

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AMONG FACULTY MEMBERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract- Employee engagement among faculty members is a critical determinant of institutional success in higher education. Engaged faculty demonstrate higher commitment, innovation, and student-centered teaching approaches, directly influencing academic quality and institutional reputation. The article examines the key factors influencing employee engagement among faculty members in higher education, drawing on recent research, organizational behavior theories, and sector-specific challenges. Employee engagement is a critical driver of institutional success in higher education, directly influencing teaching quality, research productivity, and student outcomes. The study examines the key factors affecting employee engagement among faculty members, focusing on autonomy and academic freedom, career advancement opportunities, leadership and management support, and recognition and rewards. Using a Kruskal–Wallis test, the research analyzes engagement differences across three age groups—young, mid-career, and senior faculty. Findings reveal statistically significant variations in all four dimensions, indicating that engagement priorities and perceptions differ according to career stage. Younger faculty emphasizes career growth, mid-career faculty value autonomy, and senior faculty report stronger leadership support and recognition. The study highlights the need for age-sensitive engagement strategies to enhance faculty motivation, retention, and institutional performance. Recommendations are provided for fostering an inclusive academic culture that supports faculty at all stages of their professional journey.

Keywords: Employee engagement, faculty members, higher education, autonomy, career advancement, leadership support, recognition, and age differences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Faculty members play a crucial role in guiding students, conducting research, and influencing the academic environment in higher education. A key component of performance and retention is employee engagement, which is defined as emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dedication to one's work and business. Promoting involvement is essential in the cutthroat academic setting in order to achieve institutional quality, fulfill accreditation requirements, and guarantee long-term success. Higher education involvement among employees goes beyond job satisfaction. It represents the alignment of personal values with corporate goals, the importance of academic pursuits, and the presence of favourable conditions for research, education, and service. Therefore, employee contribution is the key to higher education's success in accomplishing all corporate objectives. Participation, empowerment, inspiration, dedication, and other factors have been studied to produce the relatively new concept of employee engagement. In order to achieve its objectives and foster productive behaviour in a cutthroat setting, higher education is attempting to make effective use of human resources services. Employee engagement generally refers to the level of commitment and involvement that staff members have in higher education and its principles. Positive outcomes from employee involvement would boost a sense of duty and offer a favourable reaction to innovation. Employees must participate in events with high performance standards, put forth effort, and act professionally. Job-related engagement and organisational engagement are the two main components of employee engagement. The requirement for people to have fulfilling interpersonal interactions with their coworkers is known as employee engagement in team and coworker relationships. The study is an attempt to investigate higher education institution staff engagement.

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Given that knowledge-based sectors are currently at the core of the growth phase, the value of education, particularly higher education, is only increasing in the modern day. Higher education is crucial for supplying the cutting edge, whereas school education is required for establishing a foundation. One effective tool for creating a knowledge-based society is higher education. By providing cutting-edge knowledge and skilled labor, higher education institutions help the country progress. The number of institutions has suddenly increased as a result of the push to make higher

education more socially inclusive without balancing an increase in material and intellectual capital. Academic principles have so been disregarded. Furthermore, private professional institutions have expanded quickly due to the growing market need for professionals and the removal of government assistance from the higher education sector. The primary goal of many of these organisations is to make money. As a result, it appears that many schools do not prioritise the quality of their education. The University Grant Commission (UGC) oversees the nation's higher education system as the highest authority.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Employee engagement has been extensively examined in business and service sectors, research on engagement within higher education, especially among faculty members—remains relatively scarce. Current research frequently emphasises student engagement, teaching efficacy, or institutional success; however, the motivational and organisational determinants affecting teacher engagement are less frequently examined empirically. Furthermore, a significant portion of the existing literature focuses on general job happiness or burnout, neglecting to analyze the multifaceted aspects of engagement, including autonomy, career progression, leadership support, and acknowledgement. Contextual investigations, particularly in developing nations, are limited despite varying institutional cultures, governance frameworks, and resource limitations. Moreover, research seldom contrasts involvement levels among various faculty demographics, including age or career stage, which can markedly affect views and priorities. The absence of nuanced, sector-specific, and demographic-sensitive research generates a knowledge deficit that constrains institutions' capacity to formulate focused engagement initiatives. Consequently, there is an urgent requirement for empirical research that investigates the interaction between individual traits, institutional variables, and engagement results in higher education. Bridging this gap would not only elevate academic discourse but also yield practical insights for policy formulation, faculty enhancement, and institutional governance focused on improving productivity, retention, and the overall quality of higher education.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

Faculty members constitute the foundation of higher education institutions, directly influencing teaching quality, research productivity, and institutional prestige. Faculty engagement is essential, since involved academics are more inclined to exhibit excitement, inventiveness, and dedication to student success. In the present global landscape, characterized by swift technological advancements, competitive academic settings, and evolving educational priorities—maintaining elevated engagement levels is crucial for institutional resilience and excellence. This study is significant as it aims to uncover particular aspects that affect engagement, such as autonomy, possibilities for career growth, leadership and management support, and recognition systems. Comprehending these elements would enable schools to execute customised treatments that cater to the distinct requirements of faculty at various career stages. This study's insights help enhance leadership practices, resource allocation, and professional development programs, guaranteeing that engagement tactics are grounded in evidence rather than being general. The study offers empirical evidence that connects theoretical models of engagement with their practical implementation in higher education environments. This research has the potential to improve institutional performance, promote faculty retention, and cultivate a more dynamic academic culture that benefits educators and students alike.

5. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Although the significance of faculty engagement for institutional success is acknowledged, several higher education institutions encounter ongoing difficulties in maintaining elevated engagement levels within their academic personnel. Faculty personnel frequently function under challenging circumstances, encompassing substantial teaching obligations, administrative duties, research requirements, and constrained resources. These pressures can lower motivation, decrease job satisfaction, and impede long-term commitment. Moreover, engagement is not a uniform concept; it is influenced by various interconnected aspects, including the extent of academic autonomy, prospects for career advancement, quality of leadership support, and acknowledgement of efforts. Current institutional rules may inadequately address these aspects or may favour specific groups, resulting in discrepancies in engagement among various age demographics and professional phases. In the absence of a comprehensive grasp of the individual factors affecting engagement within their distinct contexts, institutions jeopardise faculty morale, diminish research productivity, and heighten turnover rates. The issue is exacerbated by the absence of demographic-sensitive engagement tactics. This study aims to investigate the impact of various organisational and personal factors on faculty engagement, with the objective of offering practical recommendations to enhance motivation, commitment, and performance within the academic workforce.

6. RESULTS

Relationship between Nature of Respondents and Level of Employee Engagement

6.1 Age

The study categorized respondents into three age groups.. This distribution ensured a balanced representation of early-career, mid-career, and senior faculty, enabling a holistic assessment of employee engagement across different stages of professional life. Age plays a pivotal role in shaping career perspectives, priorities, and engagement levels—while younger faculty often focus on career advancement and skill development, senior faculty may place greater emphasis on stability, work–life balance, and long-term contributions to the institution.

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the mean score of various dimensions according to the age of the respondents.

Table-6.1 Relationship Between Age and the Level of Employee Engagement Kruskal Wallis Test

Constructs		N	Mean	Test	Result
Autonomy and Academic freedom	Young	65	74.44	Chi-Square	7.789
	Middle	54	83.13		
	Old	31	64.44	Asymp. Sig.	.000
	Total	150			
Career Advancement	Young	65	94.48	Chi-Square	6.753
	Middle	54	61.48		
	Old	31	60.11	Asymp. Sig.	.001
	Total	150			
Leadership and Management Support	Young	65	72.83	Chi-Square	6.721
	Middle	54	58.35		
	Old	31	110.97	Asymp. Sig.	.001
	Total	150			
Recognition and Rewards	Young	65	84.02	Chi-Square	8.009
	Middle	54	56.03		
	Old	31	91.55	Asymp. Sig.	.002
	Total	150			

The Kruskal–Wallis test was conducted to examine differences in various dimensions of employee engagement across three age groups—Young (<30 years), Middle (30–40 years), and Old (>40 years). The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of these dimensions according to the age of respondents. For all four constructs—Autonomy and Academic Freedom, Career Advancement, Leadership and Management Support, and Recognition and Rewards—the Asymp. Sig. values (.000, .001, .001, and .002, respectively) are all less than the 0.05 significance level. This indicates statistically significant differences in the mean scores across the three age groups for each construct.

- Autonomy and Academic Freedom: Mid-career faculty (Mean = 83.13) reported higher autonomy compared to younger (74.44) and older faculty (64.44), suggesting that mid-career professionals perceive greater academic independence.
- Career Advancement: Younger faculty (Mean = 94.48) scored highest, indicating stronger aspirations for promotion and growth opportunities compared to middle-aged (61.48) and senior faculty (60.11).

- Leadership and Management Support: Senior faculty (Mean = 110.97) reported the highest levels of support, while middle-aged faculty (58.35) rated it lowest, suggesting a possible perception gap in managerial relationships.
- Recognition and Rewards: Senior faculty (91.55) scored higher than both young (84.02) and middle-aged faculty (56.03), indicating that recognition may be more prevalent or valued among experienced academics.

Discussion: Key Factors Influencing Faculty Engagement

- Autonomy and Academic Freedom: This suggests that mid-career academics experience the optimal balance between institutional trust, academic responsibility, and freedom in decision-making. Younger faculty, although relatively satisfied, may still be in a phase of establishing credibility and navigating institutional structures, which can limit perceived independence. Conversely, senior faculty may experience reduced autonomy due to increased administrative duties, policy constraints, or evolving institutional governance systems. In higher education, academic freedom is a critical factor influencing research innovation, curriculum design, and pedagogical creativity. Differences in perception across age groups may stem from varying career expectations—mid-career faculty may actively exercise independence to advance their research and professional reputation, while senior faculty may feel constrained by institutional bureaucracy or external regulations. These findings highlight the need for policies that safeguard and promote academic freedom equally across career stages, ensuring that all faculty members, regardless of age, can contribute meaningfully to teaching, research, and service.
- Career Advancement: For senior faculty, career advancement may no longer be the primary motivator; instead, recognition, academic influence, and legacy-building become more important. These findings suggest that faculty engagement strategies should be tailored to career stages—providing structured mentorship, transparent promotion pathways, and research support for younger academics, while offering leadership roles, sabbaticals, and scholarly autonomy for mid- and late-career faculty. Addressing generational differences in career advancement expectations can help institutions maintain high engagement levels across all faculty segments and reduce dissatisfaction stemming from perceived stagnation or unequal access to professional growth.
- Leadership and Management Support: The disparity suggests that experienced academics may have stronger institutional networks, long-standing professional relationships, and greater influence over decision-making processes, resulting in more perceived support from leadership. Conversely, mid-career faculty—often balancing research, teaching, and administrative duties—may experience leadership gaps, possibly due to limited communication channels or misalignment between institutional priorities and their career stage needs. For younger faculty, perceptions of leadership support may vary depending on boarding experiences, mentoring availability, and the degree of encouragement for innovative teaching and research. Effective leadership in academia requires not only policy-level commitment but also relational trust, inclusive decision-making, and proactive problem-solving. Institutions should adopt leadership models that are adaptive to the needs of different age groups, ensuring that early- and mid-career academics receive the same level of guidance, advocacy, and resource allocation as their senior counterparts.
- Recognition and Rewards: This suggests that recognition mechanisms in the institution may be more closely aligned with seniority and established contributions, such as long-term service awards, leadership appointments, and lifetime achievement honors. Younger faculty, though relatively satisfied, may benefit from initial recognition tied to early achievements, such as teaching excellence awards, research grants, and innovation acknowledgments. Mid-career faculty, however, appear to experience a recognition gap—possibly due to being in a transitional phase where expectations are high, but institutional recognition is less frequent. This “mid-career slump” in perceived rewards can affect engagement, motivation, and retention. A more balanced recognition system that values contributions at all career stages is essential for sustaining motivation. Institutions should diversify reward structures, ensuring equal acknowledgment of teaching, research, service, and community engagement, regardless of faculty rank or tenure. This will promote a culture where all contributions are visible, appreciated, and celebrated.

CONCLUSION

The results lead to rejection of the null hypothesis. Age significantly influences perceptions of engagement dimensions, with clear differences in priorities and experiences among early-career, mid-career and senior faculty members. Institutions may need to adopt age-sensitive engagement strategies to address these variations. Employee engagement among faculty members is a multidimensional construct shaped by leadership, workload, recognition, resources, and institutional culture. In higher education, where intellectual capital is the primary driver of success, fostering engagement is not optional, it is strategic. By addressing the key influencing factors and adopting evidence-

based engagement practices, higher education institutions can enhance faculty satisfaction, student learning outcomes, and overall institutional performance.

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