

Employees' Work Engagement Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract: Work engagement is a vital force in the success of every organization. Having collectively involved and committed employees in the discharge of their functions improve organizational performance, enhances creativity, and strengthens relationships, consequently ensuring client satisfaction. This descriptive research aimed to determine and compare the employees' work engagement levels before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. It sought to understand if this health crisis has changed their work engagement practices. It also explored if the employees' levels of engagement varied when grouped according to the nature of their jobs. Data were collected through a survey with the entire population of employees of a private maritime institution in the Philippines for the academic years 2019-2020 and 2021-2022. The statistical analysis using the Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-Test of Independent Means revealed that, as a whole, the employees were very strongly engaged at work before and during the pandemic, and their levels of work engagement between these periods did not significantly differ. Administrative interventions in the form of technical, physical, moral, emotional, and financial support and well-managed employee engagement activities that could boost their mental and emotional wellness were recommended to mitigate the effect of a pandemic or crisis on employees' engagement. The study recommends a follow-up investigation on employees' engagement at work, considering other variables such as age, sex, tenure, and generational groupings. It also recommends a more objective assessment of employee work engagement with the list of criteria in harmony with the three pillars of the institution: instruction, research, and extension.

Keywords: Employees' Work Engagement, Administrative Support, COVID-19 Pandemic

1. Introduction

Work engagement is crucial for many organizations. It helps the organization to deliver superior performance and gain a competitive advantage [56, 61]. Roberts and Davenport [48] point out that work engagement is the enthusiasm employees feel concerning their work and how they express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally [29, 52]. According to Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes [26], an employee's work engagement is influenced by his work environment, the management style of his superiors, and his relationship with his colleagues [41].

Work engagement is a positive, affective-motivational state of high energy combined with high levels of dedication and a strong focus on work [51]. Organizations must have

engaged employees since work engagement has been associated with high levels of creativity, task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and client satisfaction [11]. Likewise, work engagement is a fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, high levels of energy, work enthusiasm, absorption, and the employees' complete immersion in work activities [53]. The deeper the employees' work engagement is, the more significant the amount of time they spend working, the more positive they feel about their work, and the more significant the impact of this on their life and well-being [59].

Employees with higher work engagement tend to have a higher level of personal resources, including self-efficacy,

optimism, and resilience [36]. In 2016, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) highlighted that organizations with highly engaged employees have greater profits than those without. Customer happiness, revenues, and employee productivity grow in companies with highly engaged staff [2, 16, 19, 60]. Also, employee work engagement influences the workplace's organizational culture, including a safe workplace, ownership, effective leadership, and training programs that focus on skills [31, 58].

In addition, employee work engagement strategies have been proven to reduce staff turnover, improve productivity and efficiency, retain customers at a higher rate, and make more profits [15]. Most importantly, engaged employees are happier at work and in their lives. They have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and see themselves as able to deal well with the demands of their job [51]. Even though many firms recognize the value of employee job engagement, it is not necessary to address how to raise it [62]. Employee work engagement emerged as one of the greatest challenges [39]; hence, complexities and rigid regulations in many organizations may affect it. It is critical in maintaining the organization's vitality, survival, and profitability [4, 14, 24]. It also depends on employee satisfaction and the sense of self-achievement from the job as a member of the organization [23].

When the COVID-19 global pandemic happened, and the series of lockdowns and quarantines took place, it caused an atmosphere of uncertainties and confusion, creating communication gaps and disrupting our lives. In this scenario, keeping employees engaged and passionate about work is a challenge for organizations worldwide [20].

In the locale of the study, the university considers its employees as one of its assets and priorities, which is clearly stated in the eighth university agendum, "A Competent and Productive Workforce." The same importance is emphasized in the system's IMS Policy: "to satisfy and strive to exceed stakeholders' expectations." As proof, the institution supports its employees' continuous learning and development. An annual stakeholders' satisfaction survey is conducted to pinpoint particular areas or aspects for further improvement. In line with this activity, the institution develops a culture of competence by recognizing competent and productive employees.

In addition to the Stakeholders' Satisfaction Survey, an Employee Work Engagement Survey is conducted yearly to continually monitor the employees' work engagement in the affairs of the school, given the varying surrounding scenarios that they may experience in the context of their work, the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic being one of them. In part, this study sought to find out if the pandemic has changed their level of work engagement and, if it did, which aspects have been affected by it. Findings from this survey could offer insights into keeping the employees engaged and passionate about their work and their commitment to the various school affairs that involve their active work engagement.

1.1. Framework

Several frames of thinking have pointed out the importance of employee work engagement and how such can influence certain areas within an organization. For instance, in 1990, Kahn first proposed the concept of employee work engagement as a binding practice of employees to their work roles, self-employment, and self-expression, physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their work lives. Employee work engagement is often referred to as organizational commitment or organizational citizenship [55] and emotional, physical, and intellectual commitment to an organization [6, 38, 24].

Saks and Gruman [50] synthesized employee work engagement within two categories: *attention* (the amount of time an employee spends thinking about his or her role in an organization) and *absorption* (the level of intensity an employee engages within their current roles). This means that when employees are deeply engaged, they tend to pay more attention to conscientiously performing their respective roles and giving their best efforts in committing themselves to attaining the organization's goals. Deeply engaged employees demonstrate a more positive attitude towards work and are more committed, loyal, and productive [37, 63, 49]. They show a willingness to stay in the company, work hard for the company, and maintain a positive, highly awakened emotional state with two features: energy and involvement [10].

Moreover, Cha [17] described employee work engagement as the employee's active involvement at work and his physiological state, cognition, and emotion that accompanies the work engagement, including three dimensions: work engagement, organizational recognition, and sense of work value. It is a wide-ranging term that contains different types of engagement (including traits engagement, psychological state engagement, and behavioral engagement), and each one needs different conceptualizations, such as proactive personality (traits engagement), involvement or psychological state engagement, and organizational citizenship behavior or behavioral engagement [35]. Other models of employee engagement were developed, such as a work-role focus, activation, and positive affect [57]; organizational identity, work attitude, mental state, responsibility, and effectiveness [65]; initiative, loyalty, identity, and commitment [64]; and organizational identity, dedication, absorption, vigor, pleasant and Harmony [34].

Engagement strategies implemented by employers result in higher levels of employee engagement [13], customer satisfaction, productivity, and profit, and lower levels of employee accidents and turnovers [12]. They enable employees to hold positive attitudes toward their organization [40]. The basic satisfaction needs are directly related to employees' dedication [60]. Dedicated and meaningful work enables employees to realize their value within the organization.

La Guardia [33] suggested that psychological needs form a sense of identity development by intrinsic motivation, which

results in the outcomes of interest and engagement. Using potential and commitment can influence an individual's values, behavior, and goals, which are healthy factors for an individual's identity. Moreover, Cooper-Thomas et al. [19] purport that establishing high expectations and frequent performance reviews may lead to increased employee participation and cooperation. An organization must continue incorporating processes that enhance employee engagement [22]. The main focus of employee engagement is aligning the employees with the organizational goals and going beyond what is expected [58]. An effective leader or employer highly influences the engagement of employees as it provides vision and direction for employee development.

Employee engagement reflects two essential elements: (a) willingness to contribute to organizational success and (b) a positive and energized employee [7]. The first element encompasses the employees' willingness to commit emotionally and rationally within their organization, how long they are willing to stay due to that commitment, and how dedicated they are to their work [30]. Employee engagement is multidimensional, and engaged employees are emotionally, physically, and cognitively engaged in their daily work [21]. Likewise, the work environment, direct supervisor, senior management team, and colleagues influence employee engagement [26]. The same source proved that employee engagement affects organizational performance as it relates to the five major indicators of organizational performance---productivity, profitability, customer loyalty, employee retention, and security.

Considering all the concepts mentioned above, this study aimed to determine employee engagement in the workplace. This paper also aimed to determine if this engagement level differs between the faculty and the administrative staff. From the results, the Administration may be able to determine the aspects for which the employees show high or low engagement. Furthermore, this study also aimed to compare employees' engagement before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. It sought to find out if the occurrence of the pandemic has created a change in their level of engagement and, if it did, which aspects of their engagement have been affected by it. Insights from the results can serve as a basis for deciding plans and activities relevant to employee engagement.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine and compare the levels of work engagement of the employees of a higher education institution in the Philippines before and during the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic. It sought to understand if this health crisis has changed their work engagement practices and if so, to identify which areas of employee work engagement have changed. Moreover, this study also explored if the employees' levels of engagement varied when grouped according to the nature of their jobs.

The following questions were addressed in this study:

1) What are the employees' levels of work engagement

before and during the pandemic and when grouped as Faculty and Administrative Staff?

- 2) Are there significant differences between the employees' level of work engagement before and during the pandemic and when grouped as Faculty and Administrative Staff?
- 3) In what aspect of the employees' work engagement have they been affected by the pandemic?
- 4) What proposed interventions can be recommended to mitigate the effect of a pandemic or any crisis on employees' work engagement?

1.3. Hypothesis

There are no significant differences between the employees' level of work engagement before and during the pandemic and when grouped as Faculty and Administrative Staff.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-comparative design using quantitative data. The descriptive design involves the description, recording, data gathering procedures, and data analysis. Descriptive research involves describing, recording, analyzing, and interpreting existing conditions. It also involves comparisons or contrasts and attempts to discover relationships between existing non-manipulative variables. This design was employed to describe the employees' work engagement levels before (2019-2020) and during the pandemic (2021-2022) and to compare if differences existed between the data. A comparison was also made between the data for the Faculty and the Administrative Staff.

2.2. Respondents

The survey covered the entire population of employees for the academic years 2019-2020 and 2021-2022. The 2019-2020 cohorts were composed of 97 administrative staff and 93 faculty members, but due to retrieval issues, the researchers were only able to gather a total of 136, comprising 79 administrative staff and 57 faculty members. For the AY 2021-2022, 137 employees, comprising 67 faculty members and 70 administrative staff from the population of 170, responded to the survey.

Since some employees did not consent to participate in the study, the exact computation of the sample sizes for these years was not met. However, the number of employees who answered the surveys was more than enough to represent the total number of employees for both years. The same employees who refused to participate in the 2019-2020 survey were noted in the 2021-2022 survey.

To gather substantial data for RQ No. 4, a one-on-one interview was conducted with five focal persons from among the employees. These employees were selected using simple random sampling.

2.3. Instrument

The instrument used for the survey was the product of a collaborative discussion between the Academic Council and the System Research Council of the university, with the Director for Academics spearheading its design and test for validity and reliability. The survey questionnaire was composed of 27 questions using a 5-point Likert scale, rated as 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest. The following were the ratings and descriptions used: 5 (Always), 4 (Very Often), 3 (Sometimes), 2 (Rarely), and 1 (Never).

To test the instrument for reliability, 30 employees who were not considered actual respondents were asked to answer the questionnaire. After the Administration of the test, data were treated using Cronbach's alpha method, a tool for assessing the reliability of the test. The obtained result was 0.977, interpreted as highly reliable.

2.4. Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the survey was sought from the Heads of the different offices or departments. Upon approval, the survey questionnaire was converted into its electronic version and administered online through Google Forms. Individual User's Name and Password protected the respondents' access to the online tool. Data were then downloaded, analyzed, and interpreted to address the research questions.

2.5. Statistical Tools

Mean, and standard deviation were used to describe the level of employees' work engagement and to determine which aspects they expressed Very Strong, Strong, Moderate, Weak, and Very Weak work engagement in the workplace. The following was the mean scale used in interpreting the results:

Table 1. Scale used in interpreting the employees' level of work engagement.

Mean Scale	Interpretation	Description
4.20-5.00	Very Strong	Always engaged at work
3.40-4.19	Strong	Most of the time engaged at work
2.60-3.39	Moderate	Sometimes engaged at work
1.80-2.59	Weak	Rarely engaged at work
1.00-1.79	Very weak	Never engaged at work

T-test of independent means was used to determine the significant difference between the work engagement of the JBLCF employees categorized as Faculty and Administrative Staff and before and during the Pandemic.

On the final research question, "What proposed interventions can be recommended to mitigate the effect of a pandemic or any form of a crisis on employees' work engagement?" data from the one-on-one interview with five focal persons from among the employees were noted, categorized, and analyzed using Thematic Analysis.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Each employee was asked to agree with and sign an Informed Consent before they were instructed to answer the survey. Only those who consented to participate were asked to proceed to the Survey Proper. For confidentiality purposes, no names were identified in any part of the survey and the presentation of results.

3. Results Continue Editing Here

Data in Table 2 show that for the AY 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 as a whole, the employees expressed a very strong work engagement ($m = 4.47$; $SD = 0.42$) and ($m = 4.49$; $SD = 0.41$). This implies that they were constantly engaged and committed to performing their respective roles and meeting expectations relative to their job, as evidenced by the data for each indicator in the survey.

Table 2. Level of work engagement of JBLCF-B employees before and during the pandemic.

Categories	Before the Pandemic (2019-2020)			During the Pandemic (2021-2022)		
	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Faculty	4.49	0.44	Very Strong	4.43	0.40	Very Strong
Admin staff	4.46	0.40	Very Strong	4.55	0.41	Very Strong
Total	4.47	0.42	Very Strong	4.49	0.41	Very Strong

Given this finding, it can be said that generally, the employees are satisfied, committed, and dedicated to providing the best outcomes in delivering their services to those they serve. Previous studies have found that organizations with highly engaged employees experience increased customer satisfaction and productivity [2, 16, 19, 60]. This finding also implies that they can exhibit a more positive attitude towards work. Supportive of this statement are the studies that demonstrated a high commitment, loyalty, and productivity among deeply engaged employees [37, 63, 49].

Even if Table 2 shows a very strong level of Work Engagement between the faculty and administrative staff when taken as a group and as a whole, the detailed results for

the 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 data presented comparatively in Table 3 reveal some noteworthy findings. Looking at each indicator, it can be observed that some figures (Mean ratings) have declined on specific items (shaded portions on the Table) during the pandemic.

Observed in common between the two sets of data (before and during the pandemic), the mean scores have declined for both the administrative staff and the faculty members on the following items: (4) *I feel energetic at my work*, (17) *I spend much time thinking about my work*, and (19) *I speak highly of this organization to my friends*. However, it can be seen that most of these declining values are seen among the faculty members only, specifically on the following items:

(5) *I feel positive about my job*.

(7) I find my work full of meaning and purpose.
 (9) My job inspires me.
 (11) I deal with emotional problems very calmly.
 (12) I can continue working for very long periods.
 (13) I do my best to solve problems in my job.
 (14) At work, I persist through challenges.
 (15) Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget everything.
 (16) When I am working, I often lose track of time.
 (18) This organization inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.
 (20) I enjoy working toward achieving organizational objectives.
 (21) I understand how my role relates to company goals and objectives.

(22) I perform the expected tasks to meet performance requirements.

(26) I am willing to put much effort beyond expected.

(27) I frequently make suggestions to improve the work of my department.

From these detailed results, it can be said that while the administrative staff have remained unfazed by the pandemic in most areas of their work engagement and are only negatively affected on three items also felt by the faculty, it is the faculty members' work engagement that is greatly affected during the pandemic. Noting the items listed above, it could be said that their *motivation or drive*, *resilience*, and *focus* were most affected during the pandemic, as evidenced by the slight decline in the mean ratings.

Table 3. Detailed results of the Faculty and Staff work engagement BEFORE and DURING the pandemic.

Employee's Engagement	Admin Staff				Faculty				Total			
	Before		During		Before		During		Before		During	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. At work, I am passionate about my job.	4.58	0.55	4.64	0.61	4.53	0.60	4.64	0.48	4.56	0.57	4.64	0.55
2. I am enthusiastic about my job.	4.53	0.75	4.60	0.65	4.58	0.60	4.61	0.49	4.55	0.69	4.61	0.57
3. I show a great deal of passion while performing tasks.	4.57	0.55	4.64	0.57	4.61	0.56	4.66	0.48	4.59	0.55	4.65	0.52
4. I feel energetic at my work.	4.61	0.54	4.53	0.65	4.56	0.63	4.51	0.50	4.59	0.58	4.52	0.58
5. I feel positive about my job.	4.66	0.50	4.67	0.58	4.63	0.52	4.58	0.55	4.65	0.51	4.63	0.57
6. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	4.39	0.69	4.63	0.57	4.40	0.73	4.42	0.61	4.40	0.70	4.53	0.60
7. I find the work I do full of meaning and purpose.	4.63	0.56	4.67	0.50	4.67	0.55	4.57	0.56	4.65	0.55	4.62	0.53
8. I am proud of the work that I do.	4.80	0.46	4.80	0.47	4.67	0.55	4.73	0.45	4.74	0.50	4.77	0.46
9. My job inspires me.	4.58	0.63	4.71	0.54	4.61	0.53	4.58	0.53	4.60	0.59	4.65	0.54
10. At work, my mind is focused on my job.	4.53	0.55	4.69	0.53	4.51	0.57	4.54	0.50	4.52	0.56	4.61	0.52
11. I deal with emotional problems very calmly.	4.35	0.66	4.46	0.67	4.32	0.74	4.28	0.67	4.34	0.69	4.37	0.68
12. I can continue working for very long periods.	4.37	0.66	4.50	0.68	4.44	0.71	4.24	0.72	4.40	0.68	4.37	0.71
13. I do my best to solve problems in my job.	4.47	0.75	4.79	0.45	4.65	0.55	4.55	0.56	4.54	0.68	4.67	0.52
14. At work, I persist through challenges.	4.53	0.62	4.64	0.57	4.47	0.66	4.45	0.53	4.51	0.63	4.55	0.56
15. Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget everything.	3.97	0.96	4.09	0.81	4.16	0.84	3.99	0.86	4.05	0.91	4.04	0.83
16. When I am working, I often lose track of time.	3.92	1.00	4.01	0.94	4.21	0.90	3.81	0.86	4.04	0.97	3.91	0.90
17. I spend much time thinking about my work.	4.05	0.89	4.00	0.90	4.04	0.96	3.88	0.77	4.04	0.92	3.94	0.84
18. This organization inspires the best in me in job performance.	4.33	0.67	4.30	0.73	4.44	0.66	4.25	0.68	4.38	0.67	4.28	0.70
19. I speak highly of this organization to my friends.	4.37	0.62	4.33	0.72	4.35	0.74	4.31	0.70	4.36	0.67	4.32	0.71
20. I enjoy working toward achieving organizational objectives.	4.56	0.52	4.66	0.59	4.67	0.51	4.54	0.56	4.60	0.52	4.60	0.57
21. I understand how my role relates to company goals and objectives.	4.58	0.52	4.71	0.51	4.63	0.49	4.54	0.53	4.60	0.51	4.63	0.53
22. I perform the tasks that are expected to meet performance requirements.	4.61	0.49	4.70	0.49	4.63	0.52	4.58	0.53	4.62	0.50	4.64	0.51
23. I fulfill my job description's assigned responsibilities and duties.	4.61	0.52	4.74	0.58	4.54	0.54	4.57	0.53	4.58	0.52	4.66	0.56
24. I participate in activities that will influence my performance evaluation.	4.56	0.55	4.67	0.50	4.58	0.50	4.61	0.52	4.57	0.53	4.64	0.51
25. I look for innovative ways to do my job efficiently.	4.63	0.49	4.74	0.44	4.49	0.57	4.57	0.53	4.57	0.53	4.66	0.49
26. I am willing to put in much effort beyond expected.	4.53	0.55	4.59	0.58	4.53	0.57	4.45	0.61	4.53	0.56	4.52	0.60
27. I frequently make suggestions to improve the work of my department.	4.16	0.74	4.44	0.67	4.42	0.60	4.21	0.73	4.27	0.69	4.33	0.71
As a whole	4.46	0.40	4.55	0.41	4.49	0.44	4.43	0.40	4.47	0.42	4.49	0.41

As a whole, no significant difference was found between the level of work engagement in the workplace of the employees categorized as faculty and administrative staff, both BEFORE and AFTER the pandemic, as shown in Table 4. From this finding, it can be inferred that both groups are comparably the same in their level of work engagement when

taken as a whole, regardless of their nature of work. This result reflects their willingness to stay in the company and work hard to attain its goals and objectives. This widespread work engagement indicates a positive work environment and a highly awakened emotional state and energy within the organization [10].

In this study, however, any slight change in the level of work engagement, whether statistically different or not, is worth considering in making administrative decisions

because, in some cases, these movements in the evaluation of certain indicators speak of work-related issues that cannot be all the time said or expressed verbally by the employees.

Table 4. T-Test Results on Difference in Employee's Engagement.

Employee	Employee Engagement Before Pandemic				t	p	Interpretation
	n	Mean	SD	df			
Faculty	57	4.49	0.44	134	0.33	0.74	Not significant @ 0.05 alpha level of significance
Admin staff	79	4.46	0.40				
Total	136	4.47	0.42				

Employee	Employee Engagement During Pandemic				t	p	Interpretation
	n	Mean	SD	df			
Faculty	67	4.43	0.40	135	1.77	0.08	Not significant @ 0.05 alpha level of significance
Admin staff	70	4.55	0.41				
Total	137	4.49	0.41				

*p<0.05, significant at 0.05 alpha level of significance

Furthermore, Table 5 shows no significant difference between the employees' levels of work engagement before and during the pandemic. This implies that although they might have been negatively affected by the pandemic, their level of engagement did not significantly deteriorate when it struck them for two years since the first lockdown in March 2020.

Table 5. Employees' work engagement BEFORE and DURING the pandemic.

Employee's Engagement	df	t	p	Interpretation
Before Pandemic	135	0.42	0.68	Not significant @ 0.05 alpha level of significance
During Pandemic				

Recommended Interventions to Mitigate the Effect of a Pandemic or Crisis on Employees' Engagement

The final research question in this study is "What proposed interventions can be recommended to mitigate the effect of a pandemic or any form of a crisis on employees' work engagement?" A one-on-one interview was conducted with five focal persons from among the employees to gather substantial data on this concern. These employees were randomly selected using simple random sampling. From a thematic analysis of their responses, the following recommendations were derived:

Strong Administrative Support. The interviewed employees specifically mentioned wanting technical, physical, moral, emotional, and financial support from the Administration. By technical and physical support, they mean providing what they need to deliver their classes online to make their situation less stressful and more convenient. This includes a steady internet source, conducive and safe workspaces, and teaching equipment and devices within their reach. With moral and emotional support, they expect the Administration to be more sensitive and understand what they are going through. They said that just like other schools, they wish they could also be allowed most of the working days to work from home instead of reporting to school, which could make them more prone to the virus. Monitoring their attendance can be done online, and working from home could save them from spending on their daily transportation, especially when their finances are tight during the pandemic.

Schaufeli et al. [53] defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. According to Eisenberger et al.

(2016), cited in Nguyen and Tran [42], employees have a generalized sense of how much their employer values their contributions and is concerned about their well-being. This perception of organizational support affects their feelings about their employers [18, 5]. Employees who feel they have a high degree of organizational support tend to be more motivated in the workplace. They have positive attitudes and behaviors and are better committed to their work than other employees who feel less supported by their organizations [42]. Moreover, according to the same source, there are three pleasant treatments from organizations that could improve the perceived organizational support, such as the organizational rewards, the conditions of work, and support from and fairness of supervisors.

Employee Engagement Activities. By this, they mean activities that could boost their mental and emotional wellness. With the crazy effects of the pandemic on their mental and emotional state, they crave activities that could create a closer bond among themselves despite the physical distance, virtual activities through which they could talk and share each other's experiences and even their skills and talents as they cheer each other up amid the challenges and difficulties they are facing. Unlike when they are called for a meeting to only talk about updates and problems about work, they want to experience activities that could strengthen the sense of connection and empathy between themselves and the Administration. Combining resilience and engagement activities may contribute to an enhanced productivity of employees [5]. These programs could include approaches to avoid burnout by directly influencing subjective engagement to experience vigor and dedication. Employers need to

comprehend their employees' needs and wants. The massive effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees' private and work lives is prompting employee anxiety, frustration, and burnout. When left unattended, these emotions can influence employee engagement and performance, resulting in poor work quality and mistakes and, in the long run affecting a company's capacity to survive in these troublesome occasions [1].

4. Discussion

Schools are primarily deliverers of education. Teachers are at the forefront of whether the delivery of learning to students will succeed. With the transition from traditional face-to-face to the New Normal online/hybrid mode of instruction, teachers have been bombarded by many expectations. In meeting these expectations, they face barriers and challenges right from home, including a lack of basic facilities, external distractions, and family interruption during instruction and assessments [28]. At school, they are confronted with more challenges, such as the budget for purchasing advanced technologies, a lack of training, a lack of technical support and facilities [43], a lack of clarity and direction, communication and collaboration difficulties between teachers and students [25], and technical difficulties [8].

In the study of Akour et al. [3], it was found that 31% of teachers had severe distress, and 38% had mild to moderate distress. According to the same source, *engagement with family* was the most reported self-copying activity during the pandemic. More than half of the participants were most concerned and fearful about the threat posed by SARS-CoV-2 infection that could affect them and their families. So left between their concern for their family at home and their students in their virtual classes, teachers have experienced various levels of distress that have affected them psychologically [3]. Teachers who experienced more stressors reported worse mental health and found it harder to cope and teach [9].

Furthermore, Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. [44] found that 17%, 19%, and 30% of teachers reported levels of anxiety, depression, and stress during the pandemic. These scenarios also hold true among the faculty respondents in this study. Given these observations, schools must take the initiative to ensure that the teaching workforce is supported enough to create a sense of security amid the pressures they face during a pandemic.

In a multiple regression analysis done by Prasad et al. [45], it was found that organizational climate and job satisfaction, among other factors, significantly influence the psychological well-being of the employees in a technologically-driven industry such as the educational system at the height of the pandemic when teachers are made to conduct their classes online or in a hybrid set-up. From this finding, it can be said that when employees are struck by a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, they could be shaken but remain steadfast in a supportive and caring work environment.

However, it could not be denied that the employees' work

engagement has taken a blow, particularly in their motivation or drive, resilience, and focus. With the pandemic not ending yet, they could reach the point of exhaustion and loosen their hold on their commitment to continue to engage incessantly.

Several pieces of literature have presented some interesting points on this matter. Several studies have noted that employees' financial insecurity due to economic fallout resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the top contributors to stress [27, 32]. Financial distress has been positively correlated with high absenteeism [46]. It has also been negatively associated with work engagement, workplace performance, and organizational commitment [54]. When their employers in mandatory quarantine cannot provide job protection and income replacement, employees are likely to experience a complicated array of negative emotions and stress that may impair their work effort and resources [47]. Hence, wherever possible, remote working options and felt support need to be worked out by the employer in all sectors to reduce stress and enhance the psychological well-being of employees [45]).

5. Conclusion

Employee engagement in the workplace is a vital factor that can contribute to the success of an organization. It is a crucial indicator of employees who are committed, loyal, enthusiastic, productive, motivated, and willing to give their best to attain organizational goals. The findings gathered from this study have revealed positive results. First, it was gathered that, as a whole, the employees were very strongly engaged at work before and during the pandemic. Second, their levels of work engagement before and during the pandemic did not significantly differ. This result means that even after the pandemic hit them, their sense of commitment to engage themselves at work did not significantly deteriorate or diminish.

However, small details detected on specific indicators of work engagement have shown evidence that the teaching employees are the ones who have been most affected, particularly in their motivation or drive, resilience, and focus at work. This has been attributed to the numerous adjustments they had to face in the transition from in-class to online instructors and their worries over the threats of COVID-19 on themselves and their respective families, which could have financial repercussions.

Administrative intervention in the form of technical, physical, moral, emotional, and financial support and well-managed employee engagement activities that could boost their mental and emotional wellness was recommended to mitigate the effect of a pandemic or crisis on employees' engagement.

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