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## CONSTRUCTING A PSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL FOR TEACHER RETENTION: INSIGHTS FROM THE CONSERVATION OF RESOURCE THEORY

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### Abstract

This article explores the complex issue of teacher retention in African high schools, using a psychosocial framework to analyse factors like work engagement, psychological capital, and occupational passion. Drawing from the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory, it underscores the importance of preserving resources for teachers' professional development. By reinstating psychological capital as a mediator, the study reveals positive connections between work engagement and key outcomes such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with retention practices. It identifies these factors as crucial for a resilient teaching workforce and emphasizes their role in guiding teacher retention. Beyond theory, the article recognizes their broader impact on institutional cohesion. The psychosocial model offers guidance to teachers, encouraging dedication, finding joy in work, and deriving fulfilment from passion. In marginalized communities' high schools, the research uncovers internal factors affecting retention while highlighting the endurance and commitment needed to overcome challenges. Ultimately, the psychosocial model is a tool for fostering resilient and dedicated teachers, shaping a vibrant educational landscape.

*Keywords: teachers, conservation of resource theory, work engagement, psychological capital, occupational passion, retention outcomes*

### Introduction and Background

In the field of education, a recurring problem in high schools in marginalised communities of South Africa is the difficulty in retaining high-quality teachers. This article digs deeply into the issue, performing a detailed analysis to create a comprehensive psychosocial framework. The study aims to investigate the relationship among work engagement, psychological capital, occupational passion, and their impact on organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with human resource retention practices. Teacher retention is a complex challenge in academia (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Robinson et al., 2023), particularly in Black-dominated South African high schools (Mvana, 2023). This scenario entails substantial risks and intricate challenges, requiring an analysis that surpasses conventional frameworks.

Based on Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resource (COR) theory, this study highlights that individuals will safeguard and appreciate the resources they cherish while striving for fulfilment. In education, these resources are intangible assets that include active engagement in work, psychological strengths, and a strong commitment to one's career (Indrajaya & Kazeroony, 2024; Udayar, & Massoudi, 2024; Wang, 2024). The study is guided by the COR theory, a motivational philosophy, which emphasises that the consequences of losing resources are more substantial than acquiring them (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The theory delves into the essence of a teacher's professional growth, proposing that the depletion or depletion of resources, such as work engagement, psychological capital, and occupational passion, has substantial and widespread effects rather than being

insignificant. This study suggests that psychological capital, acting as a mediating variable, can effectively elucidate the positive relationships between work engagement and important outcomes such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with human resource retention practices. Research further indicates that occupational passion, a psychological resource that acts as a moderator, can boost motivation, well-being, and a deep sense of meaningfulness (Dalla Rosa & Vianello, 2020; Onyeabor et al., 2024), providing interesting depth to the analysis.

This study recognises that teacher retention depends on concrete outcomes rather than just theoretical debates. Organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with human resource retention practices are crucial indicators of a strong and dedicated teaching workforce. The study aims to investigate the significance of these results in guiding teacher employment decisions. As we begin this intellectual journey, we are deeply affected by the significant challenges that high school teachers in marginalised communities encounter. The article emphasises the significance of comprehending the intricate connection between personal resources, resource preservation, and retention outcomes in order to create enduring solutions for the issue of retaining teachers in this unique educational setting.

### **The Conservation of Resource (COR) Theory: An Exploration of Essential Human Dynamics**

The Conservation of Resource (COR) theory, originally formulated by Hobfoll in 1989 and subsequently refined in 2018, serves as a fundamental framework for understanding the intricate interplay between individuals and the resources they hold dear. At the core of this theory lies the recognition that humans are not passive recipients of resources; rather, they actively and persistently strive to acquire, safeguard, and uphold elements they deem crucial and beneficial for their well-being and achievements. In the vast tapestry of human existence, resources possess a dualistic essence, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects (Jawed & Siddiqui, 2019). Tangible resources involve concrete goods such as material possessions, financial stability, and physical health, while intangible resources include social support, emotional well-being, and cognitive assets. The COR theory thus posits that individuals, driven by an inherent desire for self-preservation and progress, exert substantial effort to acquire and protect these resources.

The significance of resources, as outlined by the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (1989), extends beyond mere survival. Scholars seem to agree that resources constitute fundamental components contributing to an individual's overall well-being and achievement (Claes et al., & Annemans, 2023; Morosanova, 2023). Usually, individuals view resources, such as knowledge, social connections, and financial stability, as crucial factors in attaining life happiness and fulfilling personal goals. Notably, the COR theory focuses on the asymmetrical nature of resource acquisition and depletion (Hobfoll, 1989). While acquiring resources is undoubtedly beneficial, the theory suggests that resource depletion has a more profound impact on individuals. Emphasising that losses hold greater prominence, are imbued with strong emotions, and have a more profound psychological effect compared to gains. It seems, the inherent inclination towards resource depletion influences individuals' actions, motivating them to continuously strive to safeguard and restore their resources (Downer, 2019; Hobfoll et al., 2003).

The COR theory (1989) posits that the observation of resource depletion is more conspicuous than resource acquisition, significantly influencing human behaviour. As a result, individuals, cognizant of the risks associated with resource depletion, feel compelled to implement proactive measures to protect their resources (Downer, 2019). This proactive approach is driven not solely by a desire for abundance but also by a strong urge to prevent the potentially harmful effects of resource depletion. According to the theory, the need to protect and restore resources is closely linked to the avoidance of defensive, irrational, or violent actions (Pandi-Perumal et al., 2023). Perhaps, the prospect of losing valuable resources triggers a psychological reaction that compels individuals to engage in behaviours aimed at preserving those resources. It also seems, individuals, whether consciously or not, make efforts to strike a delicate balance between acquiring resources and avoiding potential losses to maintain their psychological well-being (Shirmohammadi et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the COR theory (1989) offers a comprehensive understanding of the human experience, portraying individuals as proactive entities effectively navigating the challenges of resource allocation. It transcends conventional economic concepts of resource distribution, providing a nuanced perspective on the psychological and emotional aspects of resource dynamics. As people engage in the ongoing process of conserving resources, the COR theory (1989) serves as a guide, aiding researchers, psychologists, and practitioners in comprehending the motives and behaviours that govern human relationships with valued resources. Its implications extend to various areas, including personal relationships and professional endeavors, offering crucial insights into the intricate fabric of human existence and the perpetual pursuit of preserving and enhancing resources.

### **Application of COR Theory in Teacher Retention: Navigating the Intricate Interplay**

In the ever-changing field of education, the ongoing issue of retaining teachers presents a major obstacle, especially in the unique setting of Black South African high schools. This study uses the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory as a guiding framework to understand the complexities of the issue. Hobfoll's (1989) theory is essential for understanding the complex connections between work engagement, psychological capital, and occupational passion. These essential attributes for teachers are intangible assets that teachers invest in, protect vigorously, and must replenish when needed to ensure their sustained commitment and contribution to the teaching profession (Eman-Nafa & Amir Ishak, 2016; Guo et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2020). The COR theory (1989) posits that individuals, particularly teachers in this case, are proactive beings motivated by an innate drive to acquire and protect valuable resources. These resources include not only physical possessions but also intangible assets such as work engagement, psychological capital, and occupational passion. The theory suggests that the depletion of resources can have a significant and far-reaching impact on different aspects of a person's professional life, similar to a ripple effect (Li et al., 2022). Teachers must take a proactive approach to safeguard resources, implement measures to prevent losses, and potentially recover any lost resources in the challenging educational environment.

Work engagement plays a vital role in the teaching experience and is essential within the COR framework (Baethge et al., 2020). Teachers who dedicate time, effort, and enthusiasm to their work can cultivate an intricate fabric of commitment and dedication. The COR theory emphasises that a decrease in work engagement has significant consequences, as stated by Hobfoll et al. (2018). Diminished passion, engagement, and dedication in a teacher may indicate potential attrition within teacher retention efforts. The study, based on the COR theory, emphasises the importance of teachers actively investing in and safeguarding their work engagement, acknowledging it as a vital asset in maintaining a resilient and committed teaching staff.

Psychological capital, an important intangible asset, is crucial in applying the COR theory to teacher retention. Teachers must possess perseverance, optimism, self-efficacy, and hope to successfully handle the complex emotional challenges that come with their profession (Kun & Gadancz, 2019). The COR theory highlights the importance of preserving psychological capital for both personal well-being and wider outcomes such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and teacher retention (Ghafoor & Haar, 2021; Mvana, 2022; Probst et al., 2017). The study recognises that teachers have a proactive role in protecting their psychological resources and developing a positive and resilient mindset to deal with the constantly changing and challenging educational environment.

Adding occupational passion as the third factor in the COR framework enhances the depth of the study on teacher retention dynamics. Occupational passion is a powerful emotional and motivating force that drives teachers forward beyond routine tasks and responsibilities (Chen et al., 2019; Horwood et al., 2021). Passion, as per the COR theory, is viewed as a psychological asset that can moderate the relationship between work engagement and important retention outcomes when nurtured and reinforced (Dalla Rosa & Vianello, 2020; Fang et al., 2020; Scales & Quincy Brown, 2020). Teachers who have a strong passion for their work are more likely to experience fulfilment, satisfaction, and motivation in their roles, which helps protect them from the negative effects of resource depletion (Ashkani et al., 2021).

The study highlights the significance of teachers recognising and nurturing their occupational passion, as it can greatly impact their dedication to the organisation, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with human resource retention procedures. The proactive approach recommended by the COR theory is particularly evident when dealing with the effects of resource depletion in the teaching profession (Li et al., 2022). Decreased work engagement, psychological capital, and occupational passion can result in negative outcomes for teachers' commitment to their organisations, overall job satisfaction, and satisfaction with human resource retention practices. Teachers need to be keenly observant of the early indicators of resource exhaustion, similar to vigilant guardians of a precious asset, as per this study. They should then take deliberate steps to protect and, if needed, recover these resources.

The application of COR theory in teacher retention requires teachers to adopt a resourceful mindset. Teachers are encouraged to acknowledge the significance of their work engagement, psychological capital, and occupational passion, and to take steps to enhance and revitalise these resources according to Downer (2019). Teachers can effectively navigate challenges in the educational environment by adopting a proactive approach focused on resource conservation, demonstrating determination, dedication, and enduring enthusiasm for their work. As the study advances with the COR theory, it is clear that safeguarding and improving these intangible resources are not just individual actions but crucial elements of a larger strategy to strengthen teacher retention. The study's findings, based on the COR theory, have the potential to develop a teaching workforce that is resilient in overcoming challenges and deeply committed to the important task of shaping the future through education.

### **Dynamic Relationships: Work Engagement, Psychological Capital, and Occupational Passion**

Work engagement, psychological capital, and occupational passion are essential components in the teaching profession that play a crucial role in understanding and improving teacher retention. This study is based on the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory and explores the relationships between various factors, revealing a strong narrative of resilience, motivation, and commitment in the distinctive setting of Black South African high schools. This investigation focuses on how the restoration of psychological capital serves as a crucial intermediary factor. This psychological capital serves as a mediator, explaining the positive connections between work engagement and important outcomes necessary for retaining teachers, such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with human resource retention practices. Psychological capital's essence is its ability to renew and strengthen, providing teachers with the emotional and cognitive resources needed to overcome the challenges of their profession.

Teachers must prioritise the preservation of their psychological resources as they dedicate themselves to their work through active interactions with students and the educational process. The COR theory, focusing on individuals' actions to obtain, retain, and protect valuable resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018), fits well with the teacher's experience. Work engagement in this setting transitions from being focused on tasks to becoming a source of strong enthusiasm and commitment. When effectively utilised, it can produce substantial beneficial results (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Teo et al., 2020). Psychological capital acts as a mediator through a process of resource restoration. Teachers face resource depletion challenges in their profession, including emotional fatigue, burnout, and diminishing passion (Burns et al., 2020; Fogelgarn & Burns, 2020; Yudina, 2021). Revitalising psychological capital is crucial for instilling a renewed sense of purpose and resilience (Pan & Hu, 2020; Tanner et al., 2022). Restoration is like refuelling a vehicle before a long journey, ensuring teachers have the emotional and cognitive resources needed for continuous professional engagement.

Organisational commitment is a crucial result in the complex system of teacher retention. The study suggests that the strong links between work engagement and organisational commitment are affected by the enhanced psychological capital. Teachers enhance their connection with the organisational mission, vision, and values by proactively replenishing their psychological capital resources (Göçen, 2019; Luthans et al., 2010). They go above and beyond their contractual duties, demonstrating their commitment to the comprehensive growth of students and the wider educational community. Job satisfaction is a key factor in teacher retention and is closely linked to the dynamic interactions examined in this study. The strong connection between work engagement and job satisfaction, along with human resource practices, is highlighted by the mediating impact of psychological capital. This emphasises the significant role of internal resources in shaping an individual's subjective view of their career. When teachers are actively involved in their work and their psychological capital resources are replenished, they feel fulfilled and content (Goestjahjanti et al., 2020; Mvana, 2022; Ozturk et al., 2021).

Yet, the intricacy of these relationships does not end there. The study presents the idea of occupational passion as a moderating factor, a psychological asset that improves the comprehension of the connection between work engagement, psychological capital, and important retention results. Occupational passion is a powerful factor that enhances motivation, well-being, and a sense of purpose at work, as highlighted by Chen et al. (2019), Pollack et al. (2020), and Salas-Vallina et al. (2020). Occupational passion can enhance the positive connections established through work engagement and psychological capital by serving as a guiding force. Research suggests that people's strong passion for their work not only renews their mental energy but also imbues their work with a deep sense of purpose and dedication (Bilginoğlu & Yozgat, 2021; Horwood et al., 2021; Pollack et al., 2020). This passion serves as a motivating force, driving individuals beyond their usual duties and turning their roles into sources of personal fulfilment.

In Black South African high schools, the socio-cultural environment adds complexity to the teaching profession, making occupational passion more significant. It functions as a way to efficiently tackle challenges, surpass structural barriers, and foster an environment where teachers not only survive but flourish (Chen et al., 2019; Horwood et al., 2021). This study suggests that the relationships among work engagement, psychological capital, and retention outcomes depend on the strength and presence of occupational passion, which remains strong even in difficult situations. The study's findings enhance our comprehension of the intricate process of teacher retention by exploring how these dynamic connections develop. The story portrays teachers who are deeply engaged in their work, replenishing and protecting their mental resources, and infusing their profession with the significant impact of occupational passion. The study offers teachers guidance on how to navigate the intricate teaching profession by highlighting the significance of work engagement, psychological capital, and occupational passion in promoting teacher retention and a sustainable, rewarding career.

### **Outcomes Relevant to Retention: Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction, and Human Resource Practices Satisfaction**

Teacher retention, particularly in marginalized communities, has become a pressing concern in the intricate landscape of education (Zeichner, 2022). This study extensively examines the multifaceted process of retaining teachers by identifying and scrutinizing three pivotal outcomes: organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with human resource retention practices.

#### *a) Organisational Commitment: A Foundation for Consistency*

Organisational commitment is a crucial factor in teacher retention, going beyond just fulfilling contractual duties. This study highlights the importance of organisational commitment in reducing teacher absenteeism and promoting loyalty to the school. Evidence shows that dedicated teachers enhance classroom stability and harmony by investing the required time and effort (Sen et al., 2023).

Organisational commitment not only affects teacher absences but also serves as a quantifiable indicator of teachers' job satisfaction (Albaghli et al., 2022). Teaching staff are more inclined to show job satisfaction when they personally commit to the school's vision and principles. As a result, this satisfaction positively impacts instruction, staff collaboration, and the overall learning environment (Beegum & Bindu, 2021; Nassir & Benoliel, 2023; Sharma, 2023).

#### *b) The Motivating Factor That Is Job Satisfaction*

The study emphasises the crucial importance of job satisfaction in motivating long-term teacher retention. Job satisfaction in teachers is influenced by their perceptions and sources of fulfilment in their work, going beyond just being content with specific job tasks (Beegum & Bindu, 2021). Thus, comprehending and fostering job satisfaction are crucial for maintaining a motivated and committed teaching staff in a field characterised by widespread burnout and high turnover rates.

Furthermore, teachers who find pleasure in their profession are more inclined to show high motivation and exceed their assigned responsibilities (Amin, 2021). Their innate drive allows them to fully engage in their profession, positively impacting students and the educational system as a whole (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Sahito & Vaisanen, 2019; Toropova et al., 2020). Furthermore, teachers who are content with their jobs actively participate in their classrooms, motivating students and creating a conducive environment for learning.

#### *c) Contentment with HR Retention Practices: Creating Paths to Retention*

This study highlights that teacher satisfaction with human resource retention practices is a key predictor of retention in the teaching profession. These practices enable teachers to engage with the larger institutional framework, which greatly impacts their view of their professional development (Aboramadan et al., 2020). Other studies have shown that fair compensation, professional development opportunities, and supportive supervisors affect teachers' commitment and choice to stay in the field (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Mukhuty et al., 2022; Tran & Smith, 2020).

This study examines various factors such as compensation, job characteristics, training and development opportunities, supervisory support, career opportunities, and work-life balance that influence a teacher's experience in the classroom. Research indicates that teachers who are satisfied with their teaching methods are more inclined to remain in the profession for an extended period. Their profound dedication goes beyond mere loyalty, motivating them to persist through difficulties and welcome change (Day & Gu, 2009; Flores, 2019; Gu, 2014). Schools can establish a foundation for retaining teachers and granting them tenure by identifying and meeting their diverse needs through efficient human resource strategies.

#### *d) Orchestrating the Symphony of Retention*

This study thoroughly analyses the complex processes of teacher retention by examining organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with human resource retention practices. The results go beyond traditional indicators of job security and pay (Ang & Chen, 2020; Gélinas, 2006; Wagar, 1993) and centre on teachers' drive, involvement, and deep feeling of purpose in their profession.

The study provides schools with valuable guidance on how to tackle teacher resignations by emphasising the importance of enhancing retention rates over just concentrating on recruiting new teachers. Teachers require a harmonious combination of institutional backing, professional satisfaction, and acknowledgment to maintain commitment, contentment, and longevity in their careers (Bahtilla & Hui, 2021; Bullock, 2022; Choi & Tang, 2009). Schools can maintain a steady flow of skilled teachers and create a lasting and impactful learning environment for students by taking this action.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The current research aims to develop a psychosocial model that explores the complex relationships between work engagement, psychological capital, and occupational passion in the context of teacher retention. The study

explores the impact of the Conservation of Resource theory on a teacher's journey, providing a detailed and comprehensive view of the complex relationships involved. The study investigates the proactive actions teachers can implement to protect and improve their essential resources, based on the belief that people tend to protect what they value. Teachers are advised to nurture their work engagement, psychological capital, and occupational passion, as these are crucial for their professional well-being, similar to how a gardener cares for a delicate flower. Teachers take on the role of designers of their futures, adeptly creating a fabric of dedication, contentment, and longevity.

The study's findings go beyond the individual level and shed light on the overall consistency within educational institutions. This psychological model serves as a guiding beacon in the dynamic school environment, helping teachers navigate the complexities of their responsibilities. The article provides important advice to teachers, encouraging them to strengthen their dedication to their purpose, take pleasure in their daily efforts, and discover fulfilment in the nurturing support of their passion. This study is important in the unique setting of Black South African high schools, where historical echoes and present complexities come together. This study reveals the internal factors that affect teacher retention and highlights the importance of tenacity and commitment in overcoming challenges. It is crucial to understand and implement this psychosocial model, not only as an academic activity, but as a method for developing resilient and dedicated teachers. As this study's symphony ends, its lasting impact confirms a fundamental truth: teachers shape future potential, not just share information. By developing their psychological resources, individuals create a lasting impact of commitment, fulfilment, and sustained passion, which helps maintain a dynamic educational setting and promotes the growth of teaching goals.

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