# Influence of Work-Life Balance of Preschool Teachers to Their Self-Efficacy Through Student Engagement in Synchronous Online Classes

Grace Regis[1], Hannah Repotente [1] and Kristine Hernandez[1]

*De La Salle University-Manila*
*Grace Regis: grace_regis@dlsu.edu.ph*
*Hannah Repotente: hannah_repotente@dlsu.edu.ph*
*Kristine Hernandez: kristine.hernandez@dlsu.edu.ph*

**Abstract:** This study aimed to describe the work-life balance of preschool teachers and student engagement in an online setting with a goal in answering the following research questions: (1) How do the pandemic experiences affect the work-life balance of the preschool teachers? (2) How does the shift to an online learning environment affect student engagement? (2.1) What is the connection between the work-life balance of the preschool teachers and student engagement? The researchers used a qualitative descriptive analysis method, specifically narrative analysis, where the researchers arranged the data per teacher and student in a narrative format in order to see a clear picture of work-life balance and student engagement for each teacher and students under them. For this study, 11 preschool students participated in an online observation, and 4 preschool teachers participated by answering a 15-item work-life balance questionnaire and by answering questions in a one-on-one interview on work-life balance and student engagement. Findings revealed that two of the preschool teachers were described to have a "Harmonious Work-Life" while the other two preschool teachers were described to have a "Somewhat in Control Work-Life". In addition, student engagement in an online setting may vary according to attentiveness, cognitive effort, mindfulness and enthusiasm.

**Key Words:** work-life balance; self-efficacy; student engagement; online environment; pandemic experiences

## 1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has impacted the lifestyle of many people. In particular, work routines and home routines have changed for many because of quarantine regulations and the "work from home" setup. The ability to meet both work and home commitments with the time they have (Guest, 2002; Bauwens, Muylaert, Clarysse, Audenaert, Decramer, 2020) have been affected due to the changes during the quarantine period. This proves the same for teachers as their preparations for the sudden shift to online learning due to the pandemic have increased their workload which prompts them to work for more hours than before Corbera, Anguelovski, Honey-Roses, and Ruiz-Mallen (2020).

The sudden shift to online learning due to the pandemic has also affected the work-life balance of teachers and student engagement (Dong, Cao & Li, 2020). To be able to adapt to the new normal, schools have taken action by modifying their system to be able to continue teaching their students in an online learning environment. Shifting to online learning has provided schools with opportunities to become more accustomed to using technology, however, several obstacles were also presented such as the lack of resources and preparation (Elavasaran & Pugazhendhi, 2020). Although several challenges are being recognized as online learning is being more utilized, teachers have no choice

but to meet the demands and adjust to the learning needs of the students while trying to maintain a proper work-life balance at the same time (Arun & Jaiswal, 2020). Moreover, this predicament not only affects the teachers' work-life balance, but also has its impact on their self-efficacy, specifically how their performance during class contributes to student engagement and learning success of the students (Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2003; Lim, 2004). Self-efficacy is defined as how much teachers see themselves as capable of being able to accomplish tasks and adapt to situations related to learning (Botor, del Rosario, Escobin, Padilla, Pelegrina, 2018). The self-efficacy of the preschool teachers in this study may be seen through looking into student engagement during their synchronous online classes as student engagement is seen as a vital indicator of a teacher's self-efficacy (Botor, del Rosario, Escobin, Padilla, Pelegrina, 2018).

Student engagement is considered to be one of the greatest challenges for teachers when teaching online (Chen, 2010; O'Doherty et al., 2018; as cited in Dong, Cao & Li, 2020). It could refer to the amount of involvement and enthusiasm of a learner to participate in several classroom activities that involve cooperation and interaction with peers (Odom and Bailey 2001; Castro-Kemp, Granlund & Almqvist, 2015). In synchronous online classes, student engagement can be observed when children show mindfulness (i.e., being aware of what is happening during classes or being able to follow the instructions of the teacher; cognitive effort (i.e., being able to accomplish the tasks and discuss topics which are relevant to the lesson; attention (i.e., being able to pay attention to the teacher such as maintaining eye contact on the screen, following teacher's cues, and is not looking at or fiddling with anything which is not related to the lesson; and enthusiasm (i.e., being willing to participate in all lesson activities or being uncommunicative during the lesson (Lim, 2004).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study involved a mix of quantitative and qualitative research design. Work-Life Self-Assessment Tool for Employees was adapted and modified to find out the current work-life balance of the teachers as they teach in an online learning environment (TCWLS, 2010).

The Student Engagement for Online Synchronous Classes Observation Checklist was used to record the behaviors of children during online classes. It was adapted and modified from the Student Engagement

Observations Checklist found in the study of Cassar & Jang (2010) which were aligned to the four components of student engagement which are attention, mindfulness, cognitive effort, and enthusiasm (Lim, 2004). Anecdotal recording was also done to elaborate on these components per child observed all throughout the data gathering process.

The Work-life Balance and Student Engagement Interview Guide for Teachers was used during the interviews with the teachers in order to probe into the pandemic experiences pertaining to the work-life balance of the teachers and adjustments they made to maintain student engagement in synchronous online classes as an indicator of their self-efficacy.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1

*Work-Life Self-Assessment Tool Scoring of the Preschool Teachers*

| Work-Life Balance Items | Teacher A | Teacher B | Teacher D | Teacher E |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall Work Life Balance Score | 69 | 41 | 51 | 75 |
| Work-Life BalanceDescription | Harmonious Work-Life | Somewhat in Control Work-Life | Somewhat in Control Work-Life | Harmonious Work-Life |

Results show that the preschool teachers' work-life balance was split into two descriptions. Teachers A and E, who both got a score in between 55 - 75, were described to have a "Harmonious Work-Life" where they are able to balance both their work and home responsibilities and are encouraged to share their tips to others. For Teachers B and D, they were described to have a "Somewhat in Control Work-Life" after getting a score in between 40 - 54; while they are able to somehow manage their work and personal time, there may be areas to improve on by re-examining priorities and daily routines.

Table 2

*How has the sudden shift to online learning affected the way you deal with your work-related responsibilities and your personal responsibilities?*

| Teacher | Codes | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher A | Unexpected shift<br>New Activities<br>More Workload | Working for More Hours |
| Teacher E | Trying to Grasp<br>Confusion<br>Eating time from home because of work | |
| Teacher B | Resignation due to Burnout<br>Initial thought of working from home as easier | Burnout |
| Teacher D | Enjoyment in Variation of tasks<br>Enjoyment in Doing New Tasks | Good Opportunity |

The shift to online learning has affected Teachers A and E by working for more hours because of their new tasks and roles. Similar to this, Teacher B experienced burnout after working more hours to the point where she considered resigning. Teacher B's burnout from working from home may be attributed to Corbera, Anguelovski, Honey-Roses, and Ruiz-Mallen's (2020) study which found that teachers found working from home difficult because they struggled to meet both demands at work and at home. On the other hand, Teacher D saw the shift to online learning as a good opportunity as she enjoys learning new ways to teach creatively in online classes.

Table 3

*Which do you prioritize more between work and personal life? Why did you say so?*

| Teacher | Code | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher A | Work is priority unless there's an emergency at home<br>Many tasks to do for work | Prioritizing Work because of practicality |
| Teacher B | Burnout prior to the pandemic<br>Break before online classes<br>Online classes are more challenging | |
| Teacher D | Light personal life | |
| Teacher E | Prioritizes family<br>Strict with keeping working hours and rest hours | Prioritizing family |

Teachers A, B, and D prioritize work more than their personal life because of the increased demands at work as well as light personal responsibilities for Teachers A and D. In contrast, Teacher E prioritizes her personal life, specifically her family, which is why she allocates specific times for work and for family bondings. It is interesting to note that Teacher E is the only one with her own family out of the four preschool teachers.

Table 4

*How has your ability to meet your work-related responsibilities and personal responsibilities affected how you prepare for your online classes?*

| Teacher | Codes | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher A | Doing things in advance | Advanced Deadlines |
| Teacher B | Advanced timetables | |
| Teacher D | Managing work and personal life part of daily routines | Integration of work in daily routine |
| Teacher E | Flexible time | Following Schedules |
| | Doing household responsibilities before going to school | |
| | Doing materials and classes when at school only | |
| | Splitting household responsibilities with husband | |

Teacher A and B shared that they try their best to meet the advanced deadlines set by the school in order for them to have more time to prepare for their online classes. On the other hand, Teacher D shared that she does not mind working during her personal time because she has light personal responsibilities. Similar to Teacher A, Teacher E sets time for work and time for the family everyday and she tries her best to stick to these.

Table 5

*How are you able to maintain engagement in your virtual classroom setting?*

| Teacher | Codes | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher A | Presenting yourself as energetic and fun | Being energetic |
| | Fun and interesting activities | Interactive Activities |
| | Variety of activities/non-repeating activities | |
| | Giving students something to look forward to | |
| | Hands-on activities | Using different types of materials |

| Teacher E | Using materials during lessons | |
| Teacher D | Coordinating with parents on students' concerns | Coordinating with Parents |
| Teacher B | Building relationships with children | Building Relationships |
| Teacher D | Music and movement | Music and movement activities |
| | Relating lessons to students' interest | Relation to Student's Interests |
| Teacher E | Calling students to pay attention to the screen | Catching Students' Attention |
| | Asking students to interact with each other | |

From the interview, all of the teachers were able to share different ways in maintaining student engagement during their online synchronous classes. Overall, the preschool teachers have shared that doing interactive activities using a variety of materials and building relationships help maintain student engagement.

Table 6
*How do you design and manage your online classes to sustain the engagement of your students?*

| Teacher | Codes | Themes |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Teacher A | Planning lessons and materials with co-teacher | Collaborating with other Teachers |
| Teacher E | Asking advice from co-teachers | |
| Teacher A | Basing lesson plans on materials available | Using a variety of multi-use materials |
| | Considering the budget for materials | |
| | Multi-use materials | |
| Teacher E | Using materials planned by teachers | |
| | Using props | |
| Teacher B | Interactive activities Researching online | Modifying activities for students |
| | Tweaking activities based on children's responses | |
| | Trial and error of activities | |
| Teacher D | Using transitions | Using music and movement |
| Teacher E | Integrating music and movement in lessons | |

| Teacher D | Thematic curriculum | Connecting concepts |
| | Connecting concepts in different lessons | |
| Teacher E | Being animated and catchy | Manner of Presentation |

To encourage student engagement, the preschool teachers choose content that integrates concepts from different subjects which are familiar and interesting to the students. They collaborate in adjusting activities and materials based on the students' responses.

Table 7
*How do you address challenges relating to student engagement in your virtual classroom setting?*

| Teacher | Codes | Themes |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Teacher A | Challenging when children are out of mood | Challenges |
| Teacher B | Disciplining is a challenge | |
| Teacher D | Loss of physical connection | |
| | Lack of sensorial learning | |
| Teacher E | Distractions | |
| Teacher A | Not scolding students | Patience with Children |
| Teacher B | Talking to children calmly | |
| Teacher D | Doing activities focused on tactical sense | Using sensory activities / materials |
| Teacher E | Using handheld materials for every lesson | |
| Teacher A | Encouraging children's progress | Acknowledging children |
| | Giving children space and time to do what they want first | |
| Teacher B | Praising children | |
| Teacher A | Encouraging children | |
| Teacher D | Partnering with parents | Coordinating with parents |
| Teacher A | Letting parents/guardians talk to their child | |
| Teacher E | Getting tips from colleagues | Consulting with colleagues |
| Teacher E | Asking children to keep away distractions | Minimizing distractions |
| Teacher E | Relating interests of students to lessons | Interests of Students |

The nature of the online setup has posed many challenges on the students' emotions, social

interactions, attention, discipline, and opportunities for learning. To address these, the teachers worked with the parents to encourage children by being patient and giving them space to regulate themselves. The teachers also sought advice from colleagues on planning activities that are appropriate for children.

To verify how the design and the management of the online classes affect the student engagement, the study used focused observations of children based on their enthusiasm, attentiveness, mindfulness and cognitive effort.

**Student Engagement Using Enthusiasm Component**
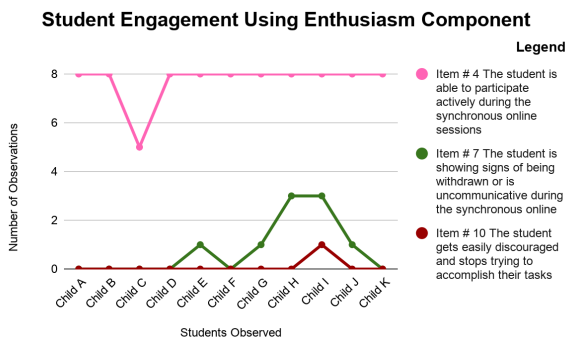


Fig. 1. Student Engagement Using Enthusiasm Component

All of the students are able to actively recite and do their tasks. In some of the sessions, there were students who would not show enthusiasm because some of them would be withdrawn from the class or would even feel discouraged when they are unable to accomplish their tasks. To solve this, the teachers and parents would assist the students from time to time.

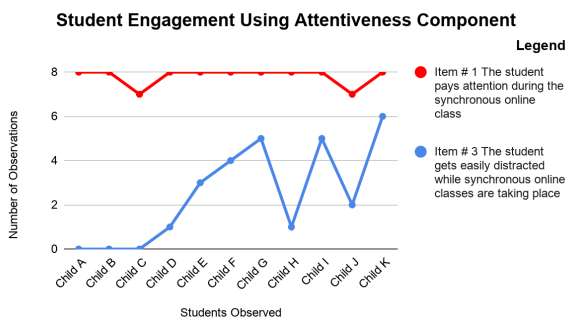**Student Engagement Using Attentiveness Component**



Fig. 2. Student Engagement Using Attentiveness Component

All of the students showed that they were attentive throughout the 8 sessions by constantly looking at the

screen and responding to the teacher during discussions. There were some instances, however, when 8 of the students would sometimes move around the room and play with materials that were not related to the lesson. To get the students' attention, the teachers and parents would call on their names, ask them to pack away unnecessary materials and to look at their teachers or classmates in the screen.

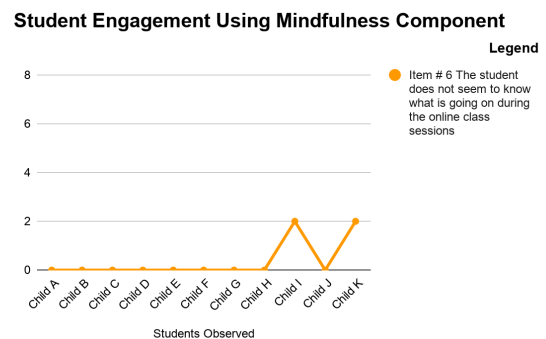**Student Engagement Using Mindfulness Component**



Fig. 3. Student Engagement Using Mindfulness Component

When it comes to the mindfulness of the students, most of them show signs of awareness by following instructions right away. In the instance that a student would be distracted, the teachers or the parents would usually call the name of the child and repeat the instruction.

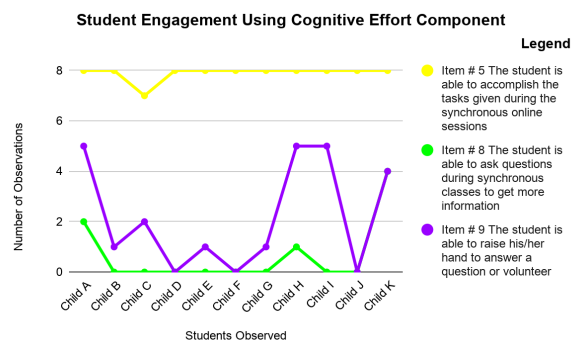**Student Engagement Using Cognitive Effort Component**



Fig. 4. Student Engagement Using Cognitive Effort Component

The students are able to finish all of the tasks given to them by their teachers on time which shows their cognitive effort. Moreover, some of the students would ask additional questions to get more information from

the teacher and would voluntarily share their answers and work. To reinforce the cognitive effort of the children, the teachers would check on them by asking about their progress, offering assistance and acknowledging the students once they are able to finish their tasks.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that the work-life balance of preschool teachers is influenced by their priorities. Teachers tend to choose their priority based on the amount and urgency of the tasks that need to be done. In relation to that, the number of family members can influence the priority of a teacher. Aside from that, having no work-life balance, whether by choice or not, can also cause less satisfaction and productivity for the person in the long run. Establishing and maintaining set work hours and personal hours can also help teachers balance their work and personal responsibilities while working from home. It is also important for preschool teachers to receive support and to split tasks between family and co-teachers to help lighten both responsibilities for personal life and work since it can help improve the work-life balance of the preschool teachers. Moreover, using a variety of learning materials can help in promoting student engagement in an online setting. Partnering with parents is very important in maintaining the engagement of younger students during synchronous online sessions because teachers are not able to reach out physically to their students. Incorporating the interests of the students into the lesson can help in maintaining student engagement. In addition, constant communication with fellow teachers helps in creating a variety of student engagement activities in an online setting.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researchers would like to acknowledge the practicum site teachers, parents and students for allowing them to conduct the study.

## 6. REFERENCES

Arun, C. J., & Jaiswal, A. (2020). Unlocking the COVID-19 Lockdown: Work from Home and Its Impact on Employees.

Bauwens, R., Muylaert, J., Clarysse, E., Audenaert, M., & Decramer, A. (2020). Teachers' acceptance and use of digital learning environments after hours: Implications for work-life balance and the role of integration preference. Computers in Human Behavior, 112, 106479.

Cassar, A. G., & Jang, E. E. (2010). Investigating the effects of a game-based approach in teaching word recognition and spelling to students with reading disabilities and attention deficits. Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities, 15(2), 193-211. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1177/0013164491512013

Castro-Kemp, S., Granlund, M., & Almqvist, L. (2015). The relationship between classroom quality related variables and engagement levels in Swedish preschool classrooms: a longitudinal Study. European Early Childhood Research Journal, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2015.1102413

Corbera, E., Anguelovski, I., Honey-Rosés, J., & Ruiz-Mallén, I. (2020). Academia in the Time of COVID-19: Towards an Ethics of Care. Planning Theory & Practice, 1-9.

Del Rosario, K., Botor, N. J., Padilla, J. J., Escobin, A., & Pelegrina, D. (2018). Work-Related Factors as Determinants of Self-Efficacy and Resilience among Selected Filipino Child Development Workers. IAFOR Journal of Education, 6(3), 25-42.

Dong, C., Cao, S., & Li, H. (2020). Young children's online learning during COVID-19 pandemic: Chinese parents' beliefs and attitudes. Child and Youth Service Review, 118(2020), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105440

Elavarasan, R. M., & Pugazhendhi, R. (2020). Restructured society and environment: A review on potential technological strategies to control the COVID-19 pandemic. Science of The Total Environment, 138858.

Lim, C. P. (2004). Engaging learners in online learning environments. TechTrends, 48(4), 16-23.

TCWLS. (2010). Energising Work Culture: A Work-Life Strategy Handbook