

Mechanism between perceived organizational support and work engagement: explanatory role of self-efficacy

Perceived
organizational
support

Ibrahim Abaasi Musenze

Economics and Management, Busitema University, Pallisa, Uganda

Thomas Sifuna Mayende

*Business and Management, Information and Communication University,
Yaounde, Cameroon*

Ahmed Jowalie Wampande

Tourism and Hospitality, Busitema University, Pallisa, Uganda

Joseph Kasango

*Marketing and Management, Makerere University Business School, Kampala,
Uganda, and*

Ongario Ronald Emojong

Economics and Management, Busitema University, Pallisa, Uganda

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and work engagement and the mediating effect of self-efficacy on the POS–work engagement relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – A questionnaire survey was developed and distributed to a sample of primary school teachers drawn from the education industry.

Findings – Analysis of the data supports a strong positive relationship between the extent of POS and work engagement. This study also found that self-efficacy mediated the relationship between POS and work engagement.

Research limitations/implications – This study has important implications for managers. First, it motivates managers, by providing justification for provision of support to employees for increased engagement at work. Based on the results of this study, POS is associated with enhanced work engagement levels. Second, evidence from this study illustrates to the organization the importance of developing an environment of support to further enhance work engagement. When employees do not acknowledge and feel supported from their respective organizations, work engagement levels may be sub-optimal. This research is limited, as the data were collected at one point of time, and this has implications for employees and organizations.

Originality/value – There is increasing recognition of the importance of POS in enhanced work engagement levels. Within this context, no previous research has empirically examined the mediating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between POS and work engagement in the setting of primary education sector.

Keywords Perceived organization support, Self-efficacy, Work engagement

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

World over, there has been renewed interest among scholars in the field of positive psychology to investigate the factors that facilitate workers to thrive in their respective occupations or at work (Bakker *et al.*, 2008; Chan *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, building on the notion of positive psychology, it is important to examine how employees can be managed to thrive at work. Defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is



characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004, p. 295), work engagement is associated with a number of positive organizational predictors and outcomes, such as employee performance (Christensen *et al.*, 2015; Listan *et al.*, 2017), customer satisfaction, firm status and shareholder value (Demerouti and Cropanzano, 2010), organizational commitment (Hakanen *et al.*, 2008), employee satisfaction, loyalty and productivity (Chan *et al.*, 2015) and organizational well-being (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008). Nonetheless, studies on work engagement remain emergent. While various academics have investigated the work engagement construct in conjunction with work-related predictors and outcomes (e.g. Christian *et al.*, 2015; Chan *et al.*, 2015), not many have investigated the linkages among the three constructs of work engagement, self-efficacy (SE) and psychosocial resources such as organizational support. Therefore, the current study attempts to explore a deeper understanding of the relationships among perceived organizational support (POS) (psychosocial resource), SE and work engagement.

Lately, research reveals acute levels of disengagement from work, a scenario that continues to spell trouble for leaders universally. Recently, massive employee disengagement from work has been reported (Hewitt, 2013). The *Global Employee Engagement Report*, which covered over five million employees at more than 1,000 organizations around the globe, established that less than one-quarter of the workers were highly engaged and 39% are moderately engaged at work (Hewitt, 2013). It was further established that in a single year, work engagement world over, dropped from 65% in 2015 to 63% in 2016, with some areas of the world, such as Singapore, faring even worse than the average. According to the recent state of the Global Workplace report, 85% of the employees were found not engaged at work (Oehler and Adair, 2019). And, 18% are actively disengaged in their work and workplace, while 67% are “not engaged,” with this latter group comprising the global workforce majority. The economic consequences of this global “norm” are so dire. For example, approximately US\$7tn is lost in terms of productivity (Oehler and Adair, 2019). This situation is not any far different in Uganda. According to the employer of the year award survey that was conducted by the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) in partnership with Makerere University, it was revealed that only 49% of the employees are highly engaged at work, 6% are disengaged and 45% are moderately engaged. The cumulative percentage of those who are disengaged and moderately engaged (51%) is a demonstration that the majority of the organizations in Uganda suffer from work engagement challenges (FUE, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary that organizations navigate models to reverse this rising challenge, without which, organizations in Uganda will continue to suffer from decreased revenue growth, high staff turnover, low customer satisfaction levels, increasing absenteeism and consequently poor service delivery.

To understand the interaction between POS and SE and its relationship with work engagement, we draw on the social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964). SET is regarded as one of the most dominant conceptual frameworks for understanding workplace behavior (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). The basic tenet of SET is that obligations are generated through a sequence of interactions between the parties that are in state of reciprocal interdependence. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) proposed three types of divergent postures to another party, namely: (1) independence, (2) dependence and (3) interdependence. The authors noted that total independence and complete dependence do not suggest a situation of social exchange. Accordingly, an exchange requires a bidirectional transaction, i.e. something has to be given in return for something, which is in line with the description of engagement, as a two-way relationship between the employer and employee (Robinson *et al.*, 2004). It is suggested that the fundamental principles of SET reside in the fact that relationships evolve over time into trusting, loyalty and mutually beneficial commitments, provided the parties abide by specified “rules” of the “game” (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Therefore, viewed from this perspective, fair social exchanges are likely to lead to strong

relationships that induce effective work behaviors leading to work engagement (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009). Employees, thus, feel obliged to respond in kind and repay the organization when they receive organization support that may be in form of economic and socio-emotional resources from their organization (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In this milieu, Saks has argued that, “One way for individuals to repay their organization is through their level of engagement. That is, employees will choose to engage themselves to varying degrees and in response to the resources they receive from their organization” (Saks, 2006, p. 603). Employees tend to exchange their engagement at work for resources such as POS and benefits offered by their employer (Saks, 2006). As a result, when employees receive organizational support, they are likely to reciprocate by exhibiting higher engagement levels at work. Overall, consistent with the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and the SET (Blau, 1964), POS would induce an obligation and commitment to contribute to the growth, development and general efficiency of the organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Hence, employees who feel supported by their organizations would feel obliged to reciprocate the positive organizational behavior and treatment they received. This is likely to be manifested through development of favorable attitudes and behaviors toward their organization, hence increasing work engagement among workers.

As well, drawing on the social cognitive theory (SCT) of Bandura (1986) and Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources (COR) theory, it is suggested that building psychosocial resources such as SE generates a resource stockpile that determines employees' perceptions and interpretations of their work, which in turn help them to cope with their diverse role demands. Employees frequently have to cope with numerous demands associated with their careers and social relationships; a strong sense of SE may facilitate the achievement of appropriate balance among various social and work-related demands. Additionally, SE is indicative of an employee's enthusiasm and readiness to expend effort in line with his capability (Bandura, 1986). However, while scholars have investigated and found that POS induces an array of positive organizational outcomes such as improved job performance, organization commitment, customer satisfaction (Christensen *et al.*, 2015; Listan *et al.*, 2017; Demerouti and Cropanzano, 2010) and work engagement (Bano *et al.*, 2015; Caesens *et al.*, 2016; Karatepe and Mehmet, 2016; Murthy, 2017), limited research has focused on the underlying psycho-cognitive mechanisms underpinning the POS–work engagement relationship. Hence, to fill the research gap in literature, the current study investigates a mediation model to understand how POS leads to work engagement through SE, despite the existence of the multiple role demands. Certainly, limited studies have examined the role of SE in the POS–work engagement chain; thus, the mechanism underlying the positive influence of POS on work engagement remain unexplained. This study attempts to examine the new underlying mechanism of influence of POS on work engagement. Drawing from the SET (Bandura, 1986) and COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), SE is used to explain the underlying mechanism of POS–work engagement chain. The second aim of this study was to investigate the relationships among the three constructs of psychosocial resources (POS), SE and work engagement. In doing so, this study contributes to the work engagement literature and more importantly providing a deeper understanding of the relationships among POS, SE and work engagement. The study further contributes to the development of SET (Blau, 1964). SET is used to explain how POS induces employees to feel obliged to respond in kind and repay the organization, when they receive organization support, that may be in form of economic and socio-emotional resources (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005) leading to positive employee attitudes and improved work engagement (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009). As well, the SCT (Bandura, 1986) and COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) are integrated to show how SE carries the inputs of POS on work engagement, through a reciprocal feeling of support in which employees develop their feeling by their perception (Bandura, 1997), such that, as they perceive a supportive environment (POS), they start believing in themselves (SE). POS,

therefore, strengthens employees' self-belief, i.e. SE (Caesens and Stinglhamber, 2014; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015), which may buffer the negative effects of work demands such as stress. As self-efficacious employees perceive and recognize work demands as opportunities for further skill development and challenges to surmount (Grau *et al.*, 2001), this is likely to raise work engagement levels. An improved understanding of how POS augments SE and work engagement is as well presented, thus bridging the incongruity between managers' interest in work engagement and the theoretical positions on the subject matter.

Theoretical foundation and hypotheses development

Perceived organizational support and work engagement

Work engagement is described by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) as a state of mind characterized by vigor (mental resilience and enthusiasm), dedication (challenging, meaningful and superior) and absorption (being fully immersed in work). According to Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011), Karatepe and Mehmet (2016) and Kurtessis *et al.* (2015), through POS, organizational leaders value employees' contribution and demonstrate caring attitudes toward their well-being as they listen to them, show concern for them, support them, treat them with fairness and, above all, provide favorable working conditions. In return, consistent with norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and the SET (Blau, 1964), employees develop an obligation and commitment to contribute to the general efficiency of the organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009). This is likely to be manifested through development of favorable attitudes and behaviors toward their organization leading to high work engagement. Consistent with this, Saks has argued that, "One way for individuals to repay their organization is through their level of engagement. That is, employees will choose to engage themselves to varying degrees and in response to the resources they receive from their organization" (Saks, 2006, p. 603). Therefore, employees tend to exchange their engagement at work for resources such as POS and benefits offered by their employer (Saks, 2006). The fact that Saks (2006) and Kurtessis *et al.* (2015) found a positive association between POS and work engagement suggests that higher levels of work engagement is a response to POS, which is conceptualized as employees' perceptions of the degree to which their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). According to the SET (Blau, 1964), job resources, and particularly POS, may reinforce employees' work engagement by rising their intrinsic motivation, i.e. by promoting growth and development, and extrinsic motivation (providing employees with necessary supportive assistance to enable them achieve their professional goals). However, within the SET literature, few scholars have investigated the positive influence of POS on work engagement (Caesens and Stinglhamber, 2014).

Preliminary empirical evidence suggests positive influence of high levels of POS for both organizations (increased commitment levels and better performance) and workers (rising engagement levels, job satisfaction and reducing employee stress) (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015; Karatepe and Mehmet, 2016). Through strengthening employees' intrinsic interest in their job, POS would enhance work engagement through diverse mechanisms, namely: (1) fostering among employees the conviction and the expectation that their organization will provide them with necessary help, i.e. material and emotional resources when required; (2) nurture among workers the expectation of possible reward for higher performance; and (3) satisfying their socio-emotional wants such as need for self-esteem, which are necessary attributes for high work engagement. While the research by Karatepe and Mehmet (2016), Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011) and Kurtessis *et al.* (2015) seems to indicate empirical links of POS on work engagement, the study by Nusantria (2012) provides contradictory findings, as this study found that POS has a positive, albeit insignificant relationship, with work engagement.

The mixed findings, therefore, allude to existing gaps in literature, necessitating further inquiry. Karatepe and Mehmet (2016) argue that as employees perceive support from the organization, they develop a feeling of strength, dedication and absorption in their work. The above notwithstanding, limited studies have empirically investigated the relationship between POS and work engagement (Karatepe and Mehmet, 2016). Thus, we can expect that to the extent an employee perceives organizational support, work engagement would be enhanced. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H1. POS is positively related to work engagement.

Self-efficacy and work engagement

SE is conceptualized as a positive factor of personality that induces a range other positive personality traits (Hiller and Hambrick, 2005). SE, thus, defines the belief inherent in peoples' ability to perform in a particular way or engage in a specific behavior so as to realize their preferred goals. It is the conviction that people are able to execute the actions required to manage complex tasks and to cope with the hardship associated with the challenging work situations (Bandura, 1997). Drawing from the SCT (Bandura, 1997), SE is considered a significant control center that drives human life, as employees' level of actions, motivation and emotional state depends upon their perception, rather than what actually happens. As well, an individual's motivation, belief, feelings and behaviors depend upon their SE. Therefore, believe in one self is a fundamental source of perception and action (Bandura, 2012). Within the occupational context, literature suggests that employees with high levels of self-belief are increasingly expected to be more committed to their work, develop desire to embrace challenging tasks and perform better, a situation that is likely to lead to high work engagement (Bandura, 1997, 2012; Yakın and Erdil, 2012). Therefore, preliminary evidence seems to indicate that SE has a positive and significant effect on a range of outcome variables. For example, SE enhances employees' quality of decision-making and lowers their depression, stress, anxiety and burnout (Chiesa *et al.*, 2016; Seggelen-Damen and Dam, 2016) and as well, it has been found to be positively associated with job satisfaction (Ren and Chadee, 2017). However, the empirical examination of the relationship between SE and work engagement is limited (Chan *et al.*, 2015; Del Libano, Llorens, Salanova and Schaufeli, 2012). In a recent study, Chan *et al.* (2015) argued that SE improves work engagement through a self-fulfilling cycle in which employees attain what they believe they can achieve, and in the process, build additional skills and personal resources to manage work-related challenges. In this way, SE is expected to positively predict being in a positive state of mind, e.g. being happy, which may lead to high work engagement among employees. Given the empirical links between SE and work engagement, we hypothesize that:

H2. SE is positively related to work engagement.

Perceived organizational support and self-efficacy

Organizational leaders facilitate the organization to realize desired results such as superior performance through provision of a supportive work environment (POS) (Moos, 2008). POS, a belief concerning the degree to which employees perceive their organization values their work and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986), enhances employees' attitudes and behaviors (Islam *et al.*, 2017; Rozkwitalska and Basinska, 2015), lowers employee turnover (Clifton and Harter, 2003), increases employees' happiness (Seligman *et al.*, 2005), stimulates higher productivity (Clifton and Harter, 2003) and leads to improved employee well-being (Wood *et al.*, 2011), which in turn increases their SE. SE is described as a person's belief in his/her capability to successfully execute a task in a specific situation

(Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura (1986), there are four factors that influence an individual's self-belief/ efficacy, vicarious learning (tendency to observe others), verbal persuasion (others' urging), physiological state (an emotional situation related to performance of a task) and enactive mastery experience (the standard performance). Research has consistently linked all four influential SE factors with POS, confirming that POS has the ability to enhance individuals' SE (Caesens *et al.*, 2016; Rozkwitalska and Basinska, 2015; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015). POS, particularly, has been shown to influence SE, as perceptions of organizational support derived from organizational supportive structure help employees to reinforce their self-belief (Caesens and Stinglhamber, 2014). Also, a range of meta-analytic studies have established POS as a significant predictor of diverse individual-level outcomes (Ahmed and Nawaz, 2015; Riggle *et al.*, 2009), but literature focusing on the relationship of POS with subjective or personal well-being is limited (Caesens *et al.*, 2016; Rozkwitalska and Basinska, 2015). Personal well-being has been defined to comprise attitudes, emotions, moods and perceptions (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015). A fundamental feature of personal well-being is SE (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015). Kurtessis *et al.* (2015) and van Woerkom *et al.* (2016) argue that POS has a positive and significant relationship with SE. Consistent with the SCT (Bandura, 1986), as noted above, three major SE-enhancing mechanisms are specifically suggested to support this postulation. First, through mastery experience, employees who perceive organizational support are most likely to register success in terms of achievement of work-related goals, hence high employee SE (van Woerkom *et al.*, 2016). Secondly, a person's physiological state determines SE. Self-assurance, also termed as confidence in one's capability, is proposed to be more probable in situations that are characterized by relaxed and comfortable states (psychological arousal) than in instances of adverse physiological arousal due to poor performance and or perceived ineptitude (Bandura, 1986). Consistent with the positive psychology literature (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which argues that one's strengths stimulate feelings of being fulfilled, authentic, excited and energized, Bandura (1986) asserts that activities that require strengths and stamina determine a person's positive physiological state. As POS reinforces activities and other forms of organizational support to employees to use their strengths, this is likely to positively affect employees' positive physiological state, which in turn may influence employee SE. It can, thus, be argued that POS is a determinant of employee SE. Finally, SE might be influenced by verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1986, 1997). As support can be given verbally by the organization, for instance, by encouraging employees to make use of their strengths to improve performance, this practice of verbal persuasion may trigger positive employee SE. These three arguments from the SCT, together with the arguments of Caesens and Stinglhamber (2014) and Kurtessis *et al.*'s (2015) framework that POS enhances SE, provide empirical evidence of the significant role of POS in reinforcing employee self-belief (i.e. SE). Therefore, in light of the above arguments, we propose that:

H3. POS is positively related to SE.

Mediating role of self-efficacy in perceived organizational support–work engagement chain

In line with the SCT (Bandura, 1986), feelings of SE influence an employee's thoughts, motivation and actions (Bandura, 1997). While there may be other drivers and inducements that too influence individual efforts toward goal attainment, all of these drivers and inducements are rooted in an employee's self-belief that he/she has the capacity to execute tasks (Bandura, 2012). Individuals are reluctant to exert effort in challenging situations, except if they believe in their capabilities to accomplish desired results. Therefore, on the basis of existing SE beliefs, individuals make decisions regarding which tasks to execute and which to skirt, how much efforts to put forth, as well as how long to persevere (Bandura, 1997).

It is apparent from prior empirical research that high SE produces greater effort and determination by employees toward goal achievement and advances positive motivational states, e.g. work engagement (Chan *et al.*, 2015; Bandura, 2012; Caesens and Stinglhamber, 2014; Yakin and Erdil, 2012; Del Libano *et al.*, 2012). Consistent with the SCT, we argue that SE acts as a fundamental mediating variable that links POS with work engagement through boosting an employee's confidence in his/her capability to engage in occupational tasks. POS as derived from the organization support theory (OST) would, therefore, obligate an employee to contribute to the achievement of organizational goals, which enhances SE and further leads to high work engagement (Caesens and Stinglhamber, 2014)

A range of empirical studies have confirmed the positive influence of high levels of POS for both organizations and employees, e.g. lowering employee turnover, increasing customer loyalty, heightened employee commitment, higher productivity, enhanced performance levels and improved employee well-being (Clifton and Harter, 2003; Seligman *et al.*, 2005; Wood *et al.*, 2011). Based on the SET (Blau, 1964), POS may reinforce employees' work engagement by boosting their intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivation arising from the supportive assistance to employees to facilitate them realize their professional goals. However, despite the numerous studies demonstrating a positive relationship between POS and work engagement (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015; Karatepe and Mehmet, 2016), none of these has empirically examined the mechanisms underlying this POS-work engagement chain. According to Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011), SE would be one of these underlying mechanisms. Caesens and Stinglhamber (2014) have argued that perceptions of organizational support help employees to reinforce their self-belief. This aligns positively with the view that workers perceive their ability to contribute when they believe in their capabilities to perform their tasks soundly (Seggelen-Damen and Dam, 2016). Therefore, SE generated as a result of POS boosts an employee's positive feelings for the organization and work (Klassen and Chiu, 2010; van Woerkom *et al.*, 2016), which in turn leads to high work engagement. This is also consistent with the COR theory that suggests that self-efficacious employees are less susceptible to resource losses and more competent in acquiring resources. With this, as employees are faced with enormous role demands and other work-related challenges, due to self-belief, they are likely to overcome them and realize high work engagement. Based on this foregoing discussion, this study affirms that a feeling and/or perception of POS reinforce employee SE, which eventually leads to high work engagement. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H4. SE will mediate the relationship between POS and work engagement.

Methods

Participants and procedure

This study was conducted in the primary education sector of Mayuge district local government in Uganda. As per the reported statistics by the office of the district education officer, a total of 142 government-aided primary schools operate across the district local government, having 1,739 permanent government paid primary school teachers (staff list obtained from the directorate of human resource management, as at November 30, 2019). Since 1986, Uganda's education industry has undergone a series of reforms, including universal primary education (UPE), school facilitation grants (SFG), liberalization of the sector, enhancement of staff salaries and capacity building aimed at improving performance and delivery of quality in the sector. These massive reforms necessitate the need for workers to be engaged if the intended outcomes are to be realized. According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoE&S) (2019), school administrators are not adequately focusing on the work engagement of their staff. This scenario highlights the importance of studying work engagement in the primary education industry. Specific to this study, 142 schools were first

individually visited, and interviews were conducted with selected head teachers. Then, 132 primary schools that were found to support their employees to become engaged at work were finalized for data collection. From a total of 132 schools, the total teacher population stood at 1,619, and this formed the final population for this study. Based on [Yamane \(1967\)](#) guidelines for sample size determination, 321 teachers were selected to participate in this study.

The data were solicited using a questionnaire-based survey method. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part covered the respondents' demographic profile, i.e. age, gender and marital status. The second part of the questionnaire solicited information on the study constructs of POS, SE and work engagement. Prior to data collection, we first secured permission from the district education officer and school leadership of the 132 primary schools, and then questionnaires were distributed to the 321 respondents, of which 298 were retrieved and subsequently used in the final analysis. Ethical issues in this research were also assured through ensuring respondents' confidentiality, anonymity and ethical conduct of the researchers. Majority of the respondents were men (i.e. 61.5%, $N = 298$); age of 26–36 years (52.1%, $N = 298$) and holding grade III teaching certificate (i.e. 65%, $N = 298$). Conversely, only 30% of the respondents were married. All the responses were anchored on a five-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree).

Variables and measures

Work engagement

Work engagement was measured using with the 17-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale ([Schaufeli et al., 2002](#)). This scale measures three aspects of work engagement, namely, vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor is measured by six items that refer to high levels of energy and resilience, readiness to invest effort, not being easily fatigued and perseverance in the face of work-related challenges. Dedication is examined using five items that refer to drawing a sense of importance from one's work, feeling enthusiastic and proud as regards one's job and feeling motivated and challenged by it. Absorption is assessed by six items that refer to being fully and gladly engrossed in one's work and having difficulties detaching individual self from it so that time passes quickly and one does not remember everything that is around. Examples of the items included are: "At my job, I feel strong and vigorous" (vigor), "I am enthusiastic about my job" (dedication) and "I am immersed in my work" (absorption). All items were scored on a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). This scale has been used in diverse settings and proven to be reasonably stable across time, exhibited internal consistence and valid in cross-national settings. In line with prior studies ([Mathieu et al., 1992](#)), we computed a composite index score of the three domains to signify the levels of work engagement. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Perceived organizational support

POS was measured using a shortened six-item scale of [Eisenberger et al. \(1986\)](#) comprising model items such as "My organization cares about my opinions." All items were scored on a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). This scale is considered useful for this study because previous studies allude to its high internal consistency (i.e. $\alpha = 0.76$), which is greater than 0.70 ([Islam et al., 2015](#)). The Cronbach alpha for this scale was 0.85.

Self-efficacy

Lastly, SE was assessed through the ten items of the "General Self-Efficacy Scale" developed by [Schwarzer and Jerusalem \(1995\)](#). The reported internal reliabilities of this scale are in the

range of 0.76 and 0.90. This scale item example included, “I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events”; “My job is well within the scope of my abilities.” All items were scored on a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). This scale yielded an internal consistence value of $\alpha = 0.87$ for this particular study.

Analyses

Demographic profile analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), correlation analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) were conducted using SPSS (version 22.0) and AMOS (version 22.0). We performed SEM to establish whether the theorized mediation model was in line with the data collected. The consistency between the hypothesized model and the collected data was examined through model-data fit, which signified the degree to which the theorized relationships among the study constructs of: POS, SE and work engagement were reasonable. Besides the chi-square statistic, the following fit indices are reported: standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted GFI (AGFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI) as well as root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Values for the GFI, AGFI, TLI and CFI are between 0 and 1, with values closer to 1 signifying a better-fitting model. A value of 0.05 or less for SRMR and a value of 0.08 or less for RMSEA are also indicative of a good-fitting model.

Results

Preliminary and confirmatory factor analysis

To test the study hypotheses, we applied SEM. Consistent with [Kline \(2005\)](#), prior to SEM, the data were initially assessed for missing values, outliers, normality and multicollinearity, as these, once not taken care of, may lead to skewed results ([Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007](#)). Based on the suggestions of [Sekaran \(2003\)](#), variables with missing values in excess of 5% require redress before inclusion in the subsequent analysis. The missing value analysis test posited results that were less than 2% for all variables, signifying tolerable threat, as responses were not deemed redundant and ineffectual. Also, to test for data normality, we used the skewness (standard value of 6.1) and kurtosis (standard value of 6.3) test, and the findings revealed that all the data were normal ([Byrne, 2010](#)). The outliers of the study were checked using the Mahalanobis distance at $p < 0.000$ ([Kline, 2005](#)), and 1 response was identified and corrected before the final analysis. As well, multicollinearity was assessed using the values of correlation analysis among the study variables. The results indicated that all correlations among the three study variables of POS, SE and work engagement were not in excess of 0.90, signifying tolerable threat of multicollinearity ([Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007](#)). Finally, to establish the presence of common method variance (CMV), the common latent factor test was conducted using CFA. The test presupposes that a single factor will account for all of the covariance among the variables of interest if CMV is present ([Podsakoff and Organ, 1986](#)). The test results did not indicate any threat of CMV.

Preceding the testing of study hypotheses, the model fit for the three measurement models of (POS, SE and work engagement) was examined using CFI, normed fit index (NFI), TLI, RMSEA, GFI, AGFI and χ^2/df values as guided by [Hair et al. \(2010\)](#), [Kline \(2005\)](#), [Williams et al. \(2009\)](#). As well, the convergent validity was examined. The observed factor loadings, also referred to as the loading estimates should be significant ($p < 0.05$) and above 0.50, and the values of average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.50 ([Fornell and Larcker, 1981](#); [Hair et al., 2010](#)). The models were later examined for CFA, as the measures used in this study were adapted from the previous studies ([Byrne, 2010](#)). The item loadings, as well as the value of AVE, were all above the standardized value of 0.50 ([Table 1](#)). Additionally, the values of the model fit for the CFA of all the three variables in this study were found to be good, as indicated in [Table 2](#) below.

Variable	Item code	Items	Values of factor loadings	Values of factor loadings	Values of factor loadings	AVE	Cronbach alpha
POS	PS3	Help is available from my organization when I have a problem	0.42**			0.62	0.85
	PS5	My organization cares about my general satisfaction at work	0.60**				
	PS6	My organization cares about my opinions	0.69**				
	PS7	My organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work	0.78**				
SE	SE2	If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want		0.27**		0.53	0.87
	SE3	It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals		0.81**			
	SE4	I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events		0.78**			
	SE7	I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities		0.64**			
	SE1	I can usually handle whatever comes my way		0.17			
WK	VG2	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous			0.57***	0.50	0.89
	VG4	I can continue working for very long periods at a time			0.54***		
	VG5	At my job, I am very resilient, mentally			0.53***		
	AB2	When I am working, I forget everything else around me			0.53***		
	AB6	It is difficult to detach myself from my job			0.25*		
	DE1	I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose			0.52**		
	DE4	I am proud on the work that I do			0.54**		

Table 1.
CFA – factor item loadings and AVE

Note(s): POS = perceived organizational support, SE = self-efficacy and WK = work engagement

Table 2.
Results of CFA

Model	df	χ^2	p-value	NFI	TLI	CFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
POS	2	2.509	0.285	0.996	0.996	0.999	0.968	0.974	0.029
SE	5	2.985	0.702	0.996	1.000	1.002	0.950	0.982	0.000
Work engagement	4	2.895	0.479	0.976	0.958	1.000	0.950	0.973	0.049

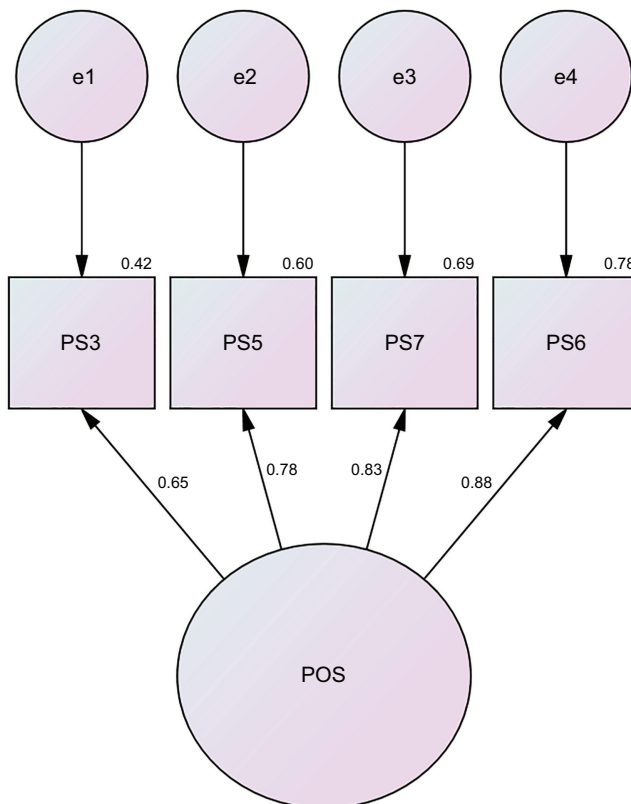
Measurement models

Before the estimation of the hypothesized work engagement model, i.e. the mediating effect of SE in the POS–work engagement chain, it was necessary to estimate the measurement models for POS, SE and work engagement. This was done to test the effectiveness of the measure. Below are the results of the measurement models.

Perceived
organizational
support

Perceived organizational support measurement model

The POS in Figure 1 shows an NFI of 0.996, which is a demonstration of strong convergent validity. The χ^2 statistic of 2.509 was not significant at the 0.05 level: its p -value was 0.285 and degrees of freedom (2), suggesting that the model adequately fitted the data. This was validated by other fit indices: RMSEA (0.029), NFI (0.996), TLI (0.996), CFI (0.999), GFI (0.968) and AGFI (0.974). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the AVE as a measure for discriminant validity should be above 0.5. In our current study, the AVE was 0.62. Analysis of the observed factor loadings in comparison with their standard errors illustrated evidence of



Goodness of Fit Indices

$\chi^2 = 2.509$; p -value = 0.285, d/f = 2; RMSEA (0.029); TLI (0.996); IFI (0.976); CFI (0.999); NFI (0.996); GFI (0.968) and AGFI (0.974)

Key

POS = Perceived Organization Support

Figure 1.
POS
measurement model

a relationship between POS and its respective constructs or item factors (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Schreiber *et al.*, 2006). Assessment of item reliability was based on multiple regressions (R^2). Save for POS 3, all the other regression weights (R^2) values were above 0.5, which is an indication of satisfactory reliability for each item (Kline, 2005). Consequently, each item was a reliable factor for POS.

Self-efficacy measurement model

The SE model in Figure 2 shows an NFI of 0.996, which is a demonstration of strong convergent validity. The χ^2 statistic of 2.985 was not significant at the 0.05 level: its p -value was 0.702 and degrees of freedom (5), indicating that the model adequately fitted the data. This was validated by other fit indices: RMSEA (0.000), TLI (1.009), IFI (1.003), CFI (1.002), NFI (0.995), GFI (0.950) and AGFI (0.982). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the AVE as a measure for discriminant validity should be above 0.5. In our current study, the AVE was 0.53. Analysis of the observed factor loadings in comparison with their standard errors illustrated evidence of a relationship between SE and its respective item factors (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Assessment of item reliability was based on multiple regressions (R^2). Save for SE1 and SE2, all the other regression weights (R^2) values were above 0.5, which is a demonstration of

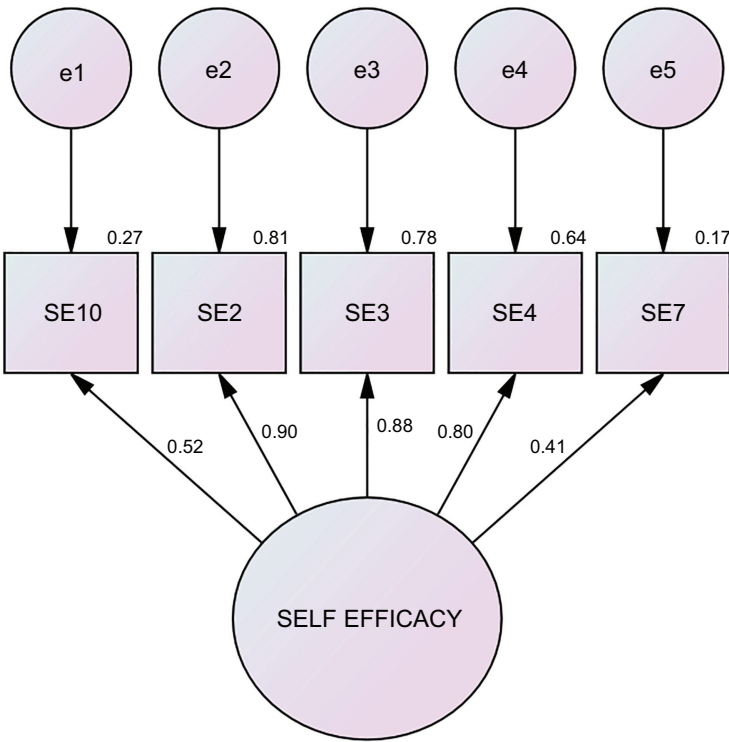


Figure 2.
SE
measurement model

Goodness of Fit Indices
 $\chi^2 = 2.985$; p -value = 0.702, d/f = 5; RMSEA (0.000); TLI (0.1009); IFI (0.999); CFI (1.002); NFI (0.995); GFI (0.950) and AGFI (0.982)

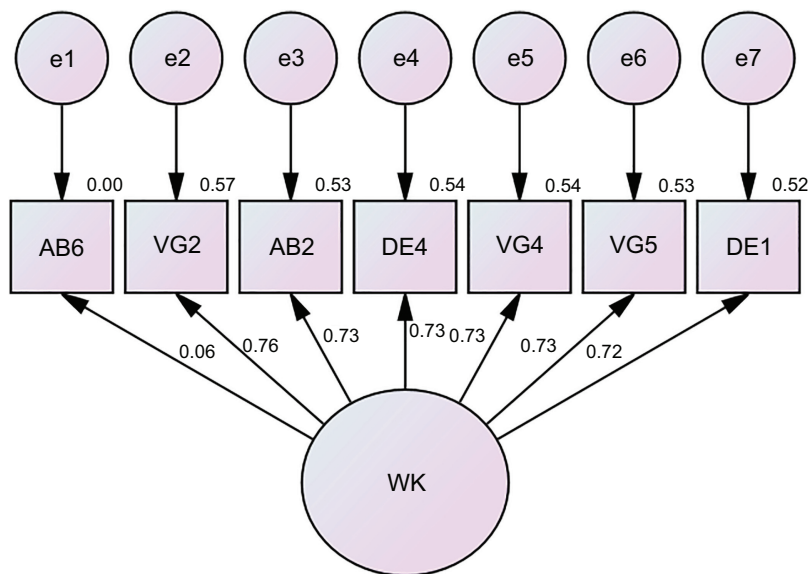
satisfactory reliability for each item (Kline, 2005). Accordingly, each item was a reliable factor for SE.

Perceived
organizational
support

Work engagement measurement model

The work engagement model in Figure 3 shows an NFI of 0.976, which is a demonstration of strong convergent validity. The χ^2 statistic of 2.895 was not significant at the 0.05 level: its p -value was 0.479 and degrees of freedom (4), indicating that the model adequately fitted the data. This was validated by other fit indices: RMSEA (0.049), TLI (0.958), NFI (0.976), CFI (1.000) IFI (0.983), GFI (0.956) and AGFI (0.973). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the AVE as a measure for discriminant validity should be above 0.5. In our current study, the AVE was 0.50. Analysis of the observed factor loadings in comparison with their standard errors illustrated evidence of a relationship between work engagement and its respective constructs or item factors (Schreiber *et al.*, 2006). Assessment of item reliability was based on multiple regressions (R^2). Save for Ab 6, all the other regression weights (R^2) values were above 0.5, which is a manifestation of satisfactory reliability for each item (Kline, 2005). Accordingly, each item was a reliable factor for work engagement. Therefore, the results from CFA indicate that, in the primary education sector, work engagement is a three-dimensional construct comprising of vigor, dedication and absorption.

The values of descriptive statistics, as well as correlation analysis, are presented in Table 3. The mean values along with standard deviation ranges from 3.26–3.55 and 0.68–0.78,



Goodness of Fit Indices

$\chi^2 = 2.895$; p -value = 0.479, d/f = 4; RMSEA (0.049); TLI (0.958); IFI (0.983); CFI (1.000); NFI (0.976); GFI (0.956) and AGFI (0.973)

Key

WK = Work Engagement

Figure 3.
Work engagement
measurement model

respectively. Also, the correlation among all the observed variables was positive and significant and below 0.90, indicating tolerable threats of multicollinearity.

Structural model and hypotheses testing

Consistent with the recommendations of Morgan and Hunt (1994), two models, i.e. the mediated and alternate (non-mediated) models, were compared. This was conducted so as to establish the best fitting model for hypothesis testing. As suggested by Morgan and Hunt (1994), during SEM model comparison, we evaluated the models guided by the following criterion: (1) overall model fit as assessed by CFI; (2) the percentage of the hypothesized significant paths ($p < 0.05$); (3) the amount of variance explained as measured by squared multiple correlations (SMCs), also called adjusted R^2 ; and (4) model parsimony measured by the parsimonious NFI. All the paths coefficients for the compared models posited positive and significant results at 0.05. The results of the mediated model, i.e. when the basic relationship between POS and work engagement was controlled by entering SE (Figure 4), show

Table 3.
Descriptive statistics
and correlation

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Respondent category (1)	—	—	1					
Education (2)	—	—	0.014	1				
Work exp (3)	—	—	0.382**	−0.028	1			
WK (4)	3.4178	0.78238	0.137	0.070	0.042	1		
PS (5)	3.5517	0.60885	0.114*	0.053	0.045	0.776**	1	
SE (6)	3.2693	0.78973	0.173	0.033	0.034	0.805**	0.656**	1

Note(s): PS = perceived organizational support, SE = self-efficacy, WK= Work engagement and Work exp = working experience; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

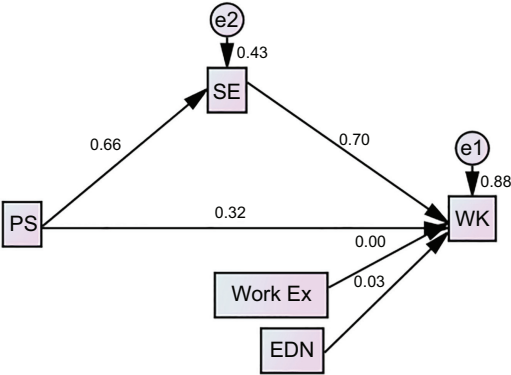


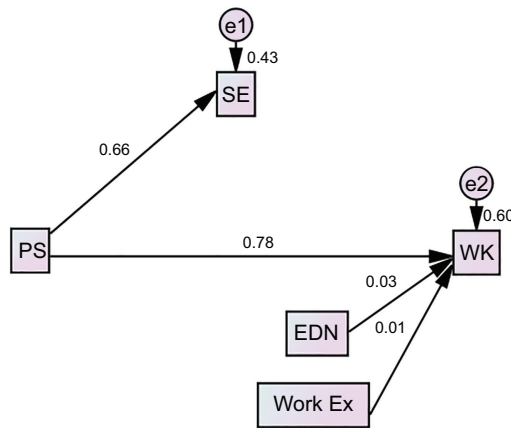
Figure 4.
Estimated work
engagement
structural model

Goodness of Fit Indices
 $\chi^2 = 1.774$; p -value = 0.879, d/f = 5; RMSEA (0.000); TLI (1.008); IFI (1.004); CFI (1.000); NFI (0.998); RMR (0.009); GFI (0.998) and AGFI (0.993)

Key
WK = Work Engagement
PS = Perceived Organization Support
SE = Self Efficacy
EDN = Educational Level
WORK EX = Working Experience

SMC = 0.88, NFI = 0.998 and CFI = 1.000. Correspondingly, the alternate or non-mediated model, where the route from SE to work engagement was trimmed (Figure 5, Table 4) shows a poor fit with SMC = 0.602, NFI = 0.553 and CFI = 0.555. Other fit indices provide evidence of poor fit of the non-mediated model (Figure 5), i.e. the model did not adequately fit of the data. The model posited RMSEA = 0.444, GFI = 0.780, AGFI = 0.451 and the χ^2 statistic of 364.103, d/f (6) was significant ($p = 0.000$) at the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, using Morgan and Hunt (1994) criteria, the results of model comparison suggest that the mediated model in Figure 4 is a better model, with the highest SMC ($R^2 = 0.88$). This was, therefore, used to test the study hypotheses.

After evaluating the measurement models, the second stage involved testing the hypothesized relationships among the latent factors, i.e. estimation of the structural model using SEM. SEM is recommended for mediation analysis because of its versatility and ability



Goodness of Fit Indices

$\chi^2 = 364$; p -value = 0.000, d/f = 6; RMSEA (0.444); TLI (0.258); IFI (0.557); CFI (0.555); NFI (0.553); RMR (0.009); GFI (0.780) and AGFI (0.451)

Key

WK = Work Engagement

PS = Perceived Organization Support

SE = Self Efficacy

EDN = Educational Level

WORK EX = Working Experience

Figure 5.
Results of a mediated
work
engagements model

Model	χ^2	df	p -value	SRMR	NFI	CFI	TLI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
Mediated	1.774	5	0.879	0.009	0.998	1.000	1.008	0.998	0.993	0.000
Non-mediated	364	6	0.000	0.064	0.553	0.555	0.258	0.780	0.451	0.444

Note(s): df = degrees of freedom; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; AGFI = Adjusted goodness-of-fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; NFI = normed fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation

Table 4.
Results of
SEM ($n = 304$)



to analyze complicated relations (analysis of direct and indirect effects) among the variables (Kline, 2011; Richter *et al.*, 2016). The results of the SEM analysis, as shown in Figure 4, revealed that the chi-square statistic was significant ($p = 0.879$), and all other fit indices were satisfactory and acceptable (TLI = 1.008, CFI = 1.000, NFI = 0.998, IFI = 1.004, RFI = 0.996, RMSEA = 0.000, SRMR = 0.009, GFI = 0.998, AGFI = 0.993), depicting the structural model as a good fit to the observed data. Besides, all the fit indices, as seen above, are within the acceptable limit, as specified in the SEM literature (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Kline, 2005). As well, all predicted paths were statistically significant (Table 5 and Figure 4). The standardized regression weights reveal that POS positively and significantly predict work engagement ($\beta = 0.318; p < 0.001$); SE significantly predicts work engagement ($\beta = 0.697; p < 0.001$). Also, approximately 66% of the variance in SE is significantly accounted for by POS ($\beta = 0.697; p < 0.001$). Based on these results, H1, H2 and H3 are supported. A closer scrutiny of the path estimates of the mediated model revealed that SE partially mediated the relationship between POS and work engagement. These findings provide strong empirical support for H4, as presented previously.

Testing for mediation models

The exact nature of the hypothesized mediation model was as well examined. Particularly, the significant direct effects of POS on work engagement reduced but remained significant on inclusion of SE as mediator. This finding provided support to partial mediation model. Table 6 and Figure 4 demonstrate that the standardized total effect of POS on work engagement is significant ($\beta = 0.776; p < 0.001$). However, when the paths coefficients of the relationship between POS and work engagement was controlled through the introduction of the mediator (SE), the originally significant path between POS and work engagement reduced from $\beta = 0.776, p < 0.001$ to $\beta = 0.318, p < 0.001$, but the model remained significant. The difference is the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.457$). This suggests partial mediation of SE in the relationship between POS and work engagement. This result supports H4 that – SE mediates

Table 5.
Regression weights of
the mediated model

Mediated model	Unstandardized coefficient (B)	SE	CR	Standardized coefficient (β)	p
SE $\rightarrow$ PS	0.850	0.056	15.117	0.656	***
WK $\rightarrow$ PS	0.408	0.034	12.043	0.318	***
WK $\rightarrow$ SE	0.690	0.026	26.434	0.697	***
WK $\rightarrow$ ED	0.073	0.048	1.534	0.031	0.125
WK $\rightarrow$ WE	0.006	0.026	0.241	0.005	0.810

Table 6.
Direct and indirect
effects of POS, SE and
work engagement

	POS	SE	Work engagement (WK)
<i>Standardized total effects</i>			
SE	0.656	0.000	0.000
Work engagement	0.776	0.697	0.000
<i>Standardized direct effects</i>			
SE	0.656	0.000	0.000
Work engagement	0.318	0.697	0.000
<i>Standardized indirect effects</i>			
SE	0.000	0.000	0.000
Work engagement	0.457	0.000	0.000

the POS–work engagement relationship. Overall, the mediated model explains 88% of the total variance in work engagement.

Perceived
organizational
support

Discussion on findings

The main objective of this study was to investigate the role of SE as a mediator between POS and work engagement in the Ugandan primary education sector. More importantly, the current study discovers developing a paradigm focusing on POS and SE, which explain the effects on work engagement. The preliminary results corroborate the predictive power of POS on work engagement, and subsequent mediation analyses provide satisfactory empirical evidence for the role of SE as a mediator between the aforesaid variables, corroborating other studies that have used it as a mediator between variables different from the ones investigated here (Ren and Chadee, 2017). The hypothesized sequence work engagement model was based on the SET and SCT. As a positive relationship between POS, SE and work engagement was established, the results show that POS and SE facilitate employees to overcome role demands and other work-related challenges, to achieve work engagement. Also, the study findings established a positive significant correlation between POS and SE. Therefore, within the current study setting, POS stimulates employees' SE. These findings are consistent with the SCT (Bandura, 1986, 1997), in which it is suggested that employees develop a reciprocal effect of organizational support. Consequently, as employees perceive a supportive work environment provided by their organizations, their self-esteem is enhanced. POS, therefore, reinforces employees' self-belief, which may provide sufficient safeguard to the negative effects of work demands such as stress leading to numerous work outcomes such as engagement. POS, as a result, provides employees with an appropriate supportive arrangement necessary for increasing employees' SE and morale at their respective workplace. This finding mirrors the study by Kurtessis *et al.* (2015), who found that organizational support boosts SE among employees, which makes employees execute their tasks with more devotion.

The findings of the study as well confirmed the hypothesis that POS is positively and significantly associated with work engagement. This supports the findings of Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011), Kurtessis *et al.* (2015), Karatepe and Mehmet (2016) and Saks (2006) that work engagement can be explained by the SET (Blau, 1964). Based on this theoretical preposition, it is envisaged that employees who perceive higher organizational support are more likely to reciprocate with enhanced levels of engagement at work. POS would, therefore, induce an obligation and commitment to contribute to the general efficiency of the organization, consistent with the suggestions of Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) and Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2009). These results provide support for testing the chain mediation role of SE using the employee exchange philosophy in the POS–work engagement relationship. Consistent with Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation principles, the results showed that SE partially mediates the POS–work engagement relationship. To our knowledge, this is the first study examining the relationship between POS and work engagement that explores SE as a fundamental mediating variable within the context of primary school industry in Uganda. The results revealed that POS is positively linked to employees' SE, which in turn is associated with employee work engagement in organizations. Based on this reasoning, beliefs about SE initiate self-esteem itself, increasing employee's perception of self-worth and confidence as challenging situations are overcome successfully, leading to high work engagement. Bandura's SCT (1997) demonstrated that positive beliefs in SE enhance employee motivation and maintain reasonable behavior for realizing preferred goals; therefore, successful experiences boost positive self-assessment of self-worth, and this facilitates plans for high work engagement. The results, therefore, suggest that POS reinforces SE among employees, which eventually augments work engagement levels. This study is possibly the first

empirical examination of the mediating role of SE in the POS–work engagement chain, within the setting of Uganda’s primary education sector. Recent studies have established that POS is directly associated with work engagement (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015; Karatepe and Mehmet, 2016). However, this study extends prior studies by recognizing the mediation role of SE. Based on the SET (Blau, 1964), job resources, and specifically POS, may reinforce employees’ work engagement by boosting their intrinsic motivation as well as extrinsic motivation achieved by providing supportive assistance to employees to facilitate them realize their professional goals. Yet, despite numerous studies demonstrating a positive relationship between POS and work engagement (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015; Karatepe and Mehmet, 2016), none of these has empirically examined the mechanisms underlying this relationship, i.e. POS–work engagement sequence. Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011) argues that SE, defined as an individual’s beliefs regarding his/her capability to perform tasks with an assured level of performance (Bandura, 1997), would be one of these underlying mechanisms. Caesens and Stinglhamber (2014) have argued that perceptions of organizational support help employees to reinforce their self-belief. Abundant literature on SE has associated it to the effectiveness of training programs (Kirkpatrick, 1996), while limited studies have suggested SE as a mechanism through which POS may be associated to employees’ job-related outcomes, such as work engagement (Caesens and Stinglhamber, 2014).

Examination of the above arguments reveals that empirical investigation of the mediating role of SE in the POS–work engagement chain, specifically in the primary education sector is still unclear. Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011) and Caesens and Stinglhamber (2014) have argued that POS buttress SE, which makes employees to demonstrate enhanced participation in task execution. As employees perceive support from their organization, they feel valued and develop high levels of SE, which as a result, make them more absorbed by their tasks, which they subsequently execute with vigor and dedication. As well, job resources (POS) and personal resources (SE) promote workers’ employment-related attitudes (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). As a result, these research findings suggest that perception of organizational support by employees reinforces their SE, sequentially resulting into high work engagement. While the findings of this study are limited to Uganda’s primary education sector, they as well illuminate the fundamental importance of SE between the POS–work engagement relationship afar.

Theoretical implications

By focusing on work engagement, this research adds value in regard to both theoretical and practical importance. In terms of contribution to theory, the current study not only provides a robust substantiation that POS could affect work engagement practices among organizational employees, but also integrates an understanding of how this type of relationship is developed. While the research of Murthy (2017) and Eisenberger *et al.* (2001) focused on the POS influence on work engagement, the current research directly evaluates the POS–work engagement relationship, most especially beyond the European context to Uganda’s primary education industry and as well extends the framework of Murthy (2017) and Eisenberger *et al.* (2001) to recognize the mediating role of SE in the POS–work engagement relationship. The current research addresses the call of Murthy (2017) for examining the influence of POS relating to work engagement practices. In addition, this study addresses Baron and Kenny’s (1986) perception about the importance of the integration of a third variable in the potential causal relationships between POS and work engagement, which has extended our understanding from the effects of POS *per se* to underlying processes that are responsible for such effects. The present study provides a deeper understanding of the potential causal relationship between POS and work engagement that is generally to be

transmitted through internal psychological variables such as SE (Baron and Kenny, 1986; Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015; Karatepe and Mehmet, 2016). Baron and Kenny (1986) also note that the prospect for the strategic use of mediation is justified by a strong relation between the predictor (POS) and the criterion variable (work engagement). POS has been found to have a strong positive significant effect with work engagement, and this consequently provides support for analysis of the mediation processes for POS effects in work engagement. Limited studies have suggested various mechanisms that might account for the effects of POS on work engagement (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015; Karatepe and Mehmet, 2016), yet these mechanisms remain mostly speculative, as they have not been tested empirically. Besides, arguments suggested for POS effects are scattered in literature and have not been integrated into one theoretical model. This study finds that the integration of SE in the POS–work engagement model boosts employees' positive attitude for the organization and work. By integrating SE in the POS–work engagement model, this study provides a mechanism by which the relationship between POS and work engagement is fully explained. The findings tell that the value and care, usually in form of fair treatment, promotions and better pay that the organization provides to its employees, stimulates their self-belief, which might lead to high work engagement. In light of these arguments, the derived work engagement model bridges POS–work engagement studies by integrating SE as a mediator. The findings of the study prove that SE works as a partial mediator. Thus, SE partially explains the mechanism between POS and work engagement.

The second aim of this study was to investigate the relationships among the three constructs of POS, SE and work engagement. In doing so, this study contributes to the work engagement literature by providing a deeper understanding of the relationships among POS, SE and work engagement. Our results demonstrate that a supportive organizational environment evokes employees' efficacy beliefs that control and regulate their efforts at the workplace. When employees feel supported and cared for by their respective organizations, their beliefs concerning their abilities to execute tasks are enhanced, thereby increasing their work engagement levels, consistent with the theoretical suppositions of Caesens and Stinglhamber (2014) and Karatepe and Mehmet (2016). Our results can as well be explained through the SCT (Bandura, 1986). For example, our results show that employees' SE is boosted as a result of a supportive organizational structure underpinned by fairness, better leadership and favorable working conditions. As this favorable treatment is expected to please employees, we assume that the enhanced SE, as found in our study, may be a result of POS. These results mirror earlier studies showing that POS enhances employees' self-belief in their capabilities and shapes their task performance levels and subsequently work engagement (van Woerkom *et al.*, 2016; Karatepe and Mehmet, 2016). Therefore, by ascertaining an association between POS and work engagement through SE, the current study proposes that promotion of employees' SE can be a significant and practical strategy for persuading employees to be highly engaged at the workplace. Overall, the present findings contribute to a better understanding of the role of POS and SE among primary school teachers in the prediction of work engagement within the context of primary education sector. More expressly, the current study finds that organizational (POS) as well as personal well-being (SE) are involved in predicting work engagement. Finally, the study contributes to the development of the SET (Blau, 1964). This study has established that an environment of POS stimulates high work engagement among employees, confirming the appropriateness of the SET to the enhancement of work engagement practices. More importantly, as POS promotes a positive reciprocal relationship between employees and their organizations, it generates an effect on the POS–work engagement relationship. Through the lens of the SET, this study suggests that POS induces employees to feel obliged to respond in kind and repay the organization when they receive organization support (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), leading to positive employee attitudes and improved work engagement levels (Xanthopoulou

et al., 2009). Our results, therefore, reveal that POS is associated with high work engagement levels; an environment of support (derived from the organization) boosts work engagement. This finding is novel not only to POS literature, but also work engagement.

Practical implications

By demonstrating that higher levels of work engagement have benefits for both organizations and employees, our findings have valuable practical implications for organizations and managers. On practical basis, our study provides procedures and a framework for managing workforce in organizations, particularly in the era where an inspired and engaged workforce is increasingly required. Our study finds SE as a significant element in the supervisor–subordinate relationship. The findings suggest that in a wider sense, the more supportive the organizations behave, the more their employees will believe they can execute tasks robustly, and the higher will be the level of work engagement. Our results as well suggest the fundamental importance of the relationship between the organization and the employees. Organizations have to care for their employees and provide favorable working environment in order to leverage their SE and generate higher levels of work engagement. In addition, organizations should promote those practices that can improve employees' work engagement and eventually contribute to both individual and organizational output. Such organizations can manage employees' work engagement through suitable POS management practices such as open communication, better-quality leadership, recognition of professional achievements, adapting work schedules to individual needs, fair treatment and building good exchange relationships with the employees (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001). In sum, organizations need to provide a robust supportive structure for employees to thrive at work, which will lead to high work engagement. As employees feel supported by their respective organizations through valuing their contributions and caring for their well-being, their self-confidence to execute demanding tasks is enhanced leading to high work engagement. The organizational support theory, the SET and empirical evidence (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002) suggest that provision of employees with better treatment and positive working conditions is a fundamental factor for promotion POS.

The findings of the current study also reveal that POS as well as SE are primarily directly and/or indirectly related to work engagement. Work engagement in practice is of high significance from an organizational standpoint because of its positive impact on various organizational outcomes (Christian *et al.*, 2015; Chan *et al.*, 2015). Not only does work engagement lead to improved employee performance (Christensen *et al.*, 2015), customer satisfaction (Demerouti and Cropanzano, 2010), organizational commitment (Hakanen *et al.*, 2008), employee satisfaction, loyalty and productivity (Chan *et al.*, 2015), employee well-being (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008) but also organizational well-being (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008). Given the positive outcomes necessary for the realization of organizational success, it becomes inevitable to take action toward the achievement of high work engagement. The present findings demonstrate the fundamental importance of POS and employees' SE. Thus, this study makes an important contribution to the improvement of POS practices aiming toward enhancing employee SE for work engagement improvement.

Conclusions and limitations

This study was conducted to explore the underlying mechanism linking POS to work engagement. The findings demonstrated the fundamental importance of POS in facilitating employees to achieve high work engagement levels, despite the existence of diverse work-related challenges. When employees feel valued and supported, they become self-efficacious, which in turn results into causal sequence-like synergistic effects, leading to high work

engagement. Work engagement is fundamental to employee performance, customer satisfaction, firm performance, commitment and organizational well-being. In light of this, there exists a desperate urge to improve the significance and scale of work engagement. The multifaceted mindset campaign needs to commence with an explicit goal to make diverse interested parties and organizations appreciate the need and importance of work engagement and purge any misunderstandings identified with it. With this reinforced mind, there is an urgent need for a thorough debate among scholars, governments, the business community and the civil society. A significant and empowering work engagement strategy is essential for organizations to prosper. The present model integrates SE as a fundamental feature of the POS–work engagement relationship. This study employed the SET and SCT, which integrate SE in the work engagement mediation model, as there is genuine need of mediators of the relationship between POS and work engagement perceptions. Particularly, the hypothesized work engagement cycle model as grounded in the SET and SCT indicated that valued and supported employees are capable of realizing high work engagement, despite the existence of work-related challenges. Altogether, this study confirms the fundamental importance of SE in work engagement practices. The current study findings provide support for organizational support, SE and work engagement studies by substantiating the association of POS and work engagement with earlier understudied constructs such as SE. Finally, the measurement models of POS and SE described in this study allow primary schools to examine the effectiveness of POS and SE among their employees in contributing to better work engagement practices.

The contributions of this study ought to be judged in light of the existing limitations. First, the employees in this study were drawn from the primary school sector, and therefore, the findings may only be generalizable to that sector. Therefore, this study suggests that future researchers should replicate the study in different settings with diverse samples and cultural context, as employees' perceptions differ with culture. Secondly, our work engagement mediation model was tested based on data derived from self-reported measures. While we performed the common latent factor test using CFA to test for common method bias (CMB) and results signified tolerable threat of CMB regarding this model, the likely adverse effects regarding CMB/CMV may not have been completely dealt, which might have affected our results (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). Thirdly, the use of a self-rating scale in this study to measure work engagement is likely to be associated with higher mean values, also called higher leniency error, and a restricted range, also referred to as lower variability error in the score (Thornton, 1968). Finally, as the present study is based on cross-sectional research design, it is probable that the views held by individuals may vary over the years. This survey research methodology allows for assessment of statistical relationship at one point in time, and statements in regard to the direction of relationships can just be made in terms of the consistency of results with the effects suggested in the theoretical development. Future studies may perhaps consider longitudinal research methods design to analytically examine the theoretical links proposed in this study.

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Corresponding author

Ibrahim Abaasi Musenze can be contacted at: ibramusenze@yahoo.com