counterparts to contribute to their institution above and beyond what is minimally required, seek ways to assist in the development of their institution, and demonstrate ongoing commitment to academic integrity. Conversely, if employees do not experience a positive work environment, they will likely have low levels of satisfaction, loyalty, and will find it difficult to remain employed in a private college.

As employee engagement has been extensively studied in the area of management and organizational studies, the focus of the current research project is on a specific but under-researched population, that being, the teaching staff of select private colleges located in Mysore City. This particular context is significant because the institutional context of undergraduate private colleges differs from that of other types of technical and professional private colleges offering technical and professional courses it operates within a unique ecological environment shaped by local labour markets, emerging HR practices, workload patterns, and increasing expectations of students. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to assess employee experience and to compare employee expectations to actual experience, evaluate the relationship between employee experience and employee engagement, as well as to identify the implications for HR management in private colleges. The aforementioned, (i.e. employee experience and employee engagement) provides a clear problem context for the study, defines the study population, identifies the behaviour to be measured, and offers practical contribution for higher education management in the form of employee engagement.

2. Operational Definitions

Employee Experience (EX): Employee Experience is the totality of an employee's overall perception and emotional response to an organization throughout an employee's

association with an organization to include interactions with an organization's culture, leadership, work environment, career development opportunities, communication methods and personal relationships. EX within this study is measured through the use of structured questionnaire items relating to the work environment, leadership effectiveness, recognition, career growth, communication, and work-life balance.

Employee Engagement (EE): Employee engagement describes an employee's emotional commitment, involvement, enthusiasm, energy, dedication, and absorption in their work role, fellow employees, and the organization they work for. The EE within this study is operationalized through the use of structured survey measuring behaviour in relation to employee engagement such as discretionary effort, intent to stay, and participation in institutional initiatives.

3. Literature Review

Kahn (1990)
Kahn (1990) was the original thinker behind the concept of "personal engagement". In his research, he defined the extent to which individuals engage in their work, both physically, cognitively and emotionally. He identified three basic factors that influence the level of engagement - psychological meaningfulness; psychological safety; and psychological availability. These findings are particularly relevant to the current research study because they demonstrate how the level of faculty engagement within the college context can be influenced by whether or not the college environment provides faculty members with confidence, purpose and support in conducting their job duties. Additionally, the results of this study provided a general theoretical framework for understanding why employees either become personally engaged or disengaged from their jobs.

Morgan (2017):
Morgan defines the overall interaction of an employee with an organization as the total of their employee experience throughout their employment history. He has therefore broadened the discussion about employee experiences from individual HR processes to also include the relationships of these processes to organizational culture, organizational leadership, work environment, technology and career opportunities to create a perception of that organization by the employee. Our research, through the lens of Morgan's studies, examines faculty\ document their experience through this lens (workplace environment, leadership support, recognition, career advancement, work/life balance). As a result, we will develop a complete understanding of the impact of institutional systems on employee attitudes and commitment.

Anitha (2014)
Anitha researched how employee engagement and performance are affected by various elements including: leadership, work environment, teamwork/relationships, training, pay and organizational policies. The research determined that engaged employees will perform better because engagement is not just an individual trait, but rather it is created by the organizational structure of engagement and therefore affects an employee's performance. The data from this study will support the idea that if a faculty develops a higher-quality experience, it will lead to increased engagement and therefore greater institutional success.

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)
Schaufeli & Bakker contributed greatly to the engagement literature by connecting engagement to the Job Demands-Resources model. They identified three components of engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Their work showed that job resources are the primary motivator of employee engagement and that job resources buffer the impact of job demands. This finding is directly applicable to the present research because faculty at higher education institutions generally experience high levels of job demands; therefore, faculty may become disengaged from their work due to insufficient job resources. Their results indicate that faculty engagement can be sustained through job resources such as supportive leaders; recognition for satisfactory work; autonomy in carrying out their assigned work; and the opportunity for professional development.

Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006)
Schaufeli et al. created and successfully tested a brief measure of employee engagement in several countries. In doing so, they generated evidence in support of using vigor, dedication and absorption to assess work engagement. The result of their work is an international measure that allows researchers to quantify an otherwise intangible psychological variable. This study uses the definition of work engagement as vigor, dedication and absorption to provide insight into the association between positive experiences by employees and higher faculty engagement.

Naidoo-Chetty and du Plessis (2021)
Naidoo-Chetty & du Plessis examined the balance between demanding jobs & resources for academics working in higher education institutions. Increasingly higher expectations for teaching quality, the number of publications produced per academic, how courses should be taught with blended (online/offline) learning formats; as well as more demands related to administration have created significant strain on the ability of academic staff to maintain their own psychological availability at work. Findings from this research provide evidence to support my position that there are two ways of understanding employee experience; through demands and through support systems.

Van der Ross, Olckers, and Schaap (2022)
Van der Ross, Olckers & Schaap investigated the engagement of academic staff during COVID-19 while exploring the relationship between perceived organizational support, risk of burnout and reciprocity. Their results indicate that support from the institution, fairness and the emotional atmosphere at work strongly influence engagement in academic environments. In addition, the findings demonstrate that employees tend to react positively to the provision of institutional support; however when stress and unidirectional requests are the primary focus, employees tend to react negatively. This supports the current study's emphasis on leadership support, work-life balance

and a supportive work environment as predictors of engagement.

Acuna-Hurtado et al. (2024)
Acuna-Hurtado et al. (2024) Acuna-Hurtado et al. state that researchers developed and validated a method for measuring employee experience using an evaluation scale for teachers. Their research demonstrated both the validity and reliability of employee experience measurement within education, thus serving as evidence that employee experience in the educational setting can be assessed in a systematic manner instead of just assessed based on a common perception of something. This research is relevant to the current study because the results give support for the use of a structured survey or questionnaire for measuring work environment, career advance opportunity, quality of leadership, and emotionality experienced by the faculty in this study.

4. Research Gap

Existing research has established the importance of employee experience and employee engagement across various institutional settings. However, most empirical studies have focused on corporate organisations or public higher educational institutions, with limited attention given to private undergraduate colleges. Moreover, previous research has largely examined individual workplace factors rather than employee experience as a multidimensional construct influencing employee engagement. Empirical study on private undergraduate colleges in Mysore City also remains limited. This study addresses these gaps by examining the relationship between employee experience and employee engagement among teaching faculty, thereby providing context-specific evidence for private higher educational institutions.

5. Need for the Study

Private undergraduate colleges compete against each other within a marketplace of competition and regulatory pressures, along with ever-increasing student expectations and the need to continue retaining competent faculty members. In addition to being part of the faculty member's welfare, their experience as an employee in a private undergraduate college is integral to a faculty member's continued ability to teach, to be committed to delivering high- quality academic experiences for students and to building long-term sustainability of institutions in an academic environment. The purpose of the current research is to identify whether faculty members experience supportive institutional conditions and whether the institution is meeting their professional expectations. Understanding gaps within faculty member's experience with work environment, leadership support, recognition, career advancement and work-life balance will assist HR professionals in making more employee-centered HR decisions. In private undergraduate colleges in Mysore City, the current research provides evidence to be utilized to enhance faculty satisfaction, reduce turnover intention, increase faculty engagement and enhance overall institutional competitiveness.

6. Objectives of the Study

1) To assess the level of employee experience among teaching staff.
2) To compare faculty expectations regarding employee experience with their current experience across major workplace dimensions.
3) To examine the relationship between employee experience and employee engagement among teaching staff.
4) To propose employee-centric HR strategies for improving faculty engagement and institutional effectiveness.

7. Hypotheses of the Study

The hypotheses have been reframed to align with the objectives and the statistical procedures used in the study.

Table 1: Reframed Hypotheses of the Study

Hypothesis	Null Hypothesis	Alternative Hypothesis
H1	H0: The employee experience of teaching staff in select private undergraduate colleges of Mysore City is not above the benchmark level.	H1: The employee experience of teaching staff in select private undergraduate colleges of Mysore City is above the benchmark level.
H2	H0: Faculty expectations are not significantly higher than their current experience across employee experience dimensions.	H1: Faculty expectations are significantly higher than their current experience across employee experience dimensions.
H3	H0: There is no significant relationship between employee experience and employee engagement among teaching staff.	H1: There is a significant positive relationship between employee experience and employee engagement among teaching staff.

8. Research Methodology

The research method is descriptive, Analytical research is designed to investigate employee experience and engagement levels among selected teaching staff at private undergraduate colleges located in the city of Mysore. The Researcher gathered data using a structured questionnaire administered to faculty members; these data constituted the primary source of information for the study sample of 116 total participants who worked at private undergraduate colleges. The researcher used stratified random sampling techniques in order to ensure balanced representation of participants with regard to academic rank and discipline (arts/science/commerce).

This design was chosen because the research aimed to describe the perceptions of professors and analyze whether statistically significant differences or relationships existed between the various outcomes measured.

The data analysis consisted of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to describe demographic information including workload characteristics, while reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) provided evidence that the questionnaire was internally consistently reliable. To determine if employee experiences exceeded the benchmark or if there was difference between expectations and actual experiences based upon the same variables, the researchers used Wilcoxon signed-rank tests as indicated in the conclusion section of the results. Lastly, in evaluating the correlation between employee experiences and employee engagement, the researchers employed Spearman's rank correlation coefficient which is appropriate for ordinal/non-normally distributed data. Therefore, the analysis met all objectives of the study but the final manuscript should label all tests (Wilcoxon vs. t-test) consistently.

9. Data Analysis and Interpretation

9.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

116 faculty members at selected private undergraduate colleges located in Mysore City responded to the questionnaire. The profiles produced by the sample demographic information provide insight into what the composition of the sample looks like, as well as the background conditions within which the employee's experience and engagement can be understood.

Table 2: Workload Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	Value
N	116
Missing	0
Mean workload hours per week	15.5
Median	13.0
Standard deviation	8.25
Minimum	5
Maximum	48

The average workload was 15.5 hours per week, with a standard deviation of 8.25. The wide variation in workload indicates uneven distribution of academic responsibilities among respondents.

Table 3: Teaching Experience of Respondents

Teaching Experience	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
11-15 years	30	25.9%	25.9%
16 years and above	14	12.1%	37.9%
5-10 years	28	24.1%	62.1%
Less than 5 years	44	37.9%	100.0%

Table 4: Gender Profile of Respondents

Gender	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Female	53	45.7%	45.7%
Male	63	54.3%	100.0%

Male respondents constituted 54.3% (n = 63), while female respondents accounted for 45.7% (n = 53). The sample reflects a relatively balanced gender composition.

Table 5: Academic Rank of Respondents

Academic Rank	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Assistant Professor	86	74.1%	74.1%
Associate Professor	21	18.1%	92.2%
Professor	9	7.8%	100.0%

Most respondents of the survey were Assistant Professors, indicating a predominance of faculty at junior or mid-level (Assistant or Associate Professor) at these institutions. This could have consequences for future expectations for the participants' advancement and involvement.

9.2 Objective 1: Assessment of Employee Experience

Table 6: Benchmark Test for Employee Experience

Variable	Test Statistic	Value	p-value	Benchmark
Experience_Total	Wilcoxon W	2568	0.023	3.5

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for Employee Experience

Variable	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Experience_Total	116	3.41	3.28	0.689	0.0640

To assess whether the teaching staff reported an above average experience as an employee, the employee experience score was compared to the benchmark value of 3.5. The mean employee experience score was 3.41, this is slightly lower than the benchmark. Since the p-value is 0.023, the difference is statistically significant at the 5% level. Therefore, the hypothesis that faculty is not supported. Therefore, this indicates that the employee experience of teaching staff is moderate rather than high, and improvements are needed throughout key experience dimensions.

9.3 Objective 2: Employee Expectations and Experience Gap

Table 8: Paired Comparison of Expectations and Current Experience

Measure 1	Measure 2	Test Statistic	Value	p-value	Effect Size
Expectation_Total	Experience_Total	Wilcoxon W	5306	< .001	Rank-biserial correlation = 0.871

Interpretation: A paired comparison was done to compare whether faculty expectations were significantly different than the way they feel about their current work situation. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between expectations and reality, $p < .001$. The rank-biserial correlation of 0.871 shows the effectiveness of the expectation-experience gap; however, there is also a considerable gap practically as well. For example, faculty expect improved working conditions, support from leadership, recognition systems, opportunities for development, and a work-life balance than they presently have. The difference in expectation versus experience is a key area of institutional intervention as unmet expectations could affect long-term faculty engagement and retention.

9.4 Objective 3: Relationship Between Employee Experience and Employee Engagement

Table 9: Spearman Correlation Between Employee Experience and Employee Engagement

Variables	Spearman's rho	df	p-value	Interpretation
Experience_Total and Engagement_Total	0.614***	114	< .001	Strong positive relationship

Interpretation: An analysis of Spearman's rank correlation was performed looking at the relationship of employee engagement and employee experience only. The correlation coefficient was calculated to be 0.614 indicating that there is a statistically significant correlation ($p<0.001$). Results suggest that the more favorable an employee's perception of their experience at work; the more engaged they will be in their position as a teacher. Faculty members who experience higher levels of recognition, leadership support, opportunities for career advancement, and ability to maintain a work/life balance are more likely to exhibit greater enthusiasm, dedication and absorption in the work they do as educators.

Scatter Plot



Spearman's rank correlation was conducted to examine the association between employee experience and employee engagement.

9.5 Hypothesis Check

Table 10: Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Reported Result	Decision
H1: Employee experience is above the benchmark level.	Mean = 3.41; Benchmark = 3.5; p = 0.023	Not supported
H2: Faculty expectations are higher than current experience.	p < .001; effect size = 0.871	Supported
H3: Employee experience is positively related to employee engagement.	rho = 0.614; p < .001	Supported

Findings from the hypothesis test show three important items. First, the teaching faculty have an average experience level and not higher than average. Second, employees have a statistically large gap between their expectations and their experiences. Last, there is a strong, statistically significant positive correlation between employee experience and employee engagement. These findings suggest that improving some of the employee experience dimensions will lead to improved faculty engagement and institutional efficacy.

10. Interpretation of Findings

There are three key ways to interpret the study's findings: 1) the moderate levels of employee experience reported by faculty show that some support is being provided by institutions; however, it is insufficient to create a consistently positive and fulfilling experience for faculty; 2) there is a large gap between what faculty members expect from a supportive academic workplace (based on their beliefs) versus what they are actually experiencing (reality)- thus, there is clearly a shortfall in the level of support provided by institutions; and 3) the strong, positive correlation between employee experience and engagement provides further evidence that improving workplace conditions will likely lead to greater faculty motivation and commitment and continued involvement in the institution.

Taken together, these three findings indicate that employee engagement at private undergraduate institutions does not exist simply as an outcome of psychological processes but is instead directly related to the ways faculty experience their academic institutions. If conditions such as leadership support, meaningfully recognized employees, manageable workloads, and visible development opportunities exist in the academic workplace, employee engagement will increase; conversely, if these conditions do not exist or are inconsistent, employee engagement may be at risk- even though faculty continue performing their formal job responsibilities. Consequently, rather than considering employee experience as a secondary issue to human resources, it should be viewed as a strategic institutional asset.

11. Discussion, Implications, and Suggestions

The study shows that private undergraduate institutions located in the City of Mysore must transition from a

compliance-centered to a faculty-centric employee experience management approach. There is currently moderate faculty employee experience relative to higher employee experience. Institutions should take steps to eliminate avoidable dissatisfaction with the most obvious dimensions of employee daily life on an immediate basis. Since faculty employee engagement is directly correlated to faculty employee experience, enhancing the quality of the work environment, quality of leadership support, recognition, career growth pathways, and work-life balance will produce measurable increases in faculty commitment to the organization and institutional effectiveness over time, even for small improvements in these areas.

11.1 Strengthening Work Environment

Institutions enhance faculty motivation and increase work passion and commitment by improving both the physical and psychological working conditions of their employees overall conditions Faculty feel engaged at work where equitable distribution of workload, and providing appropriate resources for both classrooms and digital learning and engagement, as well as implementing participatory processes of academic governance, will foster a supportive environment for engagement.

11.2 Enhancing Career Growth Opportunities

Academic institutions have a strong desire for more transparent pathways for faculty members' future career development due to the disconnect between their expectations and actual experiences. As such, colleges should have clear promotions/appraisal policies, well-structured Faculty Development Programmes, and provide incentives to conduct research outside the institution in addition to encouraging faculty to attend academic conferences and explore partnership opportunities through academic cooperatives. Resources from jobs that facilitate longer-term engagement with the institution also create new pathways for career advancement.

11.3 Institutionalising Recognition Mechanisms

Recognition of employees through formal recognition programs, including performance-based awards; appreciation for instructional innovation; recognition for contributions to research; recognition for mentoring students; and public recognition at the practical level of the operation will positively impact employee morale and increase employee commitment to the organization.

11.4 Strengthening Leadership Support

Academic leaders should have open channels of communication, provide constructive feedback, mentor faculty, and promote autonomy over curriculum development and academic initiatives. A supportive leader fosters trust, lowers the potential for burnout and increases engagement in their work.

11.5 Promoting Work-Life Balance

There is a discrepancy between the variability in workload and faculty expectations indicating the need for more Work Life Balance Intervention. Some Faculty could benefit from a flexible schedule wherever possible. Balanced distribution of teaching versus administrative duties as well as the introduction of wellness initiatives will improve faculty members psychological availability. Female faculty members need to achieve a proper work/life balance to remain engaged in their academic work long term.

11.6 Strategic Implication

The strong positive correlation between employee experience and engagement indicates that as institutional make improvements to the various dimensions of employee experience, we are likely to see measurable increases in engagement levels. Through the application of structured, faculty-focused human resource (HR) strategies, private undergraduate institutions can decrease faculty turnover, improve the quality of teaching, enhance their institutional reputations, and strengthen long-term institutional sustainability. Closing the previously identified gaps through systematic HR interventions will not only enhance faculty satisfaction but will also contribute to higher education institutions being effective and competitive institutions in the higher education industry.

12. Limitations of the Study

The data were collected through a structured self-reported questionnaire method that may suffer from response bias. The study only examined academic staff and did not include non-academic staff. Since the cross-sectional nature of the study captures perceptions at a single point in time, they cannot give a complete picture of long-term changes in experience or engagement.

13. Scope for Future Research

Future research could expand the scope of their investigations into higher education beyond private undergraduate institutions (e.g., include other types of higher education, such as governmental or postgraduate institutions) and include non-teaching staff in order to better understand the full scope of employee experience and engagement in higher education institutions. A longitudinal approach to data collection may provide insights into employee experience/engagement over time. Also, future researchers could compare the experiences of employees at urban versus rural institutions or perform studies in multiple states to identify differences between regions. Qualitative research methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups) may provide insight into employee workplace culture, motivation for working as well as institutional practices that influence employee experience and engagement.

14. Conclusion

This study has surveyed the employee engagement levels and faculty members from several private undergraduate college institutions located in Mysore City. The study

revealed that the quality of the faculty's employee experience is lower than average or acceptable; however, as compared to their reasonable anticipations about faculty expectations from their Employment at each of the institutions; the correlations between Faculty Engagement and the Employees' Experience Accounts are extremely high. The level of Engagement of a Faculty Member is primarily determined by the quality of their Employee Experience as determined by the four factors of Institutional Employment such as Recognition; Working Environment; Growth Opportunities; and Professional vs Personal Life. The result of this study suggests that the most practical and strategic method to improve the satisfaction, retention, academic quality, and long-term sustainability of private higher education institutions is to improve the faculties employee experience.

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