



THE MEDIATING EFFECT WORK ENGAGEMENT ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAY SATISFACTION AND TEACHER CREATIVITY AT SMK “XYZ” IN SIDOARJO

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to identify the role of work engagement in mediating the influence of pay satisfaction on teacher creativity at SMK “XYZ” in Sidoarjo. Data was collected by distributing the questionnaire. One hundred seventeen teachers were respondents in our study. The results of testing using PLS-SEM showed that the influence of pay satisfaction on teacher creativity is not significant, but pay satisfaction significantly increases work engagement. The study finds that work engagement has a positive influence on teacher creativity. Furthermore, the results indicated that work engagement mediates the effect of pay satisfaction on the creativity of teachers. Thus, teachers who are satisfied with their pay have higher work engagement, which further increases their creativity.

INTRODUCTION

Creativity is an important factor that contributes to the effectiveness and success of organizations (Aldabbas et al., 2023), including vocational high schools (i.e., Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan or SMK). SMK aims to produce graduates who are ready to enter the world of work, are creative, and innovative (Majalah Jendela, 2023). Besides hard skills, SMK graduates also need to have soft skill competence (Apriyani et al., 2020). The lack of competence of SMK graduates may reduce their ability to be absorbed the world of work (Arlinta, 2019). The teaching quality of the teacher is an important factor to drive the high student academics (Zhao & Ko, 2020) and improved absorption of SMK graduates in the world of work (Arlinta, 2019). The quality of this teacher is demonstrated, among other things, by the teacher's ability to design creative learning processes (Tamsah et al., 2021). A creative teacher will enhance the competence and benefits of students in the labor market (Burayeva et al., 2020).

Teachers with creative learning activities are effective teachers (Sharma & Sharma, 2017). They will allow their students to propose new ideas, encourage disciplined behaviour, take risks, and accept uncertainties (Sharma & Sharma, 2017). Based on social exchange theory (SET), individuals who receive benefits from their organization will respond positively and benefit their organizations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This kindness can be a gift of resources like money (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Furthermore, organizational treatment, such as caring for employees, will be responded to with positive behavior such as creativity that helps the achievement of organizational goals (Al-Husseini, 2023).

Consistent with social exchange theory, individuals who experience job satisfaction will respond with positive behavior (Yalabik et al., 2017). Empirically, Miao et al. (2020) found that job satisfaction is positively correlate to creativity. One aspect of job satisfaction is pay (Yalabik et al., 2017). The term pay may refer to the salary received by an individual for a job already done (Cai et al., 2018). Employees who are satisfied with the income they receive will improve their performance (Jung & Yoon, 2015). Nevertheless, previous studies that investigated the relationship

between job satisfaction and creativity focused on various aspects of work that provide satisfaction (Akgunduz et al., 2018; Miao et al., 2020). Furthermore, although several studies have found a link between pay satisfaction and employee attitudes and work behavior, such as those by Jung & Yoon (2015) and Memon et al. (2021), few studies investigate the impact of pay satisfaction on teacher creativity.

In the previous studies, such as Miao et al. (2020) and Norouzpour & Pourmohammadi (2019), job satisfaction boosted creativity. Study of Kolyvas et al. (2024) of visual arts teachers found that the satisfaction of information needs affects teacher creativity. However, Chuang et al. (2019) found that job satisfaction is not significantly related to creativity. Magdaleno et al. (2020) also found that extrinsic job satisfaction does not significantly predict the emergence of creative performance. Moreover, studies investigating the role of extrinsic rewards (including salaries) on creativity showed contradictory results (Zhang et al., 2015). Based on the results of this discovery, there may be some explanatory factors about how a satisfied individual will become more creative. Referring to the findings of Håvold et al. (2021) and Wirawan et al. (2020), job satisfaction contributes to improved work engagement. Although work engagement is considered an important antecedent of creativity (Ismail et al., 2019), few studies have tested the relationship between the two (Aldabbas et al., 2023). Furthermore, work engagement has been identified as a mediator between creativity and its antecedents (Al-Ajlouni, 2021; Hui et al., 2020). Work engagement has been found to be a mediator in the relationship between total rewards satisfaction and employee creativity in the field of research and development work in China (Wang et al., 2022). These findings align with social exchange theory that satisfied individuals will increasingly show higher work engagement and become more creative.

In the world of work, there are interesting issues about work engagement. Various surveys show that less than 30% of employees worldwide have a high level of engagement (Memon et al., 2021). A Gallup survey in 2022 for Southeast Asia (including Indonesia) also shows fewer than 30% of employees have engaged (Gallup, 2023). Specifically, research in 2015 showed that the level of engagement among teachers in Indonesia is decreasing at higher levels of education (Sasmoko, 2019). However, Adjie & Batubara's (2023) survey of teachers at one of the state high schools in Kuningan district in Indonesia shows that teachers generally have high engagement in their work. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate whether teachers who are satisfied with their salary will be more committed to their work and further enhance their creativity.

SMK XYZ is one of the public vocational schools in Sidoarjo. The teachers who work at this SMK need to have high creativity in compiling their teaching modules and use several approaches that facilitate the entire needs of the pupils. Using the "Merdeka Belajar" platform describes the demand for a high level of creativity in sharing good practices with other teachers. Moreover, in the design of "Merdeka Belajar", the curriculum prioritizes flexibility and focuses on the development of the character and competence of the pupils (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). This condition supports the purpose of this study because SMK teachers are faced with the need to develop creativity in teaching so that students can understand and master the skills demanded by the world of industry.

Our study aims to identify the relationship between pay satisfaction, work engagement, and teacher creativity and the mediating role of work engagement on the relationship between pay satisfaction and the creativity of SMK "XYZ" teachers in Sidoarjo. Our study contribution is to supplement the understanding of teacher creativity by considering the role of pay satisfaction as a predictor and work engagement as a mediator. This relationship model has yet to be identified, specifically for the object of research: teachers at SMK. Referring to Javid et al. (2023), few studies investigate teachers' creativity. Our study findings reinforce the importance of human resource management practices in giving satisfactory rewards and encouraging teachers to work with high engagement and creativity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Creativity, Pay Satisfaction, and Work Engagement

Creativity is the ability of people to generate an unusual number of new ideas and develop them into something detailed (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2016). Creativity is also a new product, process, and valuable thinking (Parhamnia et al., 2022), a solution to a problem or a response to a situation (Sharma & Sharma, 2017). Moreover, all individuals can possess and develop creativity (Sharma & Sharma, 2017). Thus, creativity can be built and developed by the organization. In education, teacher creativity plays an important role in building the effectiveness of the learning process (Javid et al., 2023) and increasing student interest and academic achievement (Ma, 2022). Teachers who produce and implement their creative ideas can increase their students' interest in learning.

Pay satisfaction is individuals' positive or negative affection or feeling for their salary (Memon et al., 2021). According to Cai et al. (2018), pay satisfaction is the overall positive experience of individuals with the salaries they receive. The extent to which an individual is satisfied with their salary is determined by several factors, such as whether the amount of salary they receive is in line with their contribution to the organization, such as commitment, knowledge, and skills (Memon et al., 2021); level, salary increase, and policies made about the salary (Tang et al., 2005).

Based on social exchange theory, individuals who obtain favorable treatment from others will reciprocate with favorable attitudes and work behavior to the other party (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Akgunduz et al. (2018) and Miao et al. (2020) found a positive relationship between individuals experiencing job satisfaction and their creativity. Furthermore, individuals who receive extrinsic awards will reciprocate by engaging in creativity (Aldabbas et al., 2023). Moreover, teachers who are satisfied with their salaries will increase their work (Cai et al., 2018). Therefore, pay satisfaction and teacher creativity may have a positive relationship. When teachers are satisfied with their pay, they give and implement their creative ideas for the progress of their classroom and school.

H1: Pay satisfaction has a positive effect on teacher creativity.

Work engagement is an emotional condition characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Enthusiastic individuals demonstrate determination, a strong mentality, and consistent effort in their work; dedication is shown with high enthusiasm and involvement in their job; and absorption is demonstrated with high concentration at work (Yalabik et al., 2017). Drawing on social exchange theory, individuals who receive valuable things and satisfy them will be encouraged to reciprocate by increasing engagement in work (Yalabik et al., 2017). Individuals who have already received a salary corresponding to what they do will have a work engagement (Memon et al., 2021). In addition, employees who perceive that their organization pays a salary that matches their contributions will experience positive emotions that encourage them to become more engaged in their work (Jung & Yoon, 2015). Therefore, teachers who are satisfied with their pay will be more enthusiastic, dedicated, and focused on their work.

H2: Pay satisfaction has a positive effect on work engagement.

Employees who are enthusiastic about their work and give total effort to it will likely become more understanding and master it. This understanding makes them more aware of the shortcomings of what they are doing and helps them find ways to improve it (Hui et al., 2020). Employees with high engagement will enjoy what they are doing, struggle to cope with problems that arise, and further expand their thinking about their work (Hui et al., 2020). Al-Ajlouni (2021) and Hui et al. (2020) find a positive relationship between work engagement and creativity. Thus, teachers who are enthusiastic and focused on their work will produce more new ideas that benefit the completion of their work. Those who are emotionally, cognitively, and physically involved in their work will likely be more open-minded, encouraging them to find new solutions and create ideas to improve their performance.

H3: Work engagement has a positive effect on teacher creativity.

The Mediating Role of Work Engagement

Referring to social exchange theory, motivated employees will give their emotional, mental, and physical resources to complete the job at their best (Al-Ajlouni, 2021). This motivation may emerge from the satisfaction of aspects of the job, such as the salary they receive. Satisfied teachers with possible financial compensation will reciprocate by giving their effort, thought, and emotion to produce the best performance. Those who value their salary commensurate with their contributions will increase their work engagement. Focus, enthusiasm, and totality in work will enhance mastery in their work. Thus, they will recognize problems and shortcomings in their work, such as the design of teaching-learning processes and the completion of tasks. Further, their pleasure and enthusiasm will encourage them to use their cognition to produce new ways and valuable solutions. Previous research on R&D employees has found that the relationship between total rewards satisfaction and creativity is mediated by work engagement (Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be expected that teachers who are satisfied with their pay will increase their work engagement, which will drive their creativity to a higher level.

H4: Work engagement mediates the relationship between pay satisfaction and teacher creativity.

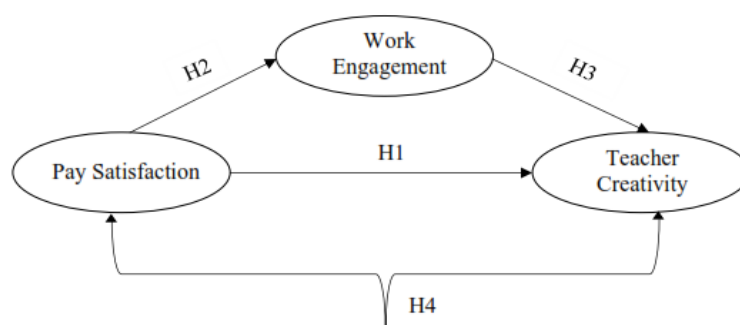


Figure 1. Research Model

Source: Authors (2023)

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

The study used surveys with questionnaires to collect data. We did the survey based on a census approach, that is, using all the data from the population as the research sample (Mwenda et al., 2023). The questionnaire was distributed to 117 teachers who worked at SMK “XYZ” in Sidoarjo. We asked respondents to complete the questionnaire anonymously and honestly. Respondents returned a completed questionnaire in an envelope we had already provided and sealed. Data collection took place over three days, at the end of September and the beginning of October 2023. The entire questionnaire that it returns can be used in data analysis. We use the SPSS application to analyze respondent profiles. Hypothesis testing is carried out based on PLS-SEM (i.e., partial least squares-structural equation modeling), which includes two stages, namely the measurement model and the structural model.

The measurement instruments in this study use well-established questionnaires from researchers concerning pay satisfaction, work engagement, and creativity. Pay satisfaction is the extent to which teachers are satisfied with the salary they receive. It is measured by six items, e.g., I am satisfied with my salary for the effort I have to exert, from Memon et al. (2021). Work engagement is the degree to which teachers are inspired, engaged, and enthusiastic about their work. Work engagement is measured by nine items, e.g., at my work, I feel bursting with energy, according to research by Schaufeli et al. (2006). Creativity is the extent to which teachers have new ideas, apply them, and communicate them in their work. Teacher creativity is measured by eight items, e.g., I find creative solutions when experiencing problems at my job, from Engelsberger et al. (2022). We asked respondents to complete the questionnaire by answering on a 5-point Likert scale (1=very disagree, 5=very agree).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 1 displays the profile of respondents in this study. The majority of respondents were male (64.1%), aged over 45 (60.7%), undergraduate (64.1%), and had tenure for more than 20 years (47%).

Table 1. Profiles of the Respondent

Demographic profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	75	64.1
Female	42	35.9
Age (years)		
<25	1	0.9
25-<35	14	12.0
35-<45	31	26.5
45-<55	25	21.4
>=55	46	39.3
Education		
Undergraduate	75	64.1
Master degree	42	35.9
Tenure (years)		
<1	2	1.7
1-<5	17	14.5
5-<10	11	9.4
10-<15	18	15.4
15-<20	14	12.0
20-<25	16	13.7
>=25	39	33.3

Source: data processing results (2023).

Data analysis is done in two steps using a partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) program. Testing measurement models that comprise validity and reliability tests should come first. Following that, structural models were used to test the research hypotheses. Table 2 displays the outer loading value of each item along with the reliability and convergence validity test results. The average variance extracted (AVE) and outer

loading values are the foundation for the convergence validity test results. All of the measuring instruments utilized in this study already meet the convergence values since the outer loading value for each item is more than 0.7, and the AVE value for each latent variable is more than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017). The composite reliability value (CR) for the entire latent variable has exceeded 0.7, confirming the reliability of the measuring instrument (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2. The Result of Measurement Model

Constructs	Items	Outer Loading	AVE	CR
Pay Satisfaction (PS)	PS1	0.908	0,761	0,950
	PS2	0.791		
	PS3	0.860		
	PS4	0.921		
	PS5	0.907		
	PS6	0.839		
Work Engagement (WE)	WE1	0.880	0.706	0.956
	WE2	0.861		
	WE3	0.882		
	WE4	0.855		
	WE5	0.827		
	WE6	0.842		
	WE7	0.809		
	WE8	0.793		
	WE9	0.808		
Teacher Creativity (CR)	CR1	0.769	0.643	0.935
	CR2	0.795		
	CR3	0.841		
	CR4	0.718		
	CR5	0.842		
	CR6	0.838		
	CR7	0.812		
	CR8	0.794		

Source: data processing results (2023)

The results of discriminating validity tests are displayed in Table 3. Discriminant validity testing uses the Fornell-Larcker criterion approach. The test results demonstrate that the square root of AVE is higher than the correlation value between constructs. Thereby, it confirms the existence of validity of the discriminant (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	Pay satisfaction	Work engagement	Creativity
Pay satisfaction	0.872		
Work engagement	0.537	0.840	
Teacher Creativity	0.454	0.665	0.802

Note: Italicized and bold values are the square root of AVE.

Source: data processing results (2023)

Table 4 shows the results of the hypothesis test. Hypothesis 1 is unsupported because pay satisfaction does not significantly affect teacher creativity ($\beta = 0.137, p > 0.05$). These findings support a study by Chuang et al. (2019) that concludes that job satisfaction does not significantly affect creativity. However, the results supported our expectation that teachers with high satisfaction with their pay are more engaged ($\beta = 0.537, p < 0.05$), so the second

hypothesis is supported. This finding supports research by Jung & Yoon (2015). Our study also shows that work engagement positively affects teacher creativity ($\beta = 0.591, p < 0.05$). The results show that the higher the teachers' work engagement, the higher their creativity, and vice versa. Therefore, the third hypothesis of this study is supported. This finding supports several previous studies, e.g., Al-Ajlouni (2021) and Hui et al. (2020). The results also show that the fourth hypothesis is supported. Our study finds that work engagement mediates the influence of pay satisfaction on teacher creativity ($\beta = 0.318, p < 0.05$). Thus, increased pay satisfaction will drive higher work engagement and increase teacher creativity. This result is consistent with the finding of Wang et al., 2022; Al-Ajlouni (2021); and Hui et al. (2020) that the relationship between creativity and its antecedents is mediated by work engagement.

Table 4. Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	β	t value	Decision
(H1) Pay satisfaction \square Teacher creativity	0.137	1.279	Unsupported
(H2) Pay satisfaction \square Work engagement	0.537	9.808	Supported
(H3) Work engagement \square Teacher creativity	0.591	6.348	Supported
(H4) Pay satisfaction \square Work engagement \square Teacher creativity	0.318	5.686	Supported

Source: data processing results (2023)

Discussion

Pay is important because when people are satisfied with it, they can fulfil other needs and perform better (Jung & Yoon, 2015). However, our study does not support the first hypothesis that pay satisfaction has a positive effect on teacher creativity. This result indicates that more than satisfaction with pay is needed to increase the teacher's creativity. Our test results support the second hypothesis that pay satisfaction has a positive effect on work engagement. Pay satisfaction must lead to work engagement first to increase teacher creativity. Teachers experience satisfaction with pay when they feel valued for their efforts, receive the pay they deserve, and are taken into account for their work. This pay satisfaction should keep teachers energetic, focused, and fully working emotionally, cognitively, and physically directed to their work.

Consistent with the third hypothesis, our study shows that work engagement has a positive effect on teacher creativity. Individuals who give total effort to their work will likely become more familiar with it (Hui et al., 2020). These findings suggest that the pleasant situation created will open up opportunities for the emergence of creative ideas. Energetic and enthusiastic teachers who perform tasks such as designing learning activities, encouraging students to be motivated and passionate about learning, and making students master the subject matter are likely to focus and think about the best ways to reach learning goals. Vocational school teachers have challenges in equipping students to master and practice the knowledge learned in class. With positive enthusiasm and emotions in carrying out their duties, individuals will be better able to cope with challenging problems (Hui et al., 2020). Thus, teachers with high work engagement will likely find the best solution when facing challenges.

Our study supports the fourth hypothesis that work engagement mediates the relationship between pay satisfaction and teacher creativity. This finding is consistent with social exchange theory, which holds that teachers with pleasant experiences will respond with beneficial goodness for the school. Our findings suggest that salary aspects such as salary levels, salary increases, and salary structures that match the complexity of tasks compared to other jobs that can satisfy teachers will be responded to by providing effort, thinking, and positive emotions in doing the job. Excitement, enthusiasm, and total involvement in work can generate new ideas that are beneficial in dealing with the job's challenges, problems, and demands. Thus, teachers who are more satisfied with their pay will increase their work engagement, encouraging them to take more initiative in making meaningful contributions.

CONCLUSION

The current study aims to analyze the effect of pay satisfaction on teacher creativity as mediated by work engagement. The results of this study show that pay satisfaction has a positive effect on the work engagement of teachers at SMK "XYZ" in Sidoarjo but does not directly affect teachers creativity. Our study demonstrates the important role of work engagement in mediating the relationship between pay satisfaction and teacher creativity.

Teachers who are satisfied with their pay will have higher work engagement and encourage their creativity. Apart from the interesting findings, this study is not free from limitations. Respondents in this study were limited to teachers who worked at one of the state vocational schools, i.e., XYZ, in Sidoarjo. The context of vocational schools and the status of civil servants (PNS) for the teachers who were our respondents may have their uniqueness, especially in the demands of student output and their salary system. Thus, further studies are needed to investigate this research model in a broader context. In addition, this study only considers pay satisfaction and work engagement as antecedents of teacher creativity. Therefore, future research can explore other variables that may be important antecedents of the emergence of teacher creativity, for example, competence, the role of leaders, and student conditions.

Our findings show that there are practical suggestions for schools and human resource management to increase teachers' creativity. Schools must provide clear information regarding the salary structure and what teachers will receive for their performance. Since the government regulates the salary levels for civil servants and is tiered (Rachmahyanti, 2022), schools need to invest in professional development, such as training and assignments, that can increase the competence of teachers. Schools must create a work environment that builds morale by promoting a positive culture where teachers feel recognized. Recognizing achievements through rewards, both financial and non-financial, can be an effective way to increase teacher job satisfaction. Schools must also involve teachers in exciting projects to increase teacher energy and enthusiasm. With positive emotions, teachers may put more effort into their work and produce creativity.

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