



Work-Life Balance and Teacher Work Engagement among Pre-Primary School Teachers in Greater Mukono, Uganda

Miria Nandera, Wilson Mugizi, and Josephine Matha Apolot
Kyambogo University, Uganda.
Email: mirianander@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study examined the relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement among pre-primary school teachers in Greater Mukono, Uganda. The study specifically examined the levels of work-life balance and teacher work engagement and the relationship between the two variables. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 153 pre-primary teachers using structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained from 20 key informants. Descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank-order correlation were used to analyse the quantitative data, while qualitative data were analysed using content analysis. The findings showed that teachers reported high levels of work engagement ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.37$) and moderate overall work-life balance ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.37$). Overall work-life balance was weakly and positively related to teacher work engagement, but the relationship was not statistically significant ($p = .150$, $p = .064$). At the dimensional level, work flexibility was positively and significantly associated with teacher work engagement ($p = .205$, $p = .011$), whereas workload and personal life were not significantly associated with engagement. Qualitative findings indicated that predictable work schedules, weekends, and school holidays provided teachers with opportunities to attend to personal responsibilities while maintaining their professional roles. The findings suggest that although overall work-life balance was not significantly associated with teacher work engagement, work flexibility may be an important aspect of the work environment for sustaining teachers' engagement. The study recommends strengthening flexible work practices where these are compatible with teaching requirements.*

Keywords: *Work-life balance, Teacher work engagement, Pre-primary school teachers, Uganda.*

How to cite this work (APA):

Nandera, M., Mugizi, W. & Apolot, J. M. (2026). Work-Life Balance and Teacher Work Engagement among Pre-Primary School Teachers in Greater Mukono, Uganda. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 10(3), 1127 – 1135. <https://doi.org/10.59765/tr4y7>

1. Introduction

Teacher work engagement has become a popular topic in educational research because of its relevance to teachers' well-being and learners' outcomes. Research has linked teacher engagement and well-being with favourable educational outcomes, including student academic achievement (Wang, 2022; Granziera et al., 2023). At the same time, teaching profession is a demanding profession and exposes teachers to various emotional and job-related pressures that may contribute to exhaustion and burnout (Huang et al., 2022). In early childhood education, these challenges may be more diverse where teachers sometimes

work in demanding environments characterized by substantial workload demands and diverse responsibilities (Villanen et al., 2026). Understanding the conditions that support and sustain engagement among early childhood teachers is therefore important.

Globally, research has examined teacher work engagement in relation to the conditions under which teachers perform their work. Runhaar et al. (2013), for example, highlighted the role of human resource practices and interactions with pupils as job resources that can support teachers' work engagement. More recent research has continued to demonstrate the importance of individual and

organisational resources in sustaining teacher engagement. Alene et al. (2025), for instance, identified collaboration, participation, and involvement in school activities as important aspects of teachers' work engagement. Similarly, Johnson (2022) found a relationship between teacher self-efficacy and work engagement among teachers working in international schools in China. These studies suggest that teacher engagement is shaped by both individual resources and the organisational conditions in which teachers work.

Evidence from African educational contexts similarly suggests that teachers' engagement is influenced by their working conditions and organisational environments. In Ethiopia, Alene et al. (2025) found that collaboration, participation, and involvement in teaching and non-teaching activities were relevant to teachers' work engagement. In Uganda, Sefu and Chrispo (2025) found that transformational leadership was associated with teacher work engagement among primary school teachers in Sheema Municipality. These findings point to the importance of organisational and interpersonal conditions in sustaining teachers' work engagement. However, evidence remains limited for teachers working specifically in pre-primary education.

In Uganda, evidence on teacher work engagement among pre-primary teachers, particularly in Central Uganda, remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on primary school teachers in Western and Northern Uganda. For example, Sefu and Chrispo (2025) found that transformational leadership was an important determinant of teacher work engagement among public primary school teachers in Sheema Municipality. Similarly, Olanya and Okongo (2025) demonstrated the importance of organisational factors in understanding teacher work engagement among primary school teachers in the Acholi Sub-region. Although these studies provide useful evidence on teacher work engagement in Uganda, their focus on primary education leaves limited understanding of work engagement among pre-primary teachers in Central Uganda. This study therefore sought to contribute evidence on work-life balance and teacher work engagement among pre-primary school teachers in Greater Mukono.

Work-life balance has also received attention in studies of teachers because of the competing demands associated with professional and personal responsibilities. Previous research suggests that teachers' ability to manage these demands is associated with positive work-related outcomes (Obasi & Adieme, 2021; Thociba, 2024). Work-life balance may provide teachers with opportunities to manage their professional responsibilities alongside personal and family demands, thereby preserving the cognitive and emotional resources required for their work. Wang (2024), for example, examined workload, organisational support, and work engagement in relation to teachers' psychological well-being. In this study, work-life balance was

operationalised through three dimensions namely work flexibility, workload, and personal life, adapted from the work-life balance scale developed by Avadhani and Menon (2022).

Despite growing interest in work-life balance and teacher engagement, much of the existing evidence has focused on elementary and secondary school teachers. Limited evidence is available on the relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement among pre-primary teachers, particularly in Central Uganda. This gap is important because pre-primary teachers work within educational settings that involve distinctive responsibilities and working conditions. The present study therefore examined the relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement among pre-primary school teachers in Greater Mukono, Uganda.

Greater Mukono, comprising Buikwe, Buvuma, Kayunga, and Mukono districts, was selected because of its distinctive educational and socio-economic context. Several communities in the area depend on fishing and market activities, which may interact with school routines (Buikwe District Local Government, 2025). Previous evidence has also highlighted challenges related to teacher punctuality and attendance as well as large classes, limited infrastructure, and inadequate support supervision (Masaaba et al., 2021; NPA, 2022; Kisunzu, 2022). These contextual conditions provide a relevant setting for examining how teachers manage work and personal responsibilities alongside their engagement in teaching.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study sought to examine the relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement among pre-primary teachers in Greater Mukono, Uganda.

1.3 Specific Objectives

1. To establish the levels of teacher work engagement among pre-primary school teachers.
2. To determine the levels of work-life balance among pre-primary school teachers.
3. To examine the relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement among pre-primary school teachers.

1.4 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions.

- RQ1. What is the level of teacher work engagement among pre-primary school teachers in Greater Mukono, Uganda, according to gender and school category?

RQ2. What is the level of work-life balance among pre-primary school teachers in Greater Mukono, Uganda, according to gender and school category?

RQ3. What is the relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement among pre-primary school teachers in Greater Mukono, Uganda?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was underpinned by the Job Demands - Resources (JD-R) framework, initially proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001) and subsequently developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007). The framework posits that job characteristics can be classified as job demands or job resources, which influence employees' well-being and work engagement. Within the JD-R framework, workload represents a potential job demand, while work flexibility may function as a job resource that enables teachers to manage competing work and personal responsibilities. Such resources may help teachers manage their energy and remain cognitively and emotionally engaged in their work. The theory therefore provides a useful basis for examining whether different dimensions of work-life balance are associated with teacher work engagement.

2.2 Empirical Review

Work-Life Balance and Teacher Work Engagement.

The relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement can be understood through the availability and conservation of personal and job resources. Teachers who are able to manage professional and personal responsibilities may have greater capacity to devote cognitive and emotional resources to their work. On the other hand, persistent conflict between work and personal responsibilities may consume resources and make sustained engagement more difficult (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2014). Studies provide some support for a positive association between work-life balance and engagement. Kaur and Randhawa (2024), for example, examined government school teachers in India and found a significant positive relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement. The authors recommended teacher-friendly organisational practices that enable teachers to manage work and family demands while remaining engaged in their work. This finding suggests that favourable work-life conditions may contribute to teachers' ability to remain psychologically invested in their work. However, the relationship between work-life balance and engagement may not be uniform across contexts or dimensions.

Evidence from the JD-R literature indicates that specific job resources may be more directly associated with

engagement than broader measures of work-life balance. Job resources such as autonomy, control, supportive relationships, and organisational support can facilitate goal attainment and stimulate motivation, thereby supporting work engagement (Bakker et al., 2014; Collie, 2023). This suggests that the particular characteristics of work-life balance experienced by teachers may be important when examining its association with engagement. These studies remain inconclusive regarding whether overall work-life balance is consistently associated with teacher work engagement. While Kaur and Randhawa (2024) reported a significant positive relationship among government school teachers, the importance of particular job resources in predicting engagement suggests that the relationship may vary according to the dimensions of work-life balance examined and the context in which teachers work. This variation provides justification for examining work-life balance not only as an overall construct but also through its specific dimensions.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature has focused on teachers in primary, secondary, or general school settings, while comparatively little research has examined pre-primary teachers. Evidence from early childhood education has predominantly focused on workload, working conditions, and educator well-being rather than directly examining the relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement (Harper et al., 2025; Bezie et al., 2025). In Uganda, the limited available evidence on teacher work engagement has also largely concentrated on primary and secondary education (Olanya & Okongo, 2025; Sefu & Chrispo, 2025). Consequently, there is a contextual and population-specific gap concerning the relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement among pre-primary teachers in Greater Mukono. The present study therefore, addresses this gap by examining the relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement among pre-primary school teachers in Greater Mukono, Uganda. In addition to examining overall work-life balance, the study considers work flexibility, workload, and personal life as distinct dimensions, thereby providing a more differentiated understanding of how aspects of teachers' work-life experiences relate to their engagement.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected and analysed first to establish the levels of work-life balance and teacher work engagement and to examine their relationship. Qualitative data were subsequently collected to provide contextual explanations for the quantitative

findings. The findings from the two phases were integrated during interpretation.

3.2 Population

The study population comprised pre-primary school teachers in Greater Mukono as the primary participants because they were directly involved in teaching and were therefore best positioned to provide information about their work-life balance and work engagement. Head teachers and inspectors of schools were included as key informants because of their administrative and supervisory roles and their knowledge of teachers' working conditions.

3.3 Sampling and Sample Size

A multistage sampling procedure was employed. For the quantitative component, the study area was first stratified into the four districts of Greater Mukono: Mukono, Buikwe, Kayunga, and Buvuma. Within each district, lists of pre-primary schools were obtained and stratified into rural and urban categories to ensure representation of the two settings. Schools were then selected from each stratum using simple random sampling, resulting in 43 schools. In the second stage, census sampling was used to include all eligible pre-primary teachers in the selected schools, yielding 153 teachers. This approach was appropriate because most pre-primary schools in the study area had two, and at most three, teachers, making it feasible to include the entire teacher population within the selected schools. For the qualitative component, head teachers and inspectors of schools were purposively selected based on their administrative and supervisory responsibilities and their knowledge of teachers' working conditions.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review, which assessed the relevance, clarity, and contextual appropriateness of the questionnaire items. The questionnaire was subsequently pilot-tested among pre-primary teachers who were not included in the main study. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with the coefficients used to evaluate the reliability of the scales before the main data collection.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 20. Means and standard deviations were used to describe the levels of work-life balance and teacher work engagement. Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine the association between work-life balance and teacher work engagement because the analysis focused on the relationship between the variables. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < .05$. Qualitative interview data were analysed using content analysis and used to explain and contextualise the quantitative findings.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for educational research. Ethical approval was obtained from the Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee (UCUREC-2025-844) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), under registration number SS4033ES. Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from Kyambogo University and the relevant district authorities in the study area. Before data collection, participants were provided with adequate information about the study and gave informed consent to participate. Confidentiality and privacy were maintained throughout the research process, and participants' information was handled solely for the purposes of the study. Following data analysis, the findings were shared with selected participants to facilitate member checking and enhance the credibility of the qualitative findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The sample included teachers from both urban and rural schools and comprised both male and female teachers.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	12	7.8
	Female	141	92.2
School Location	Urban	79	51.6
	Rural	74	48.4

Table 1 indicates that the sample was predominantly female, with female teachers comprising 92.2% of respondents compared with 7.8% male teachers. Regarding school location, the respondents were relatively evenly distributed between urban (51.6%) and rural (48.4%) settings, with a slightly higher proportion drawn from urban schools.

4.1.2 Levels of Teacher Work Engagement

Objective 1 sought to establish the level of teacher work engagement among pre-primary school teachers. Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the mean and standard deviation of the engagement scores. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Work Engagement

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Teacher Work Engagement	153	3.67	5.00	4.35	0.37

The findings in table 2 show that pre-primary school teachers reported a high level of work engagement, with a mean score of 4.35 (SD = 0.37). Scores ranged from 3.67 to 5.00, while the relatively small standard deviation

indicates that teachers' reported levels of engagement were relatively consistent across the sample. Further analysis was conducted to assess teachers work engagement across its dimensions. The results are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Work Engagement Dimensions (N = 153)

Dimension	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Cognitive Engagement (CE)	3.67	5.00	4.39	0.40
Emotional Engagement (EE)	2.67	5.00	4.43	0.44
Social Engagement – Learners (SEL)	3.33	5.00	4.34	0.45
Social Engagement – Colleagues (SEC)	3.00	5.00	4.22	0.45

In Table 3 teachers reported that emotional engagement was the highest-rated dimension of teacher work engagement among pre-primary school teachers (M = 4.43, SD = 0.44). This was followed by cognitive engagement (M = 4.39, SD = 0.40) and social engagement with learners (M = 4.34, SD = 0.45), while social engagement with colleagues recorded the lowest mean score (M = 4.22, SD = 0.45).

4.1.3 Levels of Work Life Balance

Objective 2 sought to determine the level of work-life balance among pre-primary school teachers. Descriptive statistics were used to assess teachers' reported work-life balance based on the mean and standard deviation of their scores. Further analysis examined the levels of work-life balance across its dimensions. The results are presented in the subsequent tables.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Work-Life Balance

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Work-Life Balance	153	2.25	4.50	3.58	0.37

The descriptive results in table 4 reveal that pre-primary teachers reported a moderate level of work-life balance, with a mean score of 3.58 (SD = 0.37). Individual scores ranged from 2.25 to 4.50, indicating some variation in

teachers' experiences of balancing their work and personal responsibilities. However, the relatively small standard deviation suggests that responses were generally clustered around the mean.

Table 5: Levels of Work-Life Balance by Dimension

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Work Flexibility	153	2.00	5.00	3.78	0.50
Personal Life	153	1.40	5.00	3.73	0.64
Work Load	153	2.00	5.00	3.67	0.50

The analysis in table 5 revealed that among the three dimensions, work flexibility recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.50$), followed by personal life ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.64$) and workload ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.50$). Overall, the results indicate relatively favourable experiences across the three dimensions of work-life balance.

The qualitative findings provide useful context for understanding the relatively high level of work flexibility ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.50$) reported by the teachers. Participants described having structured teaching schedules, holidays, weekends, and public holidays that provided opportunities to attend to personal and family responsibilities outside school hours. For example, one female teacher explained that the school timetable allowed her to complete teaching responsibilities within the scheduled hours and subsequently attend to personal activities at home: *“This work schedule is flexible enough to enable me to go back home and handle my personal issues without encroaching on school time”* (Female teacher 1).

Similarly, another participant highlighted the availability of weekends, public holidays, and school holidays as opportunities to engage in personal activities.

“...you know working in a school, we have a lot of time as teachers to do our private work. For example, we have holidays, public holidays, and weekends, all these days we don’t work in the school, we are at home attending to personal business.” (Female teacher 3).

A male participant further explained that these periods allowed teachers to spend time with their families and

return to school feeling ready and committed to work as per the excerpt below:

“Our school have holidays we don’t do school work all that time is for your family, so by the time you go back, you are ready and committed to work. Sometimes when the holidays are too long you miss school and your learners.” (Male teacher 4).

These accounts suggest that predictable work schedules and periods away from school may enable teachers to manage their professional and personal responsibilities, thereby supporting the relatively favourable level of work flexibility reported quantitatively.

From a Job Demands-Resources perspective, work load represents a job demand, whereas flexibility can function as a job resource that enables teachers to manage competing demands. The absence of a significant relationship between work load and engagement, alongside the significant association between work flexibility and engagement, may therefore suggest that teachers' engagement is influenced not only by the demands they experience but also by the resources available to them to manage those demands.

4.1.4 The relationship between Work-life balance and Teacher Work Engagement

The study examined the relationship between work-life balance and teacher work engagement among pre-primary teachers in Central Uganda. The results are presented in table 6.

Table 6: Spearman’s Rank-Order Correlations between Work-Life Balance Dimensions and Teacher Work Engagement

Work-life balance dimension	P	p-value
Overall work-life balance	.150	.064
Work flexibility	.205	.011
Work load	-.036	.660
Personal life	.093	.251

Note. $N = 153$. ρ = Spearman’s rank-order correlation coefficient. p values are two-tailed. $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance.

In table 6, Spearman's rank-order correlation revealed a weak positive but statistically non-significant association between overall work-life balance and teacher work engagement ($\rho = .150$, $p = .064$, $N = 153$). At the dimensional level, work flexibility was positively and significantly associated with teacher work engagement ($\rho = .205$, $p = .011$), whereas workload ($\rho = -.036$, $p = .660$) and personal life ($\rho = .093$, $p = .251$) were not significantly associated with teacher work engagement. Thus, although higher work-life balance tended to coincide with slightly higher engagement, the overall association was not statistically significant in this sample. This suggests that, although teachers with higher levels of work-life balance tended to report slightly higher levels of work engagement, the evidence was insufficient to establish a statistically significant relationship among the pre-primary teachers in the study.

4.2 Discussion

The moderate level of overall work-life balance indicates that teachers were generally able to accommodate their professional and personal responsibilities, although this balance was not consistently high. This finding is understandable given the competing demands associated with teaching. Harper et al. (2025), for example, found that early childhood educators experienced workload demands that extended beyond scheduled working hours, with relatively few reporting a good balance between contact and non-contact workload. Similarly, Bezie et al. (2025) reported competing professional and family demands among kindergarten teachers in Ethiopia. Mloyi (2022) also identified workload and resource constraints as challenges to educators' work-life balance in an African context. These findings suggest that teachers may be able to accommodate competing responsibilities without necessarily experiencing a consistently high level of work-life balance.

The relatively high level of work flexibility provides an important explanation for teachers' experiences of work-life balance in this study. The qualitative findings showed that teachers valued predictable teaching schedules, weekends, public holidays, and school holidays because these periods allowed them to attend to personal and family responsibilities. One participant explained that the school timetable enabled her to attend to personal matters after completing her teaching responsibilities. Another described weekends and holidays as opportunities to engage in private activities. These accounts suggest that predictable work schedules may provide teachers with temporal resources that help them manage competing responsibilities.

From a JD-R perspective, work flexibility may function as a job resource because it can help employees manage competing demands and preserve resources that can be

invested in their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2014). Recent evidence among teachers also suggests that work-life balance is relevant to work engagement. Kaur and Randhawa (2024), for example, found a significant positive relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement among government school teachers. However, the relationship may not be uniform across contexts or dimensions. Arceta (2020) found that job resources were positively associated with work engagement, while overall work-life balance was not significantly associated with engagement. In the present study, the significant positive association between work flexibility and teacher work engagement may therefore indicate that flexibility operates as a more specific job resource than overall work-life balance.

The absence of a statistically significant relationship between overall work-life balance and teacher work engagement suggests that work-life balance, considered as a composite construct, may not be sufficient to explain variations in teacher engagement in this context. However, the significant positive association between work flexibility and teacher work engagement provides a more differentiated picture. From a JD-R perspective, flexibility may function as a job resource because it enables teachers to manage competing demands while retaining resources for their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2014). The qualitative findings support this interpretation, as teachers described having periods outside scheduled teaching time that enabled them to attend to personal responsibilities and return to school ready to work. The findings therefore suggest that specific work-life balance resources, particularly flexibility, may be more relevant to engagement than work-life balance considered as a single overall construct.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study found that pre-primary school teachers in Greater Mukono reported high levels of teacher work engagement and moderate overall work-life balance. Emotional engagement was the highest-rated dimension of work engagement, while work flexibility recorded the highest mean among the work-life balance dimensions. Overall work-life balance was weakly and positively, but not significantly, associated with teacher work engagement. However, work flexibility was positively and significantly associated with engagement, whereas workload and personal life were not. The findings therefore suggest that work-life balance is not a uniform construct in relation to teacher engagement and that specific resources, particularly work flexibility, may be more relevant to sustaining teachers' engagement.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. School administrators should strengthen flexible work practices where these are compatible with teaching requirements. Predictable timetables and reasonable scheduling of meetings and school activities may help teachers manage professional and personal responsibilities.
2. School administrators and education authorities should monitor teachers' workloads and minimise unnecessary administrative demands that may extend beyond scheduled working hours.
3. Schools should strengthen collegial interaction through collaborative planning, peer support, and professional learning activities, given that social engagement with colleagues recorded the lowest mean among the dimensions of teacher work engagement.
4. Education authorities and proprietors of pre-primary institutions should consider work-life balance within teacher-support policies, particularly through reasonable working hours, predictable schedules, appropriate leave arrangements, and manageable workloads.

5.3 Future Research

Future studies should investigate the work-life balance–work engagement relationship among larger and more diverse samples of pre-primary teachers across different regions of Uganda. Longitudinal or qualitative studies could also provide further insight into how teachers' work-life experiences change over time and how specific organisational practices influence their engagement.

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