

# Engaging teachers: The influence of Personality on Satisfaction and Engagement in the Teaching Profession

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Teaching is one of the most important jobs in society. As well as bearing considerable responsibility for their students' academic achievement, teachers also play a key role in their social and emotional development. Recent years have witnessed growing concern for the recruitment and retention of teachers across Ireland and the UK. In 2017 it was reported that for the first time ever, more teachers left than entered the profession in England ([Foster, 2019](#)).

This issue of losing teachers to other professions has been partly attributed to low levels of job satisfaction and work engagement ([Martin et al., 2012](#)). It therefore comes as no surprise that research into the factors affecting the satisfaction and engagement of teachers at work has garnered considerable interest.

There are a myriad of factors which could be at play, from school facilities and resource availability, to relationships with colleagues, to the age of the students being taught. These could be considered 'external' factors, or factors which, to a certain extent, could be changed or improved in order to boost satisfaction and engagement.

However, it is also interesting to think about the 'internal' factors pertaining to the teachers themselves, which may contribute to how satisfied and engaged they feel at work. One such factor previous research has suggested may have an impact on job satisfaction and work engagement of teachers is their personality.

The current research set out to explore whether certain elements of personality are better-suited to teaching, and whether these characteristics are related to the levels of job satisfaction and engagement reported by the study's sample of teachers.

## The Research

The researcher employed a quantitative independent groups design which incorporated the use of online-administered attitudinal questionnaires and a personality assessment. Seventy-nine qualified primary and secondary school teachers participated in the research, 81% of whom were female, which is reflective of the female dominance within the profession. The majority of participants (58.2%) were teachers in Ireland, while the remainder were teaching in the UK.

## Personality




It comes as no surprise to learn that certain jobs are better suited to people with certain personality traits. For example, pilots' high levels of emotional stability enable them to remain calm under pressure in order to safely transport hundreds of passengers on a regular basis.

A pilot would be ineffective and unlikely to complete their training if they were overly anxious, hot-headed, or crumbled under pressure. Prior to identifying which elements of personality were likely to help individuals meet the demands of their teaching roles, the current research needed to consider how best to assess participants' personalities.

**Profile:Match2** is a psychometric assessment developed by Psychological Consultancy Ltd. It is based on the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality, which is the most widely-accepted model of personality in psychology ([Kell, 2019](#)). The Five Factor Model identifies five traits as the basis of all human personality, which can act as spectrums that differentiate between individuals.

These factors consist of openness (creative and cultured vs. traditional and cautious), conscientiousness (organised and diligent vs. careless and negligent), extraversion (sociable and energetic vs. self-sufficient and reserved), agreeableness (warm and accommodating vs. distant and analytical), and emotional stability (sensitive and anxious vs. calm and stable; [Bastian et al., 2017](#)). Previous research has suggested that the personality traits 'openness' and 'agreeableness' have little influence on teachers' job satisfaction or work engagement, resulting in their exclusion from the study.

Profile:Match2 is a Registered Test with the British Psychological Society's [Psychological Testing Centre](#). It works by dividing each FFM trait into two scales. The current study used the following six of these ten scales:

<u>FFM Trait</u>	<u>P:M2 Scale</u>
Extraversion	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sociability</li> <li>Assertiveness</li> </ul>
Conscientiousness	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perfectionist</li> <li>Compliance</li> </ul>
Emotional Stability	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Composure</li> <li>Self Esteem</li> </ul>

Profile:Match2 scales demonstrate high internal reliability, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .70 to .84. This indicates that responses to these scales generate consistent and reliable scores. Data from over 15 thousand participants indicates that these personality traits are evenly distributed across the general population.

## Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been widely researched in the teaching profession. One international study reports that teachers in England have the lowest levels of job satisfaction among 22 comparable countries ([Zieger et al., 2019](#)). Teaching requires constant interaction with large groups of people every day, ranging from students, parents and colleagues. It is therefore vital that teachers maintain composure and stay in control when dealing with children, and are well prepared in terms of meeting the demands of the curriculum. As such, it makes sense to hypothesise that more extraverted, emotionally stable and conscientious teachers will feel more at ease in their job and therefore report higher levels of job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction was measured using [Caprara et al.'s \(2003\)](#) 4-item measure in which participants rated their level of agreement with statements using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 ('Never') to 7 ('Always') (e.g. "I am satisfied with my job").

## Work Engagement

Spending long periods around large numbers of people is an unavoidable aspect of teaching, leading the researcher to hypothesise that more extraverted teachers would naturally be more engaged in this type of setting than less extraverted teachers. Similarly, the need to prepare, organise and structure lessons, and the importance of staying calm and composed when students are proving difficult to manage, led the researcher to hypothesise that conscientiousness and emotional stability would be positively related to teachers' levels of engagement at work.

The 9-item 'Utrecht Work Engagement' Survey ([Schaufeli et al., 2006](#)) was used to measure teachers' engagement at work. This questionnaire consists of three subscales measuring Vigour (energy while working), Dedication (commitment to work), and Absorption (concentration at work). Participants rated their level of agreement with nine statements using 7-point scale ranging from 1 ('Never') to 7 ('Always') (e.g. "Time flies when I am working").

## The Findings

The purpose of this research was to examine whether the personality traits of qualified teachers working in the UK and Ireland influence their satisfaction and engagement at work. Results indicated that personality possessed several relationships with teachers' job satisfaction and work engagement.

In the case of teachers' job satisfaction, conscientiousness and emotional stability positively correlated with satisfaction, but extraversion did not. More specifically, the personality scale with the largest statistically significant correlation was 'Composure' (0.34), which concerns the extent to which individuals are even-tempered, unemotional and remain calm and steady in the face of change or the unexpected or, conversely, display their emotions and react passionately to events.

This finding aligns with [Hyde \(2015\)](#), who reported similar results for job satisfaction and emotional stability.

Findings also indicated a significant relationship between personality and teachers' work engagement. Several personality scales reported correlations, the strongest of which emerged with the extraversion subscale of 'Assertiveness' (0.38). This scale is concerned with the extent to which individuals are determined to make their mark, are achievement oriented, competitive, assertive and energetic or, alternatively, are relaxed, easy going and difficult to energise, other than in current areas of interest. The aspect of achievement orientation appears key, as it likely manifests in the elements of 'vigour' and 'absorption' incorporated in the work engagement measure.

Overall, these results indicate that teachers higher in conscientiousness and emotional stability are more likely to report greater satisfaction with their job, and, when considered in combination, teachers who are more extraverted, conscientious and emotionally stable are more engaged with their work.

## Implications

It may be tempting to conclude that teachers who score highly on the personality dimensions of extraversion, conscientiousness and emotional stability will possess higher levels of job satisfaction and work engagement, and by extension, be more likely to remain in the teaching profession ([Hughes, 2012](#)). However, despite demonstrating that certain personality traits are predictive of teachers' satisfaction and engagement, our regression analyses suggest that they account for 17.9% and 17.4% of the variance respectively. Whilst notable, these findings also imply there are other factors which impact on teachers' job satisfaction and work engagement, potentially to a greater extent than personality alone.

These findings also indicate that personality assessments could potentially be used to inform and target interventions. An intention to leave a job is one of many potential consequences of low job satisfaction and engagement. If we can identify staff who are temperamentally more prone to experiencing these issues, strategies can be put in place to support and develop those most at risk. In these instances, psychological science could represent an integral part of a multi-faceted strategy designed to address the trend of poor retention that blights the teaching profession.

## About the Authors

**Claire Lenehan** is a registered member of the British Psychological Society, having graduated with an MSc in Occupational Psychology from The University of Nottingham in 2019. Claire's particular interest lies in employee wellbeing, and she considers the selection and assessment of potential employees to be an important first step in achieving high levels of job satisfaction and enjoyment among employees. Claire currently works as a Consultant on Aon Assessment Solution's Dublin team, helping clients to power their talent strategy in a way that results in the best-fit candidates being hired.

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