

Received: 29 June 2020, Accepted: 25 June 2021, Published 14September 2021

**INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF TEACHERS' GOAL ORIENTATION IN WORK
ENGAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL AGENCY: A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH**

Nahid Royaei^{1*}, Behzad Ghonsooli², Afsaneh Ghanizadeh³ & Anahita Estehmami⁴

^{1,2}Department of TEFL, Faculty of Letters and Humanities

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

^{3,4}Department of TEFL, Faculty of Humanities

Imam Reza International University, Iran

(Corresponding author: afsanehghanizadeh@gmail.com)

Abstract

The present study aimed to probe the role of goal orientation in work engagement and professional agency and to explore influential factors in professional functioning among English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers. To this aim, 90 English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers were chosen from different English language institutes in Mashhad, Iran. In order to obtain these aims, the present study used a mixed-methods approach: first, in quantitative part, the data was collected via distributing three questionnaires: *Achievement Goals for Teaching, Work & Well-being Survey*, and *Teacher Agency*. Second, in qualitative part, the data was collected via conducting semi-structured interviews. Interviews were carried out for exploring influential factors in professional functioning. The conducted interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The quantitative findings obtained via Correlation formula revealed that among goal orientation subscales, mastery goal orientation correlated significantly with all the subscales of both work engagement and professional agency. Moreover, results from semi-structured interviews documented that cultural norms, learner's ability, and institutional regulations were influential factors in EFL teachers' functioning. Finally, the results were discussed in details and implications were provided.

Keywords: EFL teachers, Goal-orientation, Professional agency, Work engagement.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In order to promote the quality of educational organization, much attention has been paid to teachers' individual resources as well as job resources (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). In this vein, goal orientation has been proved to exert effect on teachers' instructional practices and learners' motivation (Dresel et al, 2013). Goal orientations refer to the issue that describes why and how individuals put attempt to obtain a variety of aims in achievement contexts (Nitsche, Dickhäuser, Fasching, & Dresel, 2013). Nitsche et al., (2013) argue that studying goal orientation has contributed to motivational-related studies and it is fruitful regarding the adaptive and maladaptive patterns of involvement. In the theoretical lens of goal orientation, the goals that people pursue to obtain provide a framework via which they can interpret and respond to events and result in different patterns of affect, cognition, and behavior (Dweck & Leggett, 1988, as cited in Nitsche et al., 2013). In the domain of teacher education, teachers' learning goal orientation refers to the aim to expand their own professional competences (Dresel et al., 2013). A body of research has demonstrated that teachers' goal has a direct effect on their instruction and in particular their work engagement. Work engagement relates to the positive and fulfilling job-related state of mind of the individual employee, which consists of three dimensions, namely vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Highly engaged teachers have been proved to have better professional performance and commitment to organizational aims (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008).

In order to enhance teachers' functioning at both classroom level and school level, professional agency is required for professional learning and for renegotiating their professional identities in shifting educational attainments and activities, (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013). A bulk of research has demonstrated that individual factors exert influence on teachers' performance, development, and their learning from and through their work in schools (van der Heijden, Geldens, Beijaard, & Popeijus, 2015). Teacher professional agency has been viewed as a fundamental teacher's ability for developing student learning, his or her ongoing professional development, and school development (Toom, Pyhältö, & O'Connell Rust, 2015).

Due to the importance of motivational factors in educational achievement, organizational managers as well as educational practitioners have paid considerable attention to teachers' motivational factors (Fernet, Austin, Trepanier, & Dussault, 2013). This issue

inspired the present researchers to probe the role of goals in work engagement and professional agency among Iranian EFL teachers. The second phase of current study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of teacher's professional functioning in the domain of EFL context.

1.1 Goal-orientation

Derived from achievement goal theory (AGT) framework, teacher's achievement goal refers to a teacher's attempts to attain specific work-related goals (Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2016). Consistent with how instructors define achievement in work-associated activities, they may make a decision about how to establish different aims when involving in different work settings. So, these goals can be considered as mastery/learning oriented, in that it seeks to promote their teaching competence; performance approach oriented, in that it aims to obtain normative positive assessment by proving better teaching competence than others, and performance avoidance oriented, in that it aspires to shun incompetency in comparison with other instructors. Learning goals refer to the approach-oriented achievement goals that focus on the acquisition and development of own competence such as improving didactical skills and guiding individual's actions (Hein, Daumiller, Janke, Dresel, & Dickhäusera, 2019).

With respect to teachers' achievement goals for teaching, Butler (2007, as cited in Royaei, Ghapanchi, & Ghanizadeh, 2020) designated four types of goals; including mastery, ability-approach, ability-avoidance, and work-avoidance goals. Possessing mastery goals in teaching entails promoting teaching competence via professional development and seeking to upgrade teaching competence by employing innovative and effective methods and strategies. Ability-approach (i.e., performance-approach) goals denote exhibiting effective teaching performance and being evaluated positively by others (e.g., supervisors, learners, parents, and coworkers). Ability-avoidance (i.e., performance-avoidance) goals signify veiling their lack of adequate competence as a teacher. Work-avoidance goals point to the goal of doing the responsibilities by exerting the least quantity of effort and time.

1.2. Work engagement

Work engagement relates to a successful work experience and it consists of three components: vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). Vigour relates to a high level of energy and the willingness to invest energy in one's work and to maintain his or her job when facing difficulties. Dedication refers to a state of being highly engaged in one's profession and experiencing pride and enthusiasm. Absorption is described as being fully concentrated and engrossed in one's profession (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Concerning teachers,

teacher engagement refers to teachers' attempts in the classroom that result in the present-oriented enjoyment obtained from teaching (Yin, Han, & Lu, 2017). Teacher engagement has been found to relate to teachers' professional development, expertise, and interaction with learners (Kangas, Siklander, Randolph, & Ruokamo, 2017). Considerable attention has been paid to teacher engagement since it sheds light on the influence of teachers' attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors on students' achievements (Arens & Morin, 2016; Perera, Vosicka, Granziera, & McIlveen, 2018).

Another definition of teacher engagement was proposed by Klassen, Yerdelen, and Durksen (2013). They defined this construct as a motivational construct consisting of four components including: cognitive engagement (CE), emotional engagement (EE), social engagement with students (SES), and social engagement with colleagues (SEG). Cognitive engagement refers to contributing vigor, persistence, and investment of attentional resources in teaching; emotional engagement (EE) relates to instructors' positive emotional reactions to their job; and the last two components, social engagement with students (SES) and colleagues (SEC) refer to the contribution of instructors' degree of care for, commitment to, and link with learners and colleagues, respectively.

A plethora of studies has indicated the significant contribution of teacher engagement to learners' achievement given that it has positive outcomes on both educational institutes and learning (Kangas, Siklander, Randolph, & Ruokamo, 2017). For instance, teacher's competencies and motives for teaching are linked to the ways in which a teacher engages with learners and her learning (van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2013).

From another perspective, engagement consists of three perspectives: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural (Konrad, 2006). The cognitive perspective refers to staff attitudes about the organization, the organizational leaders, and working conditions. The emotional perspective deals with staff feeling about these three constituents and the last perspective relates to the discretionary attempts exerted by engaged staff. Furness (2008) described another definition of workers' engagement such as "the willingness of employees to go the extra mile."

1.3. Professional agency

The notion of agency or teacher agency in particular, is based on an understanding that people do not merely react to and repeat given practices (Oolbekkink-Marchand, Hadar, Smith, Helleve, & Ulvik, 2017) but rather they exhibit capacity for autonomous action, a process through which they intentionally transform and refine their worlds and thereby take control of

their lives. Thus, agency can be defined as the capacity to initiate purposeful action that implies will, autonomy, freedom, and choice.

Related studies in agency have highlighted two approaches of agency (Goller & Paloniemi, 2017; Imants & Van der Wal, 2019). The first approach focuses on individual factors. In this view, agency has emerged from Bandura's description of agency. In his framework agency is conceptualized as "the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life" (Bandura, 2001, p.1). The second approach to agency is directly related with action; it refers to activities that people or collectives perform while putting effect on their job and professional identity. Vähäsantanen (2013) makes distinctions among three complementary dimensions of professional agency, namely in terms of: (1) putting effect in individual's own work; (2) determining about one's own engagement in educational reform; and (3) negotiating and putting effect one's own professional identity.

Due to the growing changes in today's world, teachers are needed who are able and willing to manage challenges caused by change (van der Heijdena, Geldensa, Beijaard, & Popeijusa, 2015). With respect to today's schools, teachers are needed who are change agents, thus teachers who are willing to learn and change from 'inside' (internal drive to think and make sense of things) and 'outside' (satisfying external demands), both individually and in collaboration with others in their schools (Fullan, 2013).

Agency allows actors to engage with the situation at hand to produce change (Dubiner, Deeb, & Schwartz, 2018). Concerning teacher agency, a number of influential factors including context within which they function has received much attention (Dubiner et al., 2018). Agency is also viewed as a construct associated with individuals' self-regulation and self-actualization, which can be a source of development and refusal of structural power (Casey, 2006; Eteläpelto et al., 2013). In its most vigorous and constructive forms, indicators of professional agency can be perceived as individuals' innovative thoughts and ideas for improving work performance (Vähäsantanen, Saarinen, & Eteläpelto, 2009, as cited in Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

1.4. The Current Study

Implementing new reforms within an educational system heavily depends on instructors, but changes in the classroom and during lessons need a great amount of learning and can only be achieved if instructors tend to reconstruct and reshape their practice and receive appropriate support in their profession (Nitche et al., 2013; Borko, 2004). This issue is given more priority when schools and educational institutes are regarded as organization, since viewing teacher professional development as a process rather than an event is a fundamental

feature of its success (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998). Concerning this fact, policy makers consider teachers and administrators as the most prominent features of school development (Guskey, 2002).

Following this line of research and extending related-studies in teachers' professional functioning, the researchers of the current study tended to investigate the role of goal orientation in two job-related constructs: work engagement and professional agency. Although empirical studies have confirmed theoretical assumptions with regard to the positive link between goal orientation and work engagement, no study has examined the multi-dimensional nature of the interplay between goal orientation and work engagement among EFL teachers. The second objective of the present study is to explore the influential factors in professional functioning and its related sources among EFL teachers qualitatively via semi-structured interviews. Moreover, given that there is an intertwining of cross-cultural factors in foreign language teaching context (Brown, 2007), the importance of investigating the influential factors in teachers' functioning is critical. So, we tend to extend and examine this line of research among EFL teachers.

In line with the above contentions, the following research questions of quantitative as well as qualitative parts were posed.

RQ1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' learning goals and work engagement?

RQ2. Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' learning goals and professional agency?

RQ3. Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' professional agency and work engagement?

The core questions of the qualitative phase are:

RQ1. What are the influential factors in EFL teachers' professional functioning?

RQ2. According to EFL teachers' attitudes, what are the important resources of professional functioning?

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

A mixed-method approach was selected to conduct a quantitative analysis of examining the relationships among teachers' engagement, agency, and their goals; and to carry out a qualitative analysis of exploring various dimensions of professional functioning. The quantitative phase was done by distributing questionnaires while the qualitative one was conducted through semi-structured interviews.

2.1. Participants

Participants included 90 EFL teachers (52.3% female and 47.7% male) from different language schools in Mashhad and Tehran with a mean age of 31.23 years (SD=11.65; range 24-55 years). Teachers taught different levels of English language and had an average 14.86 years of teaching experience (SD=10.43). The questionnaires were distributed among teachers after their classes. Participation was voluntary and teachers were requested to return the completed questionnaire to the researchers next session. Before administering the aforementioned questionnaires, the EFL teachers were assured that their personal information would be kept confidential and were used only for the current research purpose.

2.2. Instrumentations

2.2.1. Achievement Goals for Teaching

To assess EFL teachers' achievement goals for teaching, the researchers employed the modified version of *Achievement Goal Orientations for Teaching* scale designed and validated by Butler (2007) and later amended by Cho and Shim (2013). The modified scale measures three sub-factors, namely mastery goals, performance-approach goals, and performance-avoidance goals for teaching. In this scale, mastery goals for teaching are measured via three items and the sample item is: "In my profession, I aspire to get new ideas on how to convey knowledge in my subject.", performance-approach goals for teaching are assessed via four items and the sample item is: "In my profession, I aspire to demonstrate to my colleagues that I teach better than other teachers.", and performance-avoidance goals are measured via three items and the example item is: "In my profession, I aspire to conceal from my colleagues when I have more trouble meeting job demands than other teachers." The inventory used a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was found to be .68.

2.2.2. Work & Well-being Survey (UWES)

In order to measure participants' work engagement, *Work & Well-being Survey (UWES)* was used. This inventory was validated by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003). It consists of 17 items that measures three subscales: vigor, dedication, absorption. Six items assess vigor and the sample item is "At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well", five items measures dedication and the example item is "I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose", and six items assess absorption and the sample items is "When I am working, I forget everything else around me." The answers are ranged from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). In the current study, the reliability estimates of the scale and subscales computed via Cronbach's alpha was found to be .76. The reliability of the subscales ranged from .68 to .79.

2.2.3. Teacher Agency

Teacher agency was assessed via the scale validated by Shen (2015) and Peng and colleagues (Peng, Wang, Huang, & Chen, 2006). This scale includes four subscales: Learning effectiveness includes six items and the sample item is “Even if I am in a bad mood, I can still actively engage in professional learning.” Teaching effectiveness was measured with five items and the example item is “I am confident that I can find effective teaching methods to develop my students.” Optimism was assessed by five items and the sample item is “In uncertain times, I usually expect the best”, and Constructive engagement was measured by six items and the example item is “I set clear learning goals for myself.” Responses were rated on a five-point scale. For this scale, Cronbach’s alpha was .82.

2.3. Procedure

To conduct the study, the questionnaires were distributed among participants (Quantitative phase) and a number of participants were asked for semi-structured interviews (Qualitative phase). The data were collected between December 2018 and 2019. To ensure ethical considerations, the participants were ascertained about the confidentiality of their responses. Furthermore, the participation was totally voluntary. To substantiate the hypothesized associations, Pearson Product-moment correlation was utilized. To discern the most influential factor/s in professional functioning, semi-structured interviews were held.

2.3.1. Quantitative analysis

To quantitatively analyze the data, the SPSS 20 software was utilized. To determine the relationships between teacher’s work engagement and goal orientation and between teacher’s goal orientations and teacher’s professional agency, a Pearson-Product moment correlation was employed.

2.3.2. Qualitative analysis

In the qualitative phase, the following steps were carried out. First, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Then, the data was scrutinized cautiously several times for the purpose of preliminary coding. On the ground of the content, the transcribed data was coded and classified into particular categories. For more precision, the researchers studied these categories several times to ensure the saturation of data and the corresponding codes.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Quantitative Phase

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Subscale	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Learning Effectiveness	90	15.00	21.00	18.00	1.76
Teaching Effectiveness	90	14.00	22.00	18.06	2.39
Optimism	90	21.00	31.00	25.06	2.33
Construct Engagement	90	15.00	23.00	19.00	2.32
Mastery	90	19.00	32.00	26.06	3.53
Performance	90	19.00	25.00	22.00	1.55
Avoidance	90	17.00	26.00	20.40	2.69
Vigor	90	23.00	38.00	29.93	4.16
Dedication	90	17.00	33.00	24.46	4.15
Absorption	90	22.00	39.00	30.46	4.99

As the table indicates, among the four subscales of professional agency, optimism has the highest mean score ($M = 25.06$, $SD = 2.33$) and learning effectiveness has the lowest mean score ($M = 18.00$, $SD = 1.76$).

With respect to subscales of goal-orientation, mastery goals have the highest mean score ($M = 26.06$, $SD = 3.53$) and avoidance goals obtain the lowest mean score ($M = 20.40$, $SD = 2.69$). Among the subscales of work engagement, the mean score of absorption has the highest mean score ($M = 30.46$, $SD = 4.99$) while dedication obtains the lowest mean score ($M = 24.46$, $SD = 4.15$) in comparison with the other scales.

The present study aimed at exploring the possible associations between the subscales of goal orientation (mastery, performance, and performance-avoidance) and the subscales of work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption). The results are displayed in Table 2. Among the subscales of goal orientation, mastery-goal orientation has moderate correlations with absorption ($r = .69$, $p < .05$) and dedication ($r = .59$, $p < .05$) and a weak relationship with vigor ($r = .48$, $p < .05$). Performance has no significant relationship with all the subscales of work engagement and avoidance correlated weakly with vigor ($r = .26$, $p < .05$).

Table 2.

Results of Correlation Between Subscales of Work Engagement and Goal Orientation

	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption	Avoidance	Performance	Mastery
Vigor	1					
Dedication	.466**	1				
Absorption	.491**	.815**	1			
Avoidance	.267*	-.065	.207	1		

Performance	-.083	.000	.017	-.257*	1	
Mastery	.482**	.596**	.694**	.352**	.233*	1

*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01.

According to Table 3, the highest relationships were found between mastery and learning effectiveness ($r = .49, p < .05$) and between mastery and construct engagement ($r = .48, p < .05$). The correlations of performance with optimism and teaching effectiveness were found to be ($r = .38, p < .05$) and ($r = .21, p < .05$) respectively. Avoidance correlated weakly with optimism ($r = .26, p < .05$) and learning effectiveness ($r = .22, p < .05$).

Table 3.

Results of Correlation Between Subscales of Professional Agency and Goal Orientation

	Learning effectiveness	Teaching effectiveness	Optimism	Construct engagement	Avoidance	Performance	
1-Learning effectiveness	1						
2-Teaching effectiveness	.400*	1					
3-Optimism	.082	.337**	1				
4-Construct engagement	.330**	.243*	.286**	1			
5-Avoidance	.228*	.095	.261*	.197	1		
6-Performance	.049	.217*	.389**	.056	.233*	1	
7-Mastery	.497**	.351**	.274**	.485**	.352**	-.257*	1

**Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05.

*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01.

As Table 4 indicates, professional agency has a rather weak link with vigor ($r = .465, p < .01$) and has no significant correlation with dedication and absorption.

3.2. The qualitative phase

In this part, the researchers provide an overview of findings from interviews. Regarding the first qualitative research question, the findings identified three main categories: cultural norms, learners' abilities, and institutional regulations.

Cultural norms

Analyzing teachers' interviews revealed that teachers' decision should be in accordance with cultural norms regarding the appropriateness of those plans. One teacher stated this issue as follows:

“The influence of our home culture is particularly important for us. In my point of view, it

shapes the path of teaching profession. For example, when I have a problem in teaching a particular event effectively, I use the similar event of my own culture and more specifically, in teaching speech acts when learners try to imagine the situation in the target language. Sometimes while practicing a dialog, some of my learners say surprisingly: teacher, it is like the event (for example, Yalda) in our culture. It shows that they attempt to compare the situations in both languages. No matter what kind of goals and plans we pursue in classroom, we should consider our cultural norms in teaching cultural issues.”

Learner's ability

Qualitative analysis identified that learner's ability exerts an influence on EFL teachers' plans. One teacher explained the influence of learner's ability on instructional plans as follows:

“Considering student's learning potentiality is of utmost importance for a teacher. When I want to implement my plans, I think about questions such as whether or not my plan is applicable for all learners, how many learners welcome them, and do they possess enough capacity to enjoy new changes?”

Institutional regulations

An investigation into teachers' interviews revealed that teachers should respect the institutional regulations. As the majority of teachers stated, their functioning is under the influence of their workplace conditions and rules. As an example, one participant said as follows:

“I take institutional regulations and norms into consideration when I want to implement educational rules. Also, I think about how I can improve educational decisions.”

With respect to the second qualitative research question, investigating the important resources of EFL teachers' professional functioning based on participants' attitudes, the findings revealed that there are three resources.

Teaching experiences

Analyzing teachers' interviews showed that their professional experiences exert effect on their professional functioning. As they reported, their teaching experiences can present a full and deep framework which encompasses various situations. Next is an extract of one teacher:

“There are many occurrences in classroom which are rather similar to each other. I mean that it might happen in the past. Being familiar with such situations contributes to my teaching, for example, I can predict how I can deal with it appropriately. My teaching experience is my best instructor.”

Learners' feedback

Learner's feedback was identified as one the main resource that impacted teachers' professional functioning. As teachers mentioned, the kind of feedback they receive can affect their academic performance. Following was reported by one teacher:

"Learners' feedback is a good indicator of using a new teaching style. Their feedback enriches our instruction especially when they enjoy new changes. In my point of view, a student feedback is the best confirmation of my professional performance which increases my motivation to do my best. Obviously, the supervisor's opinions are really important for me, but I think students' achievement is the best indicator."

EFL teachers' update knowledge

Examining interviews displayed that EFL teachers' update knowledge influence their performance and it assists their learners to find a better understanding of the required subjects. One teacher mentioned as follows:

"When I have much knowledge in a particular field, I feel as though I have a box of various strategies via which I can provide my students to select the apt strategies for their learning; for example, based on studying articles as well as books about learners' individual differences, personality type, and learning strategies, my awareness of individual differences increases and as a result, I feel more self-efficacious in my instruction. In this way, I try to provide my learners an interesting and encouraging learning setting. Moreover, having a deep understanding of language skills contributes to my teaching effectiveness."

3.3 Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the role of EFL teachers' goal orientations in their work engagement and professional agency. With respect to the first research question, examining the link between goal orientation and work engagement, the results indicated that mastery goal orientation has a significant relationship with subscales of work engagement, namely vigor, dedication, and absorption. In other words, EFL teachers with high level of mastery goal orientation are highly engaged in their job. This outcome is justifiable from several perspectives of goal orientation framework. First, mastery goal structure was positively related to instructors' values and feelings of belonging to a school. It is clear that when teachers view a task valuable, they attempt to perform the task well and have a clear picture of what they want. So, following goals encourage them to find the most appropriate techniques as well as strategies in order to accomplish it. As related research in the domain of work engagement has indicated, individual interest plays an influential role in teachers' professional engagement. In line with the lens of achievement goal theory (AGT), when mastery oriented people become engaged in an activity they may welcome challenges and see it as a means

of their professional growing and view failures as valuable issues to be managed (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Moreover, engagement in doing a task is a self-referenced activity and an achievement in it leads to experiencing success (Nicholls, 1984, as cited in Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2016). In contrast, performance oriented individuals engage in an activity to gain favorable judgments for their competence or to avoid negative evaluations for their ability and make judgments about success based on normative criteria (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Retelsdorf, Butler, Streblow, and Schiefele (2010) stated that teachers' choose of goals exerts an effect on their instructional behavior. They indicated that instructors with a mastery goal-orientation attempt to foster effort, progress, and learning for understanding, whereas instructors with a high amount of ability orientation foster learners' motivation to compare their academic function and ability with others.

Concerning the second research question, exploring the link between professional agency and goal-orientation, the results showed that mastery goal correlated moderately with learning effectiveness and construct engagement. With regard to the theoretical stand point of professional agency, agency refers to teachers' ability to move beyond the contextual rules and standards and to perform in line with their own goals and aims (Oolbekkink-Marchand, Hadar, Smith, Helleve, & Ulvik, 2017). Also, the incorporation of goal orientation in the field of teacher education relies on the assumption that instructors have different interpretations of their own professional performance as learning and/or achievement oriented (Nitsche et al, 2013).

To extend this finding in the field of teacher education, it is justified that teachers' goals play an important role in implementing changes and shaping their opinions in their instructional behavior. As a dynamic process, practicing agency is shaped individually through various interactions with the constraints of a given context (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). Accordingly, when teachers follow mastery goals they act, behave, and even make changes consistent with their individual and organizational objects. Wolters, Fan, and Daugherty (2011) give prominence to the goal-oriented teachers and view them as the most important individuals who make decision about many particular instructional functions and procedures which are pursued in a particular context.

Vähäsantanen (2015) enumerated a number of factors influencing exercising agency including teachers' professional interests including motivation, professional competencies,

and prior job experiences. Considering this, it can be stated that mastery-oriented teachers create a particular professional zone in accordance to their motivation which can construct and reconstruct their professional zone to develop their career.

With respect to the third research question, probing the link between professional agency and work engagement, the current findings documented that professional agency significantly influenced teachers' work engagement. Theoretically, work engagement is a motivational construct (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011) and relates to employees' feeling of their job experience. Concerning its correlates, Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) emphasized both personal resources and job resources. As an example of job resources, they mention autonomy. Teacher agency is viewed as a concrete manifestation of teacher autonomy (Teng, 2019). It seems plausible that the more an EFL teacher has agency in her career, the more she becomes engaged in teaching.

With respect to the qualitative part, contemporary theories of professional agency document the significant role of social context as well as social resources in developing teacher's agency (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). This study confirmed this view that when EFL teachers make a decision and implement new approaches, they focus on the extension of social and practical borders of educational context. In this line, Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, and Miller (2012) argue that teachers' agency is dependent on their past, present, and future. The findings of current study reach to this conclusion that their claim can be extended into EFL teacher education programs; for instance, as participants stated, their teaching experiences have assisted them for a better performance by focusing on the important learning components such as effective learning strategies, the appropriate feedback, and well-designed activities. All these points enrich their current performances which influence their job motivation (Ghanizadeh & Royaei, 2018).

4.0 CONCLUSION

The results of the present study may be of interest to those associated with teacher education programs as the present study examines the dynamic nature of teacher's professional functioning. One recommendation for principals and supervisors in maximizing organizational achievement is to create opportunities for teachers to share their emotional and motivational experiences since teaching is a "people-work" or a "heart-consuming job" (Yin & Lee, 2012).

Moreover, the present study can enrich studies in student engagement since engagement is reciprocal and a number of factors such as school policy, teachers, and parents

can put effect on student engagement (van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2013). The present findings may contribute to teachers' professional development given that cultural norms is of highly significance in EFL teachers' attitudes with regard to carrying out professional duties productively.

However, there are some limitations in the current study. First, the number of participants is limited. Future studies are recommended to conduct research on a larger sample of EFL teachers to see whether the current findings will be obtained or not. Another limitation is that teachers' teaching level was not considered in this study. It seems valuable that future study will focus on this variable and will examine it.

Declaration: We hereby declare that the present is not under review by any other journal. We also state that we do not have any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

- Arens, A. K., & Morin, A. J. (2016). Relations between teachers' emotional exhaustion and students' educational outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 108*(6), 800-813. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10705510903008204>
- Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2008). Positive organizational behavior: Engaged employees in flourishing organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 29*, 147-154.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*, 1–26.
- Billett, S. (2004). Workplace participatory practices: Conceptualising workplaces as learning environments. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 16*(6), 312–324.
- Borman, G., Hewes, G., Overman, L., & Brown, S. (2003). Comprehensive school reform and achievement: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 73*(2), 125–230.
- Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher, 33*(8), 3–15. doi:10.3102/0013189X033008003
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). NY: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Butler, R. (2007). Teachers' achievement goal orientation and association with teachers' help-seeking: Examination of a novel approach to teacher motivation. *Journal of Educational*

Psychology, 99, 241-252. [doi:10.1037/0022-0663.99.2.241](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.2.241)

- Casey, C. (2006). Workers, subjectivity and decent work. In S. Billett, T. Fenwick, & M. Somerville (Eds.), *Work, subjectivity and learning. Understanding learning through working life* (pp. 229–246). Dordrecht: Springer
- Dweck, C. S., & Leggett, E. L. (1988). A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review*, 95, 256–273.
- Dresel, M., Fasching, M. S., Steuer, G., Nitsche, S., & Dickhäuser, O. (2013). Relations between teachers' goal orientations, their instructional practices and students' motivation. *Psychology*, 4(7), 572-584.
- Dubiner, D., Deeb, I., & Schwartz, M. (2018): 'We are creating a reality': teacher agency in early bilingual education. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 31, 255-271. DOI: 10.1080/07908318.2018.1504399
- Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2013). What is agency? Conceptualizing professional agency at work. *Educational Research Review*, 10, 45–65.
- Fernet, C., Austin, S., Tre'panier, S., & Dussault, M. (2013). How do job characteristics contribute to burnout? Exploring the distinct mediating roles of perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 22(2), 123–137
- Fullan, M. (2013). *Stratosphere: Integrating technology, pedagogy, and change knowledge*. Toronto: Pearson Canada.
- Furness, V. (2008). Employee management: engagement defined. *Employee Benefits*, 56- 57.
- Ghanizadeh, A., & Royaei, N. (2018). Probing EFL teachers' job motivation in the light of intra-individual level predictors. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, 49(3) 375–382. doi:10.24425/119505
- Goller, M., & Paloniemi, (Eds.). (2017). *Agency at work: An agentic perspective on professional learning and development*. Cham: Springer.
- Gorozidis, S. G., & Papaioannou, A. G. (2016). Teachers' achievement goals and self-determination to engage in work tasks promoting educational innovations. *Learning and individual differences*, 49, 46-58

- Hein, J., Daumiller, M., Janke, S., Dresel, M., & Dickhäuser, O. (2019). How learning time mediates the impact of university Scholars' learning goals on professional learning in research and teaching. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 72, 15–25.
- Imants, J., & Van der Wal, M. M. (2019): A model of teacher agency in professional development and school reform. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/00220272.2019.1604809
- Kangas, M., Siklander, P., Randolph, J., & Ruokamo, H. (2017). Teachers' engagement and students' satisfaction with a playful learning environment. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 63, 274-284.
- 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. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220973.2012.678409>
- Konrad, B.A.M. (2006). *Engaging employees through high-involvement work practices*. Ivey Business Journal.
- Lee, Y. J., & Roth, W. M. (2007). The individual I collective dialectic in the learning organization. *The Learning Organization*, 14(2), 92–107.
- Lipponen, L., & Kumpulainen, K. (2011). Acting as accountable authors: Creating interactional spaces for agency work in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27, 812-819.
- Loucks-Horsley, S., Hewson, P., Love, N., & Stiles, K. E. (1998). *Designing professional development for teachers of science and mathematics*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Corwin.
- Nitsche, S., Dickhäuser, O., Fasching, M. S., & Dresel, M. (2011). Rethinking teachers' goal orientations: Conceptual and methodological enhancements. *Learning and Instruction*, 21, 574-586. [doi:10.1016/j.learninstruc.2010.12.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2010.12.001)
- Nitsche, S., Dickhäuser, O., Fasching, M. S., & Dresel, M. (2013). Teachers' professional goal orientations: Importance for further training and sick leave. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 23, 272–278.
- Oolbekkink-Marchand, H. W., Hadar, L. L., Smith, K., Helleve, I., & Ulvik, M. (2017). Teachers' perceived professional space and their agency. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 62, 37-

46.

- Perera, H. N., Vosicka, L., Granziera, H., & McIlveen, P. (2018). Towards an Integrative Perspective on the Structure of Teacher Work Engagement. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 108*, 28-41.
- Priestly, M., Edwards, R., Priestly, A., & Miller, K. (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum making: Agents of change and spaces for manoeuvre. *Curriculum Inquiry, 42*, 191-214.
- Retelsdorf, J., Butler, R., Streblov, L., & Schiefele, U. (2010). Teachers' goal orientations for teaching: Associations with instructional practices, interest in teaching, and burnout. *Learning and Instruction, 20*, 30-46.
- Royaei, N., Ghapanchi, Z., & Ghanizadeh, A. (2020). Probing EFL teachers' perceptions of learners' success factors and its contribution to their goal-orientations and organizational commitment. *Interchange, 51*(4), 483-497. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-020-09405-1>.
- Runhaar, P., Konermann, J., & Sandres, K. (2013). Teachers' organizational citizenship behaviour: Considering the roles of their work engagement, autonomy and leader-member exchange. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 30*, 99-108.
- Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A., & Salanova, M. (2006). The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire A cross-national study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 66*(4), 701-716.
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Salanova, M. (2008). Enhancing work engagement through the management of human resources. In K. Näswall, M. Sverke, & J. Hellgren (Eds.), *The individual in the changing working life* (pp. 380e404). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Somech, A., & Ron, I. (2007). Promoting organizational citizenship behavior in schools: the impact of individual and organizational characteristics. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43*, 38-66.
- Teng, M. F. (2019). Autonomy, agency, and identity in teaching and learning English as a foreign language.
- Toom, A., Pyhältö, N., & O'Connell Rust, F. (2015). Teachers' professional agency in contradictory times. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 21*(6), 615-623.

- Vähäsantanen, K. (2013). *Vocational teachers' professional agency in the stream of change*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, Faculty of Education.
- van der Heijden, H.R.M.A., Geldens, J.J.M., Beijaard, D., & Popeijus, H. L. (2015). Characteristics of teachers as change agents. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 1-20. DOI: 10.1080/13540602.2015.1044328
- Van Uden, J. M., Ritzen, H., & Pieters, J. M. (2013). I think I can engage my students. Teachers' perceptions of student engagement and their beliefs about being a teacher. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 32, 43-54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.01.004>.
- Wolters, C., Fan, W., & Daugherty, S. (2011). Teacher-Reported Goal Structures: Assessing Factor Structure and Invariance. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 79, 1-29.
- Yin, H. B., & Lee, J. C. K. (2012). Be passionate, but be rational as well: Emotional rules for Chinese teachers' work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28, 56–65.
- Yin, H., Han, J., & Lu, G. (2017): Chinese tertiary teachers' goal orientations for teaching and teaching approaches: the mediation of teacher engagement. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 1-20. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2017.1301905