

Work Engagement in Online Instructional Settings: Unveiling Iranian EFL Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences

Masomeh Estaji ^{*1}  & Mohammad Sadegh Taghizadeh ² 

Abstract

Since teachers' perceptions of work engagement can strongly shape their engagement level, it is imperative to explore how teachers perceive this construct and its associated dimensions. With this in mind, some researchers have evaluated teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards this notion. Notwithstanding this, to the authors' knowledge, no study has examined language teachers' viewpoints on this variable and its significance in online EFL classes. To bridge these gaps, this phenomenological study explored Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and experiences of work engagement and its value in online English courses. To this aim, using the purposive sampling strategy, a total of 21 EFL teachers were chosen from different state, private, and non-profit universities in Iran. To obtain the required data, all participants were invited to complete an open-ended questionnaire. To reach more comprehensive data, from among the 21 participants, nine willingly took part in a 20-minute interview session. Results obtained from content analysis revealed that Iranian EFL teachers considered work engagement as a complex variable with four related dimensions of emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social engagement. The results also indicated that Iranian teachers perceived work engagement as an important professional behavior that results in increased academic achievements, professional advancement, improved teaching quality, and strong teacher-student rapport. Hence, education leaders and teacher educators should support Iranian EFL teachers in enhancing work engagement dimensions to improve professional growth and teaching quality.

Keywords: EFL context, Iranian teachers, online English courses, teacher perspectives, work engagement

Received: 23 November 2022
Received in revised form: 26 February 2023
Accepted: 14 March 2023

¹ Corresponding Author, Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran

Email: estaji@atu.ac.ir, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8014-9491>

² Ph.D. Candidate of Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran

Email: m_taghizadeh98@atu.ac.ir, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4229-6500>

1. Introduction

The teaching profession, without a shadow of a doubt, is among the most demanding professions (Dewaele et al., 2023; Fathi et al., 2023). This is mainly because teachers often encounter a wide range of problems, obstacles, and adversities in any educational setting (McIntyre et al., 2017; Pugach, 2023). Notwithstanding, many teachers are strongly committed to their professional role and responsibility (Greenier et al., 2021; Kong, 2021; Zhi et al., 2023). This sense of professional commitment is known as “Work Engagement (WE)”, which generally pertains to “a positive, fulfilling and work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption dimensions” (Schaufeli et al., 2009, p. 894).

Engaged teachers, according to Hakanen et al. (2006), are passionate about their vocation, enthusiastic about their teaching role, and immersed in what they do in classroom contexts. As Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) noted, teachers who are more engaged with the teaching profession dedicate more time and energy to accomplish their professional responsibilities. In this regard, Burić and Macuka (2018) also maintained that an individual teacher with a higher degree of work engagement typically fulfills his or her work-related duties despite educational difficulties and challenges. In other words, highly engaged teachers are far more persistent in the face of adversities (Wang, 2023).

There is a shared belief among academics that teachers’ conceptions of the work engagement can directly influence their engagement with the teaching profession (Meister, 2010; Timms & Brough, 2013). Put another way, it is widely believed that how teachers conceptualize this construct and its dimensions has a significant impact on their work engagement (Nanto & Özcan, 2020; Perera et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2013). Accordingly, in order to promote teachers’ engagement at work, their perceptions and attitudes toward work engagement need to be scrutinized. However, the majority of earlier investigations into teacher work engagement have focused on the causes and consequences of this variable (e.g., Al-Obaydi et al., 2023; Azari Noughabi et al., 2022; Dai & Wang, 2023; Derakhshan et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Wang & Pan, 2023; Wang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023, among others).

More importantly, few studies have been dedicated to examining teachers’ viewpoints toward the concept of work engagement and its dimensions in various educational contexts, including language classes (e.g., Ghaderi et al., 2012;

Gulbahar & Sivaci, 2018; Wetzel & Farrow, 2023). Furthermore, no empirical research to date has evaluated language teachers' perspectives toward work engagement in online instructional environments. In an endeavor to bridge the mentioned gaps, this qualitative research set out to explore Iranian EFL teachers' conceptions of work engagement and its main facets in online English classes. To accomplish this, the current research strived to address the following questions.

1. How do Iranian teachers define the construct of work engagement and its dimensions in online EFL classes?
2. From Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives, to what extent is teacher work engagement important in the online English classes?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Work Engagement

The term "Work Engagement" was primarily defined by Kahn (1990) as the degree to which individuals utilize and manifest themselves cognitively, physically, and emotionally while carrying out their roles. Considering the cognitive aspect of this definition, Rothbard (2001) described work engagement as a mental condition that is mainly characterized by attention and absorption. Attention, as noted by Rothbard (2001), pertains to the cognitive processes and time dedicated to contemplating one's work role. Absorption also refers to the depth of concentration on a work role (Rothbard, 2001). Later, in light of these definitions, Schaufeli et al. (2002) characterized work engagement as a pleasant, favorable, job-related state of mind marked by "Absorption", "Dedication", and "Vigor". Absorption is described as being entirely focused and joyfully immersed in a given profession (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Dedication is also characterized by being deeply committed to a particular profession and experiencing a sense of value, passion, and enthusiasm (Derakhshan & Fathi, 2023; Derakhshan et al., 2022; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010, Shakki, 2022). Finally, vigor is defined by a great amount of energy and perseverance while working (Schaufeli, 2012; Shakki, 2023).

In a similar vein, Hakanen et al. (2006) described teacher engagement in terms of two major dimensions: "Dedication" and "Vigour". The first dimension alludes to the amount of passion and enthusiasm teachers show for the teaching profession (Hakanen et al., 2006). The second dimension, as noted by Hakanen et al. (2006),

concerns the level of energy and mental resilience teachers display while teaching. Building upon Hakanen et al.'s (2006) description of work engagement, Klassen et al. (2012) conceptualized teacher work engagement as the degree of desire, enthusiasm, and persistence that teachers display while teaching. Teacher work engagement, according to Klassen et al. (2012), also deals with the degree to which teachers commit themselves to the teaching vocation.

2.2. Theoretical Underpinning

Different theoretical models, to date, have been offered to characterize the construct of teacher engagement and its underlying components (e.g., Hakanen et al., 2006; Klassen et al., 2013; Rothbard, 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2002, among others). In the current study, Klassen et al.'s (2013) model of teacher work engagement was used to refer to this construct and its dimensions. In his comprehensive model, Klassen et al. (2013) grouped the components of this construct into four interrelated dimensions: “*Cognitive engagement*”, “*Emotional engagement*”, “*Social engagement: Students*”, and “*Social engagement: Colleagues*”. Cognitive engagement, according to Klassen et al. (2013), pertains to the extent to which teachers care about their professional role and responsibilities. To them, emotional engagement concerns how teachers perceive their profession and its related activities. As put by Klassen et al. (2013), the last two dimensions refer to the warm and mutual relationships teachers develop with their students and colleagues.

2.3. Research Background

As teachers' work engagement is subject to their conceptions of this concept (Meister, 2010; Timms & Brough, 2013), how teachers perceive and define this construct must be widely explored. In response to this necessity, some researchers have delved into teachers' perceptions of work engagement and its underlying components (e.g., Ersin et al., 2022; Faskhodi & Siyyari, 2018; Nanto & Özan, 2020; Perera et al., 2018). For instance, in a qualitative research, Perera et al. (2018) explored how school teachers define the construct of work engagement and its dimensions. For this purpose, they interviewed 595 Australian teachers teaching at various primary and secondary schools. The findings showed that almost all teachers perceived the work engagement to be a multidimensional construct comprising three different dimensions of cognitive, affective, and social

engagement.

In a similar attempt, Faskhodi and Siyyari (2018) examined the dimensions of work engagement from the perspective of Iranian EFL teachers. To this aim, a self-report questionnaire was distributed among 117 Iranian English teachers. Results demonstrated that participants viewed teacher work engagement as a multifaceted variable that encompasses three important facets of vigor, absorption, and dedication. Additionally, Nanto and Özcan (2020) investigated school teachers' standpoints about the notion of work engagement and its related facets. In doing this, using a reliable questionnaire, they evaluated 747 school teachers' perspectives on work engagement and its related aspects. The outcomes indicated that participants defined work engagement in terms of vigor, devotion, and concentration.

Besides, in order to determine the value and position of work engagement in classroom contexts, some scholars have probed the implications of work engagement from teachers' standpoints (e.g., Gozon & Yango, 2023; Han & Wang, 2021; Huang et al., 2023; Pourtousi & Ghanizadeh, 2020; Rose, 2021). Pourtousi and Ghanizadeh (2020), for instance, explored the value of work engagement from the perspective of 210 English teachers. To accomplish this, two surveys were administered to participants. Results evinced that participants considered work engagement as an important construct that leads teachers to a higher degree of job commitment. Furthermore, Han and Wang (2021) investigated teachers' attitudes toward the significance of work engagement in English classes. The needed data and information were collected using two self-report scales. The outcomes divulged that English teachers had positive perspectives toward work engagement and referred to it as an important source of teacher reflection. Later, in a qualitative study, Rose (2021) examined how school teachers viewed the notion of work engagement. To this aim, some semi-structured interviews were run with 20 Canadian teachers recruited from three schools. The study outcomes evinced that the majority of teachers viewed work engagement as an important source of their professional development. In particular, participants believed that work engagement could greatly contribute to their professional growth.

Similarly, Wang (2022) examined school teachers' perspectives regarding the importance of teacher work engagement. In doing so, two valid questionnaires were given to 365 Chinese teachers. The analysis of the respondents' answers uncovered

that they perceived work engagement as a strong predictor of students' academic achievements. Further, in a multinational study, Wang et al. (2022) evaluated the value of work engagement from the perspective of Chinese, Indonesian, Iranian, and Vietnamese EFL teachers. Data obtained from closed-ended questionnaires divulged that participants had favorable attitudes toward work engagement and viewed this variable as a significant predictor of teacher immunity. More recently, Huang et al. (2023) assessed Chinese teachers' perspectives on emotional, cognitive, and social engagement. For this purpose, two pre-designed scales were administered to 998 teachers chosen from different schools in Northeast China. Findings revealed that teachers' emotional, cognitive, and social engagement are of high importance for their instructional quality. Particularly, the participants believed that teachers' emotional, cognitive, and social engagement could bring significant variations in their instructional quality. Likewise, Gozon and Yango (2023) inspected school teachers' perceptions of the significance of emotional, social, and cognitive engagement in classroom contexts. Results indicated that school teachers had positive beliefs about emotional, social, and cognitive engagement and considered them as important predictors of school performance. They maintained that teachers who were affectively, socially, and cognitively engaged in their profession would perform more effectively in the classroom.

3. Methodology

The present qualitative research used the phenomenological approach to unravel Iranian teachers' perceptions and lived experiences of the notion of work engagement and its significance in online EFL classrooms. The phenomenological approach is a subset of qualitative research methods that allows researchers to explain the interpretations that multiple individuals derive from experiencing a shared phenomenon (Croker, 2009). It concentrates on understanding how individuals make sense of and give meaning to their lived experiences. In the context of this study, phenomenology was employed to delve into the teachers' personal understandings, perceptions, and interpretations of work engagement, as well as their experiences of it in online EFL instructional settings.

3.1. Setting and Participants

The present research was carried out exclusively in Iran, where English is not an

official language and is taught as a foreign language. In this country, different educational institutions, including schools, language institutes, and universities, run a variety of English courses. In this study, the needed data were obtained from the standpoint of EFL instructors who teach English at different state, private, and non-profit universities in Iran (see Table 1).

Table 1
Demographic Information

Category	N	%
Gender		
Male	9	43%
Female	12	57%
Age		
30-35	4	19%
36-41	11	52%
42-47	4	19%
47+	2	10%
Teaching Experience		
6-10	4	19%
11-15	9	43%
16-20	6	29%
20+	2	9%
Educational Institution		
State University	18	86%
Private/Non-profit University	3	14%

Adopting the purposive sampling technique, a group of English-major teachers were selected from seven universities in Iran. Purposive sampling, also called judgmental or expert sampling, is the most appropriate sampling method for qualitative studies (Dörnyei, 2007), which allows researchers to choose participants who are most likely to offer proper and valuable information (Kelly, 2010). As presented in Table 1, this sampling technique led to the selection of 21 EFL teachers who had the experience of teaching in online English courses. In compliance with the ethical guidelines set by the “Research Ethics Committee” (REC), all participants were provided with a consent letter. Having signed the consent letter, they received some explanations regarding the main aims and intentions of the study.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Open-ended Questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire was used to examine how participants perceived work engagement and its value in online English classes. The questionnaire consisted of three main parts: (a) informed consent, (b) demographic data, and (c) open-ended questions. The first two parts were designed to collect participants' written permissions and their demographic information. The third part included three main questions aimed at assessing the participants' perspectives on work engagement, its dimensions, and significance in online English courses. To guarantee the content validity of these questions, five language scholars who have published several scholarly papers on language teachers' work engagement were asked to evaluate the quality of questions in terms of language form and content. The open-ended questions were then modified based on the feedback and suggestions offered by the scholars.

3.2.2. Semi-structured Interview

To collect more detailed and in-depth information, a semi-structured interview was also employed. The justification for employing semi-structured interview is that in this data-gathering instrument, the researcher utilizes a written set of questions as a framework, yet retains the flexibility to diverge and inquire for additional information (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In other words, this instrument enables researchers to offer a wider picture of the phenomenon or behavior under investigation. The interview questions, developed by the researchers, followed a flexible structure, with some open-ended questions as a guide and some probing techniques to encourage the participants to provide more detailed information on their responses. This approach allowed for the exploration of participants' unique perspectives while ensuring that all relevant topics were discussed.

To make sure of the reliability and content validity of the semi-structured interview, the content of the interview guide was thoroughly reviewed by five language researchers who have conducted various investigations into teachers' engagement at work. For the same purpose, some pilot interview sessions were also held with five EFL teachers. As pinpointed by Friedman (2012), pilot interviews allow researchers to spot any potential flaws or problems in the interview guide. Finally, the interview guide was amended in reference to reviewers' suggestions

and the results of the pilot sessions.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

This research aimed to gather rich qualitative data through the combination of open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, providing valuable insights for the study. To collect the dataset, an open-ended questionnaire comprising three main parts (i.e., informed consent, demographic data, open-ended questions) was initially distributed among participants using two popular messaging apps, namely WhatsApp and Telegram. Subsequently, in order to reach a wider picture of the phenomenon, several interview sessions were conducted with a random sample of participants ($N = 9$) in the Adobe Connect platform. Each interview session, on average, took 15-20 minutes, depending on the depth and complexity of the participants' responses. With the participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded using a smart phone and Chrome recording extension. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accurate capture of the participants' responses. The data obtained from both the questionnaire and interviews were then analyzed to draw comprehensive conclusions.

3.4. Data Analysis

Respondents' answers to the interview questions and open-ended questionnaire were analyzed through the content analysis approach. Content analysis as a method of qualitative analysis pertains to systematic classification of data to uncover patterns and generate well-supported interpretations (Friedman, 2012). Although the content analysis approach is commonly employed for qualitative purposes, it can also yield some numerical values, such as the frequency or percentage of themes (Cole, 1988; Weber, 1990). Generally, there are three major approaches to content analysis: Conventional approach (i.e., content analysis is implemented without a priori conceptual model), directed approach (i.e., content analysis is performed in light of a theoretical model), and summative approach (i.e., content analysis is conducted in reference to the text data and a preexisting theory) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In the current research, the summative approach was adopted to analyze the dataset.

In this study, the content analysis was performed through the latest version of

MAXQDA software (version 2023). The justification for doing the content analysis through software is that employing “Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software” (CAQDAS) can promote the reliability of analysis (Baralt, 2012). It is important to note that to ensure the credibility of the findings, the process of content analysis, which encompasses three main phases (preparation, organizing, reporting and interpreting), was carried out independently by two analysts.

During the preparation phase, the analysts immersed themselves in the dataset to acquire an overall understanding of the participants’ answers. Afterward, in the organizing phase, they divided the participants’ answers into some manageable pieces. During this stage, the analysts assigned preliminary codes to the participants’ responses. Finally, in the reporting and interpreting phase, the analysts scrutinized the tentative codes to bundle them into some meaningful themes and sub-themes. Further, throughout this phase, the analysts interpreted the generated themes and sub-themes in reference to the research questions.

Since the mentioned phases were conducted by two persons, the intercoder reliability (ICR) was finally measured through Cohen’s Kappa (κ). The Cohen’s Kappa coefficient was found to be 0.97, demonstrating a high level of agreement between the two analysts. Finally, the technique of respondent validation was employed to strengthen the credibility of the analysis (Nassaji, 2020). To this aim, 10 interviewees were asked to assess the precision and accuracy of the generated themes and subthemes against the datasets. As a result, the precision and accuracy of themes and subthemes were corroborated by interviewees.

4. Findings

In the current section, the findings of content analysis are categorized into two different parts. The first part demonstrates participants’ perceptions of teacher work engagement and its related aspects in online EFL classrooms. The second part displays participants’ beliefs and attitudes toward the significance of teacher work engagement in online EFL classes. In particular, it illustrates how crucial teacher work engagement is to Iranian EFL teachers.

4.1. Dimensions of Teacher Work Engagement in Online EFL Classes

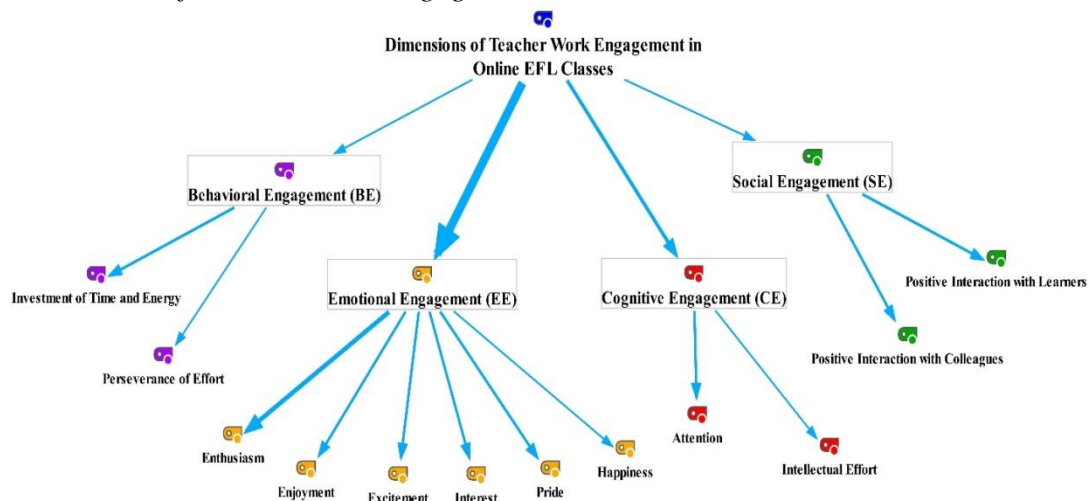
As the outcome of content analysis revealed, Iranian EFL teachers described teacher

work engagement in terms of four main dimensions (Table 2): *Emotional Engagement (EE)*, *Behavioral Engagement (BE)*, *Cognitive Engagement (CE)*, and *Social Engagement (SE)*. Figure 1 indicates that *emotional engagement* was the most prominent aspect of teacher work engagement. In other words, the majority of participants (63%) viewed emotional engagement as a key dimension of teacher work engagement in online EFL courses.

Table 2
Dimensions of Teacher Work Engagement in Online EFL Classes

Themes	Sub-themes	Percentage
Emotional Engagement	Enthusiasm, Enjoyment, Excitement, Interest, Pride, and Happiness	63%
Cognitive Engagement	Attention and Intellectual Effort	17%
Behavioral Engagement	Investment of Time and Energy and Perseverance of Effort	13%
Social Engagement	Positive Interaction with Colleagues and Positive Interaction with Students	7%

Figure 1
Dimensions of Teacher Work Engagement in Online EFL Classrooms



As shown in Figure 1, participants defined the emotional aspect of work engagement in reference to six different emotions, namely *Enthusiasm*, *Enjoyment*, *Excitement*, *Interest*, *Pride*, and *Happiness*. To illustrate,

I believe teacher work engagement refers to the extent to which teachers are passionate and enthusiastic about their career. (Participant 7)

From my point of view, teaching enjoyment is a pivotal component of teacher work engagement. (Participant 3)

In my idea, teacher work engagement can be defined as the degree to which teachers are excited about teaching. (Participant 2)

I think engaged teachers are those who are interested in their profession. (Participant 11)

Being proud of the teaching profession is an important component of teacher work engagement. (Participant 17)

To me, engaged instructors are those who are happy while teaching. (Participant 19)

As the findings also revealed, many participants (17%) considered *cognitive engagement* as another important aspect of work engagement in online EFL classrooms. As indicated in Figure 1, this aspect is made up of two major components: *Attention* and *Intellectual Effort*. The following statements represent these two components, respectively:

Similar to learner engagement, teacher work engagement can be defined as the amount of attention a person gives to his/her role and responsibility. (Participant 9)

Teacher work engagement pertains to the mental effort a teacher makes to accomplish their instructional responsibilities. (Participant 12)

Behavioral engagement was also discovered to be the third essential aspect of teacher work engagement. This aspect consists of two interrelated components: *Investment of Time and Energy* and *Perseverance of Effort*. These two components are illustrated in the following excerpts:

I think teachers' work engagement is dealt with the amount of time and energy they put into their vocation. (Participant 2)

Teacher work engagement alludes to teachers' ongoing commitment to their profession. (Participant 13)

Finally, *social engagement* was thought to be the fourth dimension of teacher work engagement. The analysis of outcomes discovered that several participants considered *Positive Interaction with Colleagues* and *Positive Interaction with*

Students as two important constituents of teacher work engagement. To illustrate,

Building close, positive relationships with students is an important indicator of teacher work engagement. (Participant 1)

I think engaged teachers are those who connect well with their colleagues. (Participant 20)

Overall, as the outcomes of content analysis revealed, the participants characterized the concept of teacher work engagement as a multi-faceted construct made up of four distinct dimensions, namely *social engagement*, *emotional engagement*, *behavioral engagement*, and *cognitive engagement*.

4.2. Importance of Teacher Work Engagement in Online EFL Classes

The analysis of outcomes regarding the value of teacher work engagement evinced that all participants regarded work engagement as a critical professional behavior in online EFL classes. They believed that the *Increased Academic Achievements*, *Improved Teaching Quality*, *Professional Advancement*, and *Strong Rapport with Pupils* are to a great extent the product of teacher work engagement (Table 3).

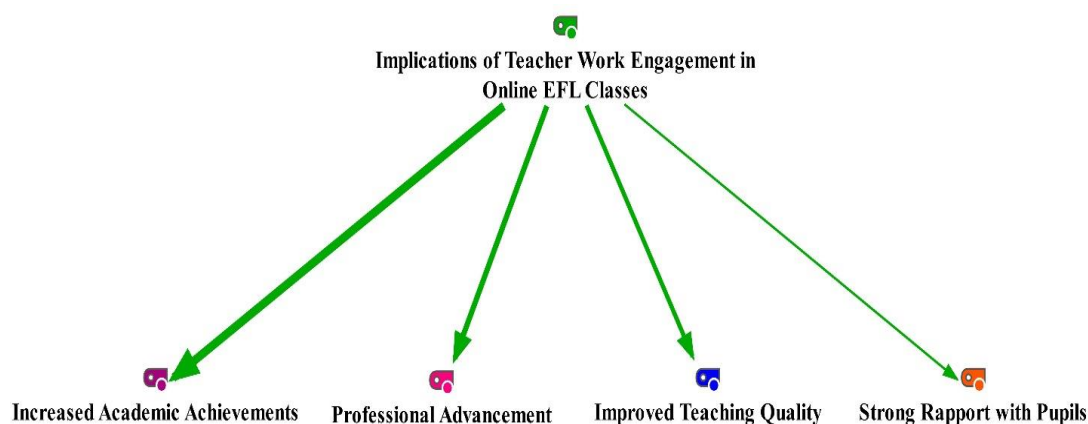
Table 3

Implications of Teacher Work Engagement in Online EFL Classes

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Increased Academic Achievements	9	43%
Professional Advancement	6	29%
Improved Teaching Quality	4	19%
Strong Rapport with Pupils	2	9%

Figure 2

Implications of Teacher Work Engagement in Online EFL Classes



As shown in Figure 2, the participants maintained that EFL teachers' work engagement can bring favorable variations in learning outcomes, professional growth, teaching quality, and classroom interactions. For instance, some of the participants articulated that,

In my opinion, the emotional and physical engagement of teachers can lead to increased learning outcomes (Participant 4).

I think work engagement plays a significant role in promoting EFL teachers' teaching quality. (Participant 9)

I believe that work engagement has a direct impact on EFL teachers' professional growth and development. (Participant 13)

To me, teacher work engagement can greatly contribute to strong teacher-student rapport. (Participant 18)

Taken together, the outcomes obtained from content analysis displayed that the participants viewed teacher work engagement as an important professional behavior that assist online EFL teachers to ameliorate their teaching quality, increase their students' achievements, and develop amicable relationships with them. The results also evinced that, from participants' perspectives, this professional behavior can greatly contribute to online EFL teachers' professional advancement.

5. Discussion

This qualitative research was conducted to probe Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives on the concept of work engagement and its importance in online classrooms. In other words, the present research sought to find out how Iranian teachers conceptualized work engagement and described its position and value in online English courses. As to the first purpose of the study, the outcomes of content analysis identified that participants defined the construct of teacher work engagement in terms of the four aspects of emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social engagement. This suggests that the participants considered teacher work engagement as a complex, multifaceted construct that involves the emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social contributions of teachers in EFL instructional contexts.

Concerning the emotional contribution, the participants maintained that engaged teachers are those who have positive feelings about their professional role and

responsibilities. More precisely, according to them, an engaged teacher is the one who feels enthusiasm, enjoyment, excitement, interest, pride, and happiness while accomplishing the teaching responsibilities. This finding is in congruence with Klassen et al.'s (2013) comprehensive model of teacher work engagement that introduced emotional engagement as one of the key facets of teacher engagement. Moreover, this finding accords with the outcomes of Perera et al. (2018), who found that emotional engagement is a key aspect of teacher work engagement. Furthermore, this outcome lends support to the results of Faskhodi and Siyyari (2018) and Nanto and Özhan (2020), who discovered that teachers' positive emotions like value, passion, and enthusiasm are important components of teacher work engagement.

Regarding the cognitive contribution, the participants stated that teacher work engagement has to do with the amount of attention and intellectual efforts teachers demonstrate while teaching. This result is consistent with Klassen et al.'s (2013) theoretical model, which proposed cognitive engagement as another crucial component of teacher work engagement. Moreover, this result echoes that of Faskhodi and Siyyari (2018) and Nanto and Özhan (2020), who identified that mental effort is a major facet of teacher work engagement. Concerning the behavioral contribution, the participants posited that teacher work engagement alludes to the amount of time and energy a teacher devotes to his or her career. According to them, the behavioral contribution of teachers in online English courses also relates to their perseverance of effort. This implies that, from Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives, engaged teachers are those who work hard regardless of professional hurdles and adversities (Hidayat et al., 2023).

This outcome is not in line with the heuristic model of Klassen et al. (2013), who disregarded the behavioral aspect of teacher work engagement. However, it seems interesting to compare this finding with that of Faskhodi and Siyyari (2018) and Nanto and Özhan (2020), who reported that vigor (i.e., energy and perseverance) is a crucial dimension of teacher work engagement. Finally, regarding the social contribution of teachers in online English courses, the participants stated that an engaged teacher is one who builds a strong rapport with their students and colleagues. This outcome corroborates Klassen et al.'s (2013) theoretical model, which suggested that social engagement is an integral aspect of teacher work engagement.

Concerning the second purpose of the study, the outcomes evinced that the participants considered work engagement as an important behavior of teachers in online

EFL classrooms. According to them, teacher work engagement can make notable changes in students' academic achievements, teachers' professional advancement, teaching quality, and teacher-student rapport. Put another way, they asserted that high levels of work engagement empower teachers to ameliorate learning outcomes, professional growth, instructional effectiveness, and classroom interactions.

The research findings on the implications of teacher work engagement are in agreement with those of Rose (2021), who reported that teachers' work engagement can significantly contribute to their professional development. The outcome is also consistent with Wang's (2022) results, which divulged that highly engaged teachers can make positive changes in their students' learning outcomes. This result further supports Huang et al.'s (2023) outcomes, which indicated that teachers' emotional, cognitive, and social engagement in instructional settings help them improve their teaching effectiveness. Additionally, this finding accords with Gozon and Yango's (2023) results, which represented that the emotional, cognitive, and social engagement of teachers enable them to function more effectively in educational environments.

All in all, the participants' conceptualizations of teacher work engagement collectively portrayed this professional behavior as a complex construct, highlighting the intricate interplay of emotions, cognition, behavior, and social interactions in the instructional practices of EFL teachers. Likewise, the participants underscored that teacher work engagement is a crucial determinant that can yield substantial impacts on various facets of the educational environment, positioning teacher work engagement as a key factor in shaping the dynamics and outcomes of online EFL instruction.

6. Conclusion

This research set out to examine Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of work engagement and its significance in online courses. The results demonstrated that the participants perceived teacher work engagement to be a complex, multidimensional construct consisting of four major dimensions, including emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social engagement. The study outcomes also indicated the participants referred to teacher work engagement as an important professional behavior that greatly contributes to increased academic achievements, improved teaching quality, professional advancement, and strong teacher-student rapport. With

respect to these findings, it can be logically concluded that engaged teachers are those who are emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally, and socially involved in the teaching profession. With the implications of teacher work engagement in mind, it can also be inferred that teachers with higher levels of behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement are more successful at improving their teaching effectiveness, professional growth, and classroom interactions. As the study outcomes revealed, such teachers can help their learners attain higher academic achievements.

The findings of the present study add substantially to our understanding of the concept of teacher work engagement and its significance in online EFL courses. More precisely, the findings appear to be enlightening and beneficial for educational leaders and teacher educators. Considering the important role of teacher work engagement in promoting teaching quality and academic achievements, educational leaders need to improve teachers' work engagement through transformational leadership behaviors. In addition, teacher educators should emphasize the value of behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement in their training programs. They are also required to teach their trainees how to become emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally, and socially engaged in the teaching profession.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the results of this study are subject to three significant limitations. The first significant limitation of the present research has to do with its methodology. This study adopted a qualitative approach to assess the participants' viewpoints regarding teacher work engagement and its significance in online EFL courses. Since teacher work engagement is a complex and multi-faceted construct, future research should study this construct through complexity-informed approaches such as the process tracing approach, retrodictive modeling, ecological approach, and idiodynamic approach. The second limitation of the study is that it exclusively examined teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the value of teacher work engagement in online instructional settings. In other words, students' insights on the significance of teacher work engagement were disregarded in this qualitative research. To gain a better understanding of the value and position of teacher work engagement in online classrooms, future research should look into students' perspectives as well. The third limitation of this research is that it only used survey and semi-structured interview to delve into participants' viewpoints. For the sake of triangulation, future studies into teacher work engagement can employ other data-gathering instruments like narrative writing, audio journal, and course observation.

References

- Al-Obaydi, L. H., Shakki, F., Tawafak, R. M., Pikhart, M., & Uгла, R. L. (2023). What I know, what I want to know, what I learned: Activating EFL college students' cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement through structured feedback in an online environment. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 1083673. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1083673>
- Azari Noughabi, M., Ghonsooly, B., & Jahedizadeh, S. (2022). Modeling the associations between EFL teachers' immunity, L2 grit, and work engagement. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 1*–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2088766>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. *Career Development International, 13*(3), 209–223. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430810870476>
- Baralt, M. (2012). Coding qualitative data. In A. Mackey & S. M. Gass (Eds.), *Research methods in second language acquisition* (pp. 222–244). Blackwell.
- Burić, I., & Macuka, I. (2018). Self-efficacy, emotions and work engagement among teachers: A two wave cross-lagged analysis. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 19*(7), 1917–1933. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-017-9903-9>
- Cole, F. L. (1988). Content analysis: Process and application. *Clinical Nurse Specialist, 2*(1), 53–57. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00002800-198800210-00025>
- Croker, R. A. (2009). An introduction to qualitative research. In J. Heigham, & R. A. Croker (Eds.), *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: A practical introduction* (pp. 3–24). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Dai, K., & Wang, Y. (2023). Investigating the interplay of Chinese EFL teachers' proactive personality, flow, and work engagement. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 1*–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2174128>
- Derakhshan, A., & Fathi, J. (2023). Grit and foreign language enjoyment as predictors of EFL learners' online engagement: The mediating role of online learning self-efficacy. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 52*(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-023-00745-x>
- Derakhshan, A., Fathi, J., Pawlak, M., & Kruk, M. (2022). Classroom social climate, growth language mindset, and student engagement: The mediating role of boredom in learning English as a foreign language. *Journal of Multilingual and*

- Multicultural Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2099407>
- Derakhshan, A., Greenier, V., & Fathi, J. (2023). Exploring the interplay between a loving pedagogy, creativity, and work engagement among EFL/ESL teachers: A multinational study. *Current Psychology*, 42(26), 22803–22822. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03371-w>
- Dewaele, J. M., Mercer, S., & Gkonou, C. (2023). Attitudinal, motivational, and socio-biographical predictors of EFL teachers' well-being. In C. Amerstorfer, & M. von Blanckenbur (Eds.), *Activating and engaging learners and teachers: Perspectives for English language education* (pp. 97–116). Narr Francke Attempto Verlag.
- Dörnyei, Z. (Ed.) (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Ersin, P., Atay, D., & Eskiçirak, F. U. (2022). Online work engagement during the covid-19 pandemic: The case of L2 English instructors. In *Handbook of research on effective online language teaching in a disruptive environment* (pp. 334–353). IGI Global.
- Faskhodi, A. A., & Siyyari, M. (2018). Dimensions of work engagement and teacher burnout: A study of relations among Iranian EFL teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, 43(1), 78–93. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v43n1.5>
- Fathi, J., Zhang, L. J., & Arefian, M. H. (2023). Testing a model of EFL teachers' work engagement: The roles of teachers' professional identity, L2 grit, and foreign language teaching enjoyment. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2023-0024>
- Friedman, D. A. (2012). How to collect and analyze qualitative data. In A. Mackey & S. M. Gass (Eds.), *Research methods in second language acquisition* (pp. 180–200). Blackwell.
- Ghaderi, S., Siadat, A., & Shams Mourkani, G. H. (2012). A study of the relationship between perception of organizational justice and work engagement among Isfahan high school teachers. *New Educational Approaches*, 7(1), 49–72.
- Gozon, J. P., & Yango, A. R. (2023). Teachers' work engagement, school performance, and teachers' retention in selected private schools in the city schools division of Santa Rosa, Laguna. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 44(1), 360–

383. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v44i1.8922>

Greenier, V., Derakhshan, A., & Fathi, J. (2021). Emotion regulation and psychological well-being in teacher work engagement: A case of British and Iranian English language teachers. *System*, 97(1), 102446.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102446>

Gulbahar, B., & Sivaci, S. Y. (2018). Evaluation of the relationship between the perceptions on work engagement and in-class effective communication skills of the secondary school teachers. In C. Ruggiero, H. Arslan, & M. A. Icbay (Eds.), *Research on communication* (pp. 125–134). International Association of Social Science Research

Hakanen, J. J., Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2006). Burnout and work engagement among teachers. *Journal of School Psychology*, 43(6), 495–513.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2005.11.001>

Han, Y., & Wang, Y. (2021). Investigating the correlation among Chinese EFL teachers' self-efficacy, work engagement, and reflection. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 763234. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.763234>

Hidayat, N., Setiawan, S., & Anam, S. (2023). Do EFL teachers' digital literacies reflect sociocultural frameworks during their online professional development? *Language Related Research*. 14(1), 193–217. <https://doi.org/10.29252/LRR.14.1.8>

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>

Huang, X., Lam, S. M., Wang, C., & Xu, P. (2023). Striving for personal growth matters: The relationship between personal growth initiative, teacher engagement and instructional quality. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(3), 658–675. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12583>

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692–724.

<https://doi.org/10.5465/256287>

Kelly S. (2010). Qualitative interviewing techniques and styles. In I. Bourgeault, R. Dingwall, & R. de Vries (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative methods in health research* (pp. 307–326). Sage Publications.

Klassen, R. M., Aldhafri, S., Mansfield, C. F., Purwanto, E., Siu, A. F., Wong, M.

- W., & Woods-McConney, A. (2012). Teachers' engagement at work: An international validation study. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 80(4), 317–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.2012.678409>
- Klassen, R. M., Yerdelen, S., & Durksen, T. L. (2013). Measuring teacher engagement: development of the engaged teachers scale (ETS). *Frontline Learning Research*, 1(2), 33–52. <https://doi.org/10.14786/flr.v1i2.44>
- Kong, X. (2021). Chinese English as a foreign language teachers' self-efficacy and psychological well-being as predictors of their work engagement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 788756. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.788756>
- Liu, L., Fathi, J., Allahveysi, S. P., & Kamran, K. (2023). A model of teachers' growth mindset, teaching enjoyment, work engagement, and teacher grit among EFL teachers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1137357. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1137357>
- Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (Eds.) (2005). *Second language research methodology and design*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- McIntyre, T., McIntyre, S., & Francis, D. (Eds.) (2017). *Educator Stress*. Springer.
- Meister, D. G. (2010). Experienced secondary teachers' perceptions of engagement and effectiveness: A guide for professional development. *Qualitative Report*, 15(4), 880–898. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2010.1186>
- Nanto, Z., & Özan, M. B. (2020). Investigation of teachers' perceptions of work engagement through some variables. *African Educational Research Journal*, 8(3), 124–133. <https://doi.org/10.30918/AERJ.8S3.20.079>
- Nassaji, H. (2020). Good qualitative research. *Language Teaching Research*, 24(4), 427–431. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820941288>
- Perera, H. N., Vosicka, L., Granziera, H., & McIlveen, P. (2018). Towards an integrative perspective on the structure of teacher work engagement. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 108, 28–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.05.006>
- Pourtousi, Z., & Ghanizadeh, A. (2020). Teachers' motivation and its association with job commitment and work engagement. *Psychological Studies*, 65(4), 455–466. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12646-020-00571-x>
- Pugach, M. C. (Eds.) (2023). *Because teaching matters: An introduction to the profession*. John Wiley & Sons.

- Rose, K. (2021). *How do teachers' perceptions of their agency and engagement change after participating in self-directed professional development?* (Doctoral Dissertation). University of Alberta.
- Rothbard, N. P. (2001). Enriching or depleting? The dynamics of engagement in work and family roles. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 46(4), 655–684.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3094827>
- Schaufeli, W. (2012). Work engagement: What do we know and where do we go? *Romanian Journal of Applied Psychology*, 14(1), 3–10.
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2010). Defining and measuring work engagement: Bringing clarity to the concept. In A. B. Bakker, & M. P. Leiter (Eds.), *Work engagement: A handbook of essential theory and research* (pp. 10–24). Psychology Press.
- Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Van Rhenen, W. (2009). How changes in job demands and resources predict burnout, work engagement, and sickness absenteeism. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30(7), 893–917.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.595>
- Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., González-Romá, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3(1), 71–92.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015630930326>
- Shakki, F. (2022). Iranian EFL students' L2 engagement: The impact of teacher support and teacher-student rapport. *Language Related Research*, 13(3), 175–198.
<https://doi.org/10.52547/LRR.13.3.8>
- Shakki, F. (2023). Investigating the relationship between EFL learners' engagement and their achievement emotions. *Porta Linguarum Revista Interuniversitaria de Didáctica de las Lenguas Extranjeras*, 40, 275–294.
<https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.vi40.27338>
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2013). Teachers' perceptions of the school goal structure: Relations with teachers' goal orientations, work engagement, and job satisfaction. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 62(3), 199–209.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2013.09.004>
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2014). Teacher self-efficacy and perceived autonomy: Relations with teacher engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional

exhaustion. *Psychological Reports*, 114(1), 68–77.

<https://doi.org/10.2466/14.02.PR0.114k14w0>

Timms, C., & Brough, P. (2013). “I like being a teacher” Career satisfaction, the work environment and work engagement. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 51(6), 768–789. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-06-2012-0072>

Wang, L. (2022). Exploring the relationship among teacher emotional intelligence, work engagement, teacher self-efficacy, and student academic achievement: A moderated mediation model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 810559.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.810559>

Wang, X. (2023). A conceptual review on EFL teachers’ motivation and engagement in flipped classrooms: A social networking platform. *Language Related Research*, 14(3), 239–264. <https://doi.org/10.29252/LRR.14.3.10>

Wang, Y., & Pan, Z. (2023). Modeling the effect of Chinese EFL teachers’ self-efficacy and resilience on their work engagement: A structural equation modeling analysis. *Sage Open*, 13(4), 21582440231214329.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231214329>

Wang, Y., Derakhshan, A., & Azari Noughabi, M. (2022). The interplay of EFL teachers’ immunity, work engagement, and psychological well-being: Evidence from four Asian countries. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2092625>

Weber, R. P. (Ed.) (1990). *Basic content analysis*. Sage Publications.

Wetzel, E. M., & Farrow, C. B. (2023). Active learning in construction management education: faculty perceptions of engagement and learning. *International Journal of Construction Management*, 23(8), 1417–1425.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15623599.2021.1974684>

Zhang, L. J., Fathi, J., & Naderi, M. (2023). A cross-lagged panel analysis of self-efficacy, teacher grit, teaching enjoyment, and work engagement among foreign language teachers. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1–19.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2248064>

Zhi, R., Wang, Y., & Derakhshan, A. (2023). On the role of academic buoyancy and self-efficacy in predicting teachers’ work engagement: A case of Chinese English as a foreign language teachers. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 00315125231222398.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00315125231222398>

About the Authors

Masoomeh Estaji is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Allameh Tabataba'i University (ATU), Tehran, Iran. She holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Allameh Tabataba'i University. She earned the Top Researcher Award at ATU in 2018, 2020, 2022. She has presented and published numerous papers on methodology, testing, and second language acquisition (SLA) in various national and international journals like *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Educational Assessment*, *Language Learning in Higher Education*, *Reading Psychology*, *English as an International Language*, *The Asian ESP*, *Asia TEFL*, and *Classroom Interaction*. Her research interests include language testing and assessment, ESP, and teacher education.

Mohammad Sadegh Taghizadeh received his MA in Applied Linguistics from Iran University of Science and Technology (IUST). He is currently a PhD Candidate in Applied Linguistics at Allameh Tabataba'i University (ATU). He serves as a peer reviewer for several SSCI-indexed journals, including *Porta Linguarum*, *Plos One*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, *Heliyon*, and *Language Related Research (LLR)*. His main research interests are teacher education, positive psychology in language education, and educational psychology. He has published some related papers in different journals, including *Cogent Education* and *Issues in Language Teaching (ILT)*.