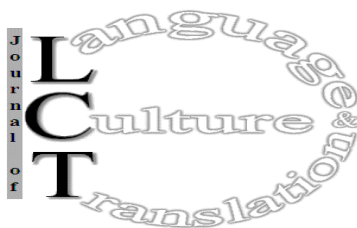




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The Association Between Iranian EFL Teachers' Work Engagement and Their Teaching Styles

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the relationship between work engagement and teaching styles among Iranian EFL teachers. The research sought to determine the level of work engagement, identify key dimensions, explore correlations between engagement and teaching approaches, and predict teaching styles based on engagement dimensions. The sample consisted of 79 teachers from public and private schools in Semirom and Isfahan, selected through purposive sampling. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 54, with an average of 14 years of teaching experience. A correlational design was employed, utilizing quantitative data collected via the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) and Grasha's Teaching Style Inventory (GTSI). Data was gathered through self-administered questionnaires, both online and in person. Results indicated that teachers displayed varying engagement levels, with dedication being the most prominent dimension. Significant correlations were found between engagement levels and teaching styles, especially higher engagement associated with Expert and Formal Authority approaches. Moreover, vigor and dedication emerged as strong predictors of teaching styles. The findings have important implications; theoretically, they support the relevance of Self-Determination and Sociocultural Theories in the EFL context. Practically, the results emphasize the need for initiatives that boost teachers' engagement, fostering an environment that supports their psychological needs to improve their commitment and teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: Work engagement; Teaching styles; Iranian EFL teachers; Grasha Teaching Style Inventory

1. introduction

Employee work engagement, defined as a positive psychological state characterized by dedication, vigor, and absorption, has garnered substantial attention within organizational and educational research due to

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its association with desirable outcomes such as enhanced job satisfaction, performance, creativity, and well-being (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Bakker et al., 2014). In educational settings, particularly among teachers, engagement is pivotal, as it directly influences instructional quality, motivation, professional development, and students' academic success and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Teachers' work engagement can be shaped by various personal and contextual factors, including organizational support, workload, self-efficacy, and individual personality traits (Hakanen et al., 2006).

In addition to engagement, teaching style represents a fundamental aspect of teachers' professional identities, reflecting their beliefs, values, and pedagogical preferences in classroom management, instructional approaches, and interaction with students (Grasha, 1994; Zhang, 2009). Teaching style not only affects educators' instructional quality and motivation but also impacts students' academic engagement and learning outcomes (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, teaching styles acquire further importance due to the unique linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and communicative challenges EFL teachers face in diverse educational environments (Nunan, 2003; Richards, 2017).

Despite the significance of work engagement and teaching style, their interrelationship remains underexplored, especially within the Iranian EFL context. Most studies have independently investigated factors influencing either teachers' engagement or instructional approaches, primarily in Western educational settings, limiting their applicability to Iran's distinct linguistic and cultural landscape (Bakker et al., 2014; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015). This gap highlights the need to examine how these constructs interact among Iranian EFL teachers, considering potential mediators and moderators such as professional identity, motivation, and teaching enjoyment (Fathi et al., 2023; Dong & Xu, 2021).

This study aims to address this lacuna by investigating the association between work engagement and teaching styles among Iranian EFL teachers. Understanding this relationship is essential for informing teacher development initiatives and fostering pedagogical practices better aligned with teachers' psychological states. By exploring the dimensions of work engagement—vigor, dedication, and absorption—and their predictive power concerning teaching styles, the research seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to the enhancement of English language teaching in Iran. Ultimately, the findings can guide stakeholders in designing targeted professional support to improve teacher engagement, instructional quality, and student learning outcomes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing Work Engagement

Work engagement represents a positive psychological state characterized by vigor (high energy and resilience), dedication (sense of

significance and enthusiasm), and absorption (full concentration in work tasks) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, engagement arises when job resources (e.g., autonomy, support) fulfill psychological needs, enabling employees to manage demands effectively (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In education, engaged teachers exhibit heightened enthusiasm, innovate pedagogically, and foster positive student outcomes (Hakanen et al., 2006; Klusmann et al., 2008). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) operationalizes these dimensions, validated globally across professions, including teaching (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

2.2. Teaching Styles in Educational Contexts

Teaching styles encompass the distinctive methods educators employ to manage classrooms, deliver instruction, and interact with students, reflecting their underlying pedagogical beliefs and values (Grasha, 1994). These styles are not static but adapt to contextual demands, including curricular objectives, student needs, and institutional expectations (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Grasha's (1996) framework offers a comprehensive typology, identifying five predominant teaching orientations that capture the spectrum of instructional approaches.

The Expert style emphasizes subject-matter mastery, with teachers positioning themselves as knowledge authorities who provide structured guidance and clear explanations. This approach prioritizes content delivery and intellectual rigor, often seen in settings where disciplinary expertise is paramount. In contrast, the Formal Authority style centers on maintaining classroom order through established rules and hierarchical control. Teachers adopting this style emphasize discipline, standardized procedures, and measurable outcomes, which may align with educational systems valuing uniformity and accountability.

A third orientation, the Personal Model style, involves teachers demonstrating ideal behaviors or problem-solving techniques for students to emulate. This approach blends instruction with mentorship, as educators actively model desired skills and attitudes, fostering learning through observation and imitation. Meanwhile, the Facilitator style shifts focus toward student-centered learning, where teachers act as guides rather than directors. By encouraging exploration, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving, facilitators aim to develop learners' autonomy and metacognitive skills. Finally, the Delegator style extends this learner independence further, assigning students substantial responsibility for their own progress through self-directed projects or peer-led activities.

In EFL contexts, the choice of teaching style is further complicated by linguistic and cultural variables. For instance, communicative language teaching often aligns with Facilitator or Delegator styles to promote oral proficiency and interaction (Richards, 2017). However, institutional constraints—such as exam-driven curricula or large class sizes—may compel teachers to adopt more structured or authority-driven approaches (Chen & Cheng, 2013). Research underscores that effective EFL teachers

often blend multiple styles, adapting flexibly to situational demands while maintaining student engagement (Zhang, 2011). Understanding these dynamics is critical for professional development, as mismatches between teachers' preferred styles and contextual requirements can lead to frustration or diminished efficacy (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015).

2.3. Work Engagement and Teaching Styles in Iranian EFL Context

Iranian EFL teachers navigate unique challenges, including sociocultural emphasis on academic achievement and linguistic barriers (Pishghadam et al., 2015). While Western studies link engagement to teaching innovation (Bakker et al., 2014), empirical gaps persist in Iran. Prior research isolates these constructs—examining engagement predictors (e.g., self-efficacy; Hakanen et al., 2006) or style outcomes (e.g., on student motivation; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015)—but neglects their interplay. Cultural and institutional differences limit the generalizability of Western findings, necessitating context-specific investigation (Fathi et al., 2023).

2.4. Theoretical Integration and Research Gap

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) underpin this relationship. Engagement thrives when psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) are met, fostering teaching styles aligned with intrinsic motivation. Simultaneously, sociocultural contexts mediate how styles manifest (e.g., hierarchical structures may reinforce Formal Authority styles). Despite theoretical relevance, no integrated study examines Iranian EFL teachers' engagement-style dynamics, overlooking potential mediators (e.g., professional identity; Dong & Xu, 2021). This study bridges this gap by probing correlations and predictive dimensions. Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

- RQ1. What dimensions of work engagement are predominantly demonstrated by Iranian EFL teachers?
- RQ2. Is there any significant correlation between the dimensions of work engagement among Iranian EFL teachers and their preferred teaching styles?
- RQ3. Which dimensions of work engagement can best predict teaching styles among Iranian EFL teachers?

3. Method

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed to examine the association between work engagement and teaching styles among Iranian EFL teachers. Cross-sectional surveys capture data on multiple variables at a single point in time, providing a “snapshot” of the population under study (Creswell, 2015). This design facilitated correlational analyses to assess relationships among the three dimensions

of work engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) and five teaching styles, as well as multiple regression to determine which engagement dimensions predicted specific teaching styles.

3.1. Participant

The sample comprised 79 Iranian EFL teachers teaching in public and private schools in Semrom and Isfahan. Participants were recruited via purposive sampling to ensure inclusion of diverse subgroups (e.g., teaching sector, gender, academic degree) (Patton, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Invitations were sent to 95 teachers; after screening for completeness, 79 valid questionnaires remained. The majority were female (65.8%), held a BA/BS degree (65.8%), and taught in the public sector (67.1%). Ages ranged from 21 to 54 years ($M = 36.94$, $SD = 9.12$), with teaching experience spanning 1–35 years ($M = 14.03$, $SD = 7.81$)

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9)

Work engagement was measured using the 9-item UWES, which assesses vigor, dedication, and absorption on a 7-point frequency scale (0 = never to 6 = always). Each subscale comprises three items. The UWES-9 demonstrates strong factorial validity and internal consistency across diverse samples (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

3.2.2. Grasha–Riechmann Teaching Style Inventory (GTSI)

Teaching styles were assessed with the 40-item GTSI, covering Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator, and Delegator styles. Responses are given on a 7-point agreement scale. The GTSI's reliability and validity were established during its development (Grasha, 1994).

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee. Participants provided informed consent and were free to withdraw at any time. Questionnaires were administered both online and in person, with detailed instructions to ensure accurate completion. Completed instruments were collected, screened for missing data, and only fully valid responses were retained. Data were coded and entered into SPSS for analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics characterized overall work engagement levels and teaching style preferences. Normality of distributions was assessed via Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests. Given significant deviations, non-parametric tests were used for some analyses. Pearson's (or Kendall's tau, where appropriate) correlations examined relationships between engagement dimensions and teaching styles. Multiple regression analyses identified which engagement dimensions best predicted each teaching style, with model assumptions (e.g.,

multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals) verified prior to interpretation.

4. Results

General work engagement scores (measured via the UWES-9) were first examined for normality. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test yielded $Statistic = .123, df = 79, p = .005$, and the Shapiro–Wilk test yielded $Statistic = .931, df = 79, p < .001$, indicating significant departure from normality. Consequently, non-parametric procedures were employed in subsequent analyses.

4.1. *Predominant Dimensions of Work Engagement*

To determine which UWES-9 dimension (Vigor, Dedication, Absorption) was most pronounced, Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests compared their medians pairwise.

Table 1. *Ranks of Work Engagement Dimensions*

	Mean Rank
Vigor	1.87
Dedication	2.47
Absorption	1.66

Results showed that Dedication significantly exceeded both Vigor ($Z = -4.721, p < .001$) and Absorption ($Z = -5.048, p < .001$), whereas Vigor and Absorption did not differ significantly ($p = .688$). Thus, Dedication emerged as the predominant engagement dimension among participants.

Table 2. *Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Statistics^a for multiple comparisons*

	Dedication - Vigor	Absorption - Vigor	Absorption - Dedication
Z	-4.721 ^b	-.401 ^c	-5.048 ^c
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.688	.000

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

c. Based on positive ranks.

4.2. *Correlations Between Work Engagement Dimensions and Teaching Styles*

Kendall's tau_b correlation coefficients were computed to assess associations between each engagement dimension and the five Grasha teaching styles. Key findings (Table 3) include:

Table 3. Correlations among Teaching Styles and Work Engagement Dimensions

		F.	P.			
		Expert	Authority	Model	Facilitator	Delegator
Vigor	Correlation Coefficient	.273**	.351**	.351**	.235**	.279**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.004	.001
	N	79	79	79	79	79
Dedication	Correlation Coefficient	.277**	.313**	.345**	.379**	.249**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.000	.003
	N	79	79	79	79	79
Absorption	Correlation Coefficient	.073	.102	.176*	.098	.092
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.377	.214	.033	.236	.265
	N	79	79	79	79	79

- **Expert style** correlated positively with Dedication ($\tau = .277, p = .001$) and Vigor ($\tau = .273, p = .001$).
- **Formal Authority** correlated with Vigor ($\tau = .351, p < .001$) and Dedication ($\tau = .313, p < .001$).
- **Personal Model** correlated with Dedication ($\tau = .345, p < .001$), Vigor ($\tau = .351, p < .001$), and Absorption ($\tau = .176, p = .033$).
- **Facilitator** correlated with Dedication ($\tau = .379, p < .001$) and Vigor ($\tau = .235, p = .004$).
- **Delegator** correlated with Dedication ($\tau = .249, p = .003$) and Vigor ($\tau = .279, p = .001$).

These patterns indicate that higher energy and commitment are associated with more directive (Expert, Formal Authority) as well as more student-centered (Personal Model, Facilitator, Delegator) styles.

4.3. Predicting Teaching Styles from Work Engagement Dimensions

A series of multiple regressions evaluated the extent to which Vigor, Dedication, and Absorption predicted each teaching style. The model explained 15.9 % of variance ($R^2 = .159, F(3, 75) = 4.714, p = .005$). Dedication ($B = .221, p = .082$) and Vigor ($B = .155, p = .096$) were positive predictors; Absorption was non-significant.

Table 4. Model Summary for all teaching styles

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
Expert	.398 ^a	.159	.125	.63656	1.675
Formal Authority	.544 ^a	.296	.268	.71139	1.692
Personal Model	.541 ^a	.292	.264	.60108	1.603
Facilitator	.549 ^a	.302	.274	.70553	1.631
Delegator	.427 ^a	.183	.150	.67104	1.713

a. Predictors: (Constant), Absorption, Vigor, Dedication

As summarized in Table 4, the strongest prediction was for Facilitator ($R^2 = .302$), followed by Formal Authority ($R^2 = .296$) and Personal Model ($R^2 = .292$), with Delegator lowest ($R^2 = .183$). Overall, Dedication and Vigor consistently contributed to predicting both directive and student-centered teaching styles, whereas Absorption added little explanatory power.

5. Discussion

Consistent with first research question, “Dedication” emerged as the most pronounced dimension of work engagement among Iranian EFL teachers, followed by “Vigor” and then “Absorption.” This hierarchy mirrors prior findings that dedication—reflecting teachers’ sense of significance, enthusiasm, and pride—is often the most salient component in educational settings (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The prominence of vigor aligns with evidence that energy and mental resilience underpin sustained engagement (Bakker & Bal, 2010), whereas the relatively lower level of absorption confirms that deep immersion, while important, may be less observable in day-to-day teaching behaviors (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Moreover, Hakanen et al. (2006) demonstrated that high dedication and vigor predict favorable outcomes such as enhanced satisfaction and reduced burnout. Theoretically, these findings support Self-Determination Theory’s emphasis on intrinsic motivation fueling dedication and vigor (Deci & Ryan, 2000), Sociocultural Theory’s view that committed teachers foster interactive learning environments (Vygotsky, 1978), and the Job Demands–Resources model’s argument that adequate resources bolster key engagement dimensions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Turning to second research question, significant positive associations were found between engagement dimensions and teaching styles, with dedication showing the strongest correlation with the Expert style, followed by vigor and, to a lesser extent, absorption. This pattern concurs with Klassen and Chiu’s (2011) observation that highly committed teachers adopt more structured, authoritative approaches, and with Bakker et al.’s (2008) findings linking engagement to proactive pedagogical practices. The moderate links between vigor and interactive methods echo Hakanen et al.’s (2006) account of energized teachers promoting active student participation, while the weaker absorption–style correlations align with the notion that intense focus may constrain pedagogical flexibility (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). These results can be framed by Self-Determination Theory’s emphasis on competence and relatedness driving teaching preferences (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Sociocultural Theory’s stress on engaged scaffolding practices (Vygotsky, 1978), and professional-development perspectives that tie ongoing engagement to instructional adaptability (Guskey, 2002).

Finally, addressing the last research question, multiple regression analyses identified dedication as the most robust predictor of teaching styles, with vigor contributing secondarily and absorption providing minimal incremental power. This replicates Bakker et al.'s (2008) report that dedication engenders varied, student-centered approaches and resonates with Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) emphasis on vigor and dedication shaping professional behaviors. From Kahn's (1990) standpoint, heightened dedication and vigor reflect psychological conditions that promote creative effort, while Maslach and Leiter's (2008) burnout–engagement continuum suggests that these dimensions enable teachers to sustain a range of effective instructional strategies. Collectively, these predictive findings underscore the centrality of dedication in shaping EFL teachers' pedagogical choices.

6. Implications

This study advances theoretical understanding of work engagement within EFL contexts by demonstrating that dedication and vigor are key drivers of teachers' pedagogical choices. The prominence of dedication among Iranian EFL instructors corroborates Self-Determination Theory's assertion that satisfaction of intrinsic psychological needs underpins sustained motivation and engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Moreover, the association between high dedication and more structured, culturally attuned teaching styles reinforces Sociocultural Theory's emphasis on the interplay between social context and instructional practice (Vygotsky, 1978). Finally, alignment with the Job Demands–Resources model suggests that access to professional resources—such as collegial support and growth opportunities—fosters the dedication and vigor that shape adaptive teaching behaviors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

For educational leaders and policymakers, the strong link between engagement and teaching style underscores the need to cultivate environments that nourish teachers' intrinsic motivation. Institutions should implement targeted professional development, recognize and reward teacher commitment, and involve instructors in decision making to bolster dedication and vigor. Teacher education programs would benefit from integrating modules on reflective practice and emotional resilience to prime future educators for sustained engagement. Finally, policy initiatives must be culturally responsive: in the Iranian context, strategies to enhance autonomy and professional growth should be tailored to local values and expectations to maximize relevance and impact.

7. Conclusions

This study demonstrated that Iranian EFL teachers exhibit high overall work engagement, with Dedication as the most dominant dimension, followed by Vigor and Absorption. Significant positive relationships emerged between Dedication and Vigor and teachers' preference for structured, authoritative styles—especially the Expert and Formal

Authority approaches. These results echo prior evidence linking work engagement to enhanced professional practices (Hakanen et al., 2006) and underscore Dedication and Vigor as key drivers of pedagogical choice. Theoretically, the findings align with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on intrinsic motivation fulfilling psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000), Sociocultural Theory's focus on socially responsive instruction (Vygotsky, 1978), and the Job Demands–Resources model's assertion that professional resources bolster engagement dimensions that shape teaching behaviors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

7.2. Limitations

Several constraints temper the generalizability of these findings. First, the modest, purposive sample of 79 Iranian EFL teachers limits applicability beyond similar contexts. Second, reliance on self-report questionnaires introduces potential biases such as social desirability. Third, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences; longitudinal data would better capture dynamic interplay between engagement and teaching style. Fourth, unmeasured factors—such as institutional support, personality traits, or career stage—may also influence both engagement and pedagogical choices. Finally, although regression models identified Dedication and Vigor as significant predictors, omitted variable bias cannot be entirely ruled out.

7.3. Suggestions for Further Research

Future investigations would benefit from adopting longitudinal designs that trace the evolution of work engagement dimensions and teaching styles throughout teachers' careers. Such an approach could reveal whether and how dedication, vigor, and absorption change over time, and whether shifts in these engagement facets correspond with modifications in pedagogical preferences as EFL instructors gain experience or face new professional challenges.

Comparative studies across diverse educational contexts are also warranted. By examining how work engagement and teaching styles manifest in public versus private schools, urban versus rural settings, or at different instructional levels (e.g., primary, secondary, tertiary), researchers can identify contextual factors that moderate these relationships. Understanding such variations would enable more targeted recommendations for policy and practice tailored to specific institutional or cultural environments.

Finally, employing mixed-methods approaches—integrating quantitative surveys with classroom observations and in-depth interviews—would enrich our understanding of how engaged teachers enact their preferred instructional strategies in real time. Incorporating additional predictors, such as institutional support structures, personality traits, and participation in professional development, could further refine theoretical models of how work engagement shapes pedagogical decision-making. These multifaceted investigations will deepen insights into the

dynamic interplay between teacher engagement and instructional practice, ultimately guiding efforts to enhance language-learning outcomes.

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