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Structural Relationship Model of Occupational Ethics and Job Engagement among Teachers: The Mediating Role of Career Adaptability

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Abstract

Aim: The purpose of the present study was to investigate relationship between occupational ethic and job engagement with mediating role of career adaptability among primary school teachers in Rasht.

Method: The method was descriptive-correlational. The population of the research included all the primary school teachers of Rasht department of education. 282 people were selected by stratified random method based on Cochran's formula. Data collection tools were, three questionnaires of professional ethics scale by Gregory, C., Petty, (1990), career adapt-ability scale (CAAS) by Savickas et al., (2012) and job engagement by Schaufeli & Salanova, (2001). Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) via SPSS version 18 and LISREL version 8.8.

Results: The results of the structural equation model showed that the direct effect of occupational ethics on job engagement (β = 0.41) and on career adaptability (β = 0.30) was significant. Furthermore, career adaptability had a significant direct effect on job engagement (β = 0.26). The indirect effect (mediating role) of career adaptability in the relationship between occupational ethics and job engagement was also significant (β = 0.078).

Conclusion: The proposed structural model provides a coherent framework for understanding how occupational ethics and career adaptability interact to shape teachers' job engagement. The findings highlight that fostering career adaptability is a crucial mechanism for translating ethical values into higher job engagement in educational settings. Therefore, educational policymakers and school administrators should prioritize the development of these two psychological resources to enhance teachers' professional performance and engagement.

Keywords: Occupational Ethics, Job Engagement, Career Adaptability

Introduction

One of the most important organizations in any country is the education organization, and also one of progressive elements of such organizations are motivated and effective teachers. Teachers, as the main element of teaching and learning process, and having a high level of motivation, morale and enthusiasm, guarantee the effectiveness of the country's educational system. In this context, job enthusiasm is one of the important psychological constructs that plays a prominent role in increasing effectiveness of individuals and organizations (Lee, Hameduddin, & Lee, 2023). In line with the general trend towards positive psychology, job enthusiasm was proposed as a concept in contrast to job burnout, which is a response to long-term job-related stress (Perera, Vosicka, Granziera, & McIlveen, 2018).

In recent years, giving attention to job enthusiasm as a psychological component in organizations has caused many discussions and studies (Cruz, Alquwez, & Balay-odao, 2022). Career engagement is a concept that has a direct relationship with positive outcomes of organizational commitment, strengthening organizational civic behaviors, and job motivation . Also has a negative relationship with, intention to quit the job (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). Halberg and Shaufeli (2006) consider career engagement to be a positive psychological concept that is known as an indicator of well-being and psychological health in workplace. Career engagement is a penetrating, stable and positive state of mind related to work, which is characterized by three components: enthusiasm, dedication and attraction (Schoufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). Enthusiasm for work is characterized by high levels of energy, mental flexibility while working, eagerness to invest and resilience in facing problems. Engagement in work refers to a person's deep focus on work, passing time quickly and forgetting everything around while doing job, and being devoted to the perception of a meaningful feeling about doing the job, having a sense of enthusiasm and pride. It also describes as if the job is challenging (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008). According to Bakker and Demeruti's model of job enthusiasm (2008), some jobs and personal resources in the workplace create job enthusiasm in employees, and subsequently, job enthusiasm leads to positive consequences in the work environment. Based on Bakker and Leiter's (2010) research, in organizations like schools, enthusiastic teachers are completely fascinated by their job and perform the job tasks in a desirable way. Teachers with high job enthusiasm take creativity and are initiative in their jobs, increase their responsibility of teaching and learning, so this help the schools to achieve their goals (Keyko, Cummings, Yonge, & Wong, 2016). Accordingly, job enthusiasm, as a desirable resource, may lead to a positive cycle of resources, hence has positive effects on health, which results in correct performance of job duties (Simon, 2018). In the education and training organization,

teachers' job enthusiasm as an approach against their job burnout can play an important role in improving the learning and training environment so, knowing and understanding the related factors and its predictors are important (Lazarids, Buchholz, & Rubach, 2018). As the research results of Yu, Yang, Han and Lee (2022) have pointed out the role of career adaptability in promoting career enthusiasm. Career adaptability is a term that comes from career path growth theory. Job adaptability means the ability to adaptation and conformity in changing ambiguous conditions, which is increasingly important (Zacher, 2015). The constructivist theory of the career path belongs to Savickas (2001), which was created in response to the society's need for an appropriate approach to current century (Maree, Gerryts, Fletcher, & Olivier, 2019). Savickas (2012), considers career path adaptability as a psycho-social construct that indicates a person's readiness and resources to deal with tasks, changes, and expected shocks in different roles, including job roles. According to the constructivist theory of Savickas, the adaptability of the career path means the acquisition of attitudes, competencies, and behaviors that people use to align themselves with the job that suits them; Therefore, the adaptability of the career path means adapting the demands that during it, complex and unfamiliar situations impose on the individual (Savickas, & Porfeli, 2012). In fact, job adaptability can be considered a type of high-level self-regulation that helps people to perform their job duties efficiently, and this ability to self-regulate during job situations is necessary for each person (Maree, & Che, 2020). Therefore, the career adaptability, as an important and effective factor facilitates self-regulation in goals and behaviors for employees and encourages them to be responsible (Savickas, 2020). Lantra (2019) believes that if teachers, involved in the education organization as the most important human factor, cannot have a sense of enthusiasm and pride in performing their duties and do not acquire the necessary adaptability in the career path, practically, it will cost lots of damages. In a study conducted by Klehe, Zikic, van and Depater (2011), it was found that, most teachers are concerned about the monotony of their job. so discovering and planning a career can lead to adaptability and career successes. Haenggli and Hirschi (2020) indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between two variables of job adaptability and job enthusiasm among employees. Also, Kohi, Soleimani and Shafizadeh (2021) has shown that establishment of the teachers' career adaptability model increases job enthusiasm, life satisfaction, loyalty to organization and professional competence. It also decreases intention to quit their job and has beneficial consequences at the occupational, individual and organizational levels. Today, the concept of work ethics has become very important in all organizations to create and maintain motivated and hardworking employees. Organizations are Getting more complicated and the increase in amount of unethical, illegal and irresponsible works by stuff, the attention of managers in organizations has been directed to the ethical issues (shakeri, Kahdoui & Abbasi, 2021). One of the social

systems in which compliance with principles of professional ethics is very important, is the educational system. The teacher is one of the main elements of this system that knows and obtains its goals and plans. The profound effects of teachers on students in today's world, and their identifier and patterning role, lead them to be aware of not only academic qualifications, but also they observe moral principles appropriate to their jobs. On the other hand, the acquisition of teachers` insight about the professional ethics plays an important role in their moral and professional responsibility, and creation of a healthy moral atmosphere in educational environment (Golami, Heidari & Nasr Abadi, 2022). Occupational ethics is a cultural norm that gives a positive spiritual value to do good and appropriate work in a society and believes that work in itself has an inherent value (Bier, 2019). Occupational ethics is a part of life ethics including, micro to macro levels of work and business. It is the commitment of mental, psychological and physical strength in individuals or group to their collective thought, in order to obtain the inner strengths and talents of group and individual for development (Morris, & Wood, 2011). Work ethic makes the teacher do his job well in school by all means and be diligent, selfless, responsible of having social and creative relationships at work environment. It is associated with consequences such as organizational commitment, job performance and reducing job burnout (Golam Pour, Pour Shafei, 2020). Buber (1998) as an existentialist philosopher emphasizes the moral responsibility of teacher. From his point of view, responsibility originates from his own self and his humanity. That is, if there is no force majeure interpellation to the person to take responsibility, he is still responsible, which means the origin of the responsibility is within the person, not outside of him. In fact, the moral virtues in Buber's thinking are the same major moral responsibilities which these virtues can help the teacher in the process of building his own moral and professional identity and personality, according to the requirements of these virtues it helps to expand vision and improve the understanding of teachers in order to provide effective and real communication with themselves and their students in the school environment (Golami, Heidari & Nasr-Abadi, 2022). Therefore, work ethics is considered as one of the key factors affecting individual and organizational outcomes, so that the existence of good work ethics can reduce job burnout and increase job performance and organizational commitment (Gigol, 2020). Several studies have shown that work ethic has a positive relationship with job enthusiasm (Rezai Sharif, Karimianpour, Moradi and Karimianpour, 2017) and career adaptability (Ginora, Magnano, Lodi, Anuvazi, Kamusi, Patrizi and Nata, 2018). Thus, Lee, Hamudodin and Lee (2023) concluded that, there is a positive and significant relationship between the two variables of professional ethics and job passion. He, Hong and Yu (2022) according to their research indicated that professional ethics have a positive effect on teachers' job enthusiasm. The research results of Iner, Ildran and Oregan (2012) showed that professional ethics increase job enthusiasm in the

organization by creating and expanding the sense of trust among employees. Also, research results of Ganak (2019) have shown that the course of professional ethics, has a positive and meaningful effect in effectiveness of teachers' training and learning process. Several studies have shown that work ethic increases employees' loyalty to the organization and reduces the motivation to quit the job (Fury, Bulman and Rossir, 2015), continuity of their jobs (Zacher, 2014), reducing job anxiety. (Coetzee and Stoltz, 2015) and promoting their job satisfaction and success (Chen, Liu and Chen, 2018), prepares the background for promoting job adaptability. Since education is the most important pillar in today's societies to achieve development and transformation, schools need motivated, responsible and committed human resources more than anything else. It might depend on the effort and commitment of teachers. Also, considering that teachers play a very important role in promoting the country and raising a healthy, energetic and hard-working generation, it is necessary to study and examine job ethics and job adaptability as effective factors in creating motivation, sense of responsibility and loyalty. On the other hand, considering the importance of variables related to human resources, paying attention to the importance and consequences of job enthusiasm for the organization and the realization of organizational goals, it is very important to identify the predictors of this variable in organization. Based on the research conducted in this field, work ethic and job adaptability are among the variables that are effective in predicting job enthusiasm. Since investigations about predictors of job enthusiasm has less focused on role of job adaptability, and also, work ethic has not been investigated as a predictor of job adaptability, this research seeks to investigate the relationship between work ethic and job enthusiasm with the mediating role of job adaptability among teachers of elementary grades in Rash city schools.

Methodology

participants

The method of the current research was descriptive-correlational using structural equation modeling.

The statistical population included all primary school teachers of the Rasht Department of Education in the fall of 2024 (N = 962; 472 in District 1 and 490 in District 2). The sample size was determined using Morgan's table, yielding a sampling adequacy of 282 teachers. The sample was selected using a stratified proportional sampling method based on district (139 from District 1 and 143 from District 2).

The inclusion criteria for the study were: having at least one year of teaching experience, holding a formal or contractual employment contract, and providing informed consent to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria were: incomplete questionnaires, lack of willingness to continue cooperation, and having less than one year of teaching experience.

After making the necessary arrangements with the Rasht Department of Education, the researchers referred to the selected schools. The questionnaires were distributed in person and in a paper-and-pencil format during the teachers' break times by the researchers. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation coefficient) in SPSS version 18, and structural equation modeling in LISREL version 8.8. Normality and multicollinearity assumptions were checked, and the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used to assess data normality.

Instrument

Occupational Ethics Questionnaire (Gregory C. Petty, 1990)

This questionnaire contains 23 items and four components: attachment and interest in work (items 1–6), persistence and seriousness at work (7–12), health and human relations at work (13–17), and collective spirit and participation in work (18–23). Items are scored on a five-point Likert scale from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5); the total score ranges from 23 to 115, and subscale ranges are 6–30, 6–30, 5–25, and 6–30, respectively. Construct validity was examined through confirmatory factor analysis (χ^2 = 516.261, df = 281, χ^2/df = 3.25, CFI = 0.90, GFI = 0.93, NFI = 0.83, RMSEA = 0.06), indicating acceptable fit. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.91 for the total scale and 0.86, 0.88, 0.79, and 0.90 for the subscales of attachment, persistence, health, and collective spirit, respectively.

Job Engagement Questionnaire (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2001)

This questionnaire contains 17 items and three components: professional energy/vigor (1–6), dedication (7–11), and absorption (12–17). Items are scored on a five-point Likert scale from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5); the total score ranges from 17 to 85, and subscale ranges are 6–30, 5–25, and 6–30, respectively. Construct validity was examined through confirmatory factor analysis (χ^2 = 243.516, df = 267, χ^2/df = 3.42, CFI = 0.93, GFI = 0.91, NFI = 0.81, RMSEA = 0.06), indicating acceptable fit. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.89 for the total scale and 0.83, 0.79, and 0.87 for the subscales of vigor, dedication, and absorption, respectively.

Career adaptability Scale (Savickas et al., 2012)

This questionnaire contains 24 items and four components: concern (1–6), control (7–12), curiosity (13–18), and confidence (19–24). Items are scored on a Likert scale from very little (1) to very much (5); the total score ranges from 24 to 120, and each subscale ranges from 6 to 30. Savickas and Porfeli (2012) reported internal consistency of 0.94 for

the total scale and 0.92, 0.89, 0.91, and 0.94 for concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, respectively. Construct validity in the present study was examined through confirmatory factor analysis ($\chi^2 = 589.233$, df = 267, $\chi^2/df = 2.83$, CFI = 0.90, GFI = 0.93, NFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.05), indicating acceptable fit. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.93 for the total scale, indicating good reliability.

Results

Examining the demographic information of the participants showed that 80% were married and 20% were single. 46.1% had a bachelor's degree, 44% had a master's degree, and 9.9% had a doctorine degree. Their average age was 35 years and their average teaching experience was 12 years.

The descriptive statistics and the results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K–S) test for the research variables showed that the mean and standard deviation were 88.45 and 11.81 for occupational ethics, 58.10 and 9.11 for career adaptability, and 92.28 and 19.23 for job engagement, respectively. Furthermore, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov statistics for occupational ethics (0.33), career adaptability (0.14), and job engagement (0.21) were all associated with significance levels greater than the 0.05 error level (P > 0.05). Therefore, the normality of the data for all three variables is confirmed, and parametric tests can be used to analyze the data.

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between job ethics and career adaptability with job engagement.

Table 1. Correlation matrix of research variables

3	**2**	**1**	**variable**	
		1	Occupational ethics	**1**
	1	0.71	career adaptability	**2**
1	0.42	0.56	Job Engagement	**3**

According to table 1 the relationship between job ethics and job adaptability (0.71) and job enthusiasm (0.56) is positive and significant. The relationship between job adaptability and job enthusiasm (0.42) is positive and significant.

Hypothesis 2: Job ethics has an indirect effect on job engagement by the mediating role of job adaptability.

In the second hypothesis, the structural equation method was used to investigate mediating role of career adaptability in relations with occupational ethics and job engagement. The tested model of the current research is presented in diagram (1)

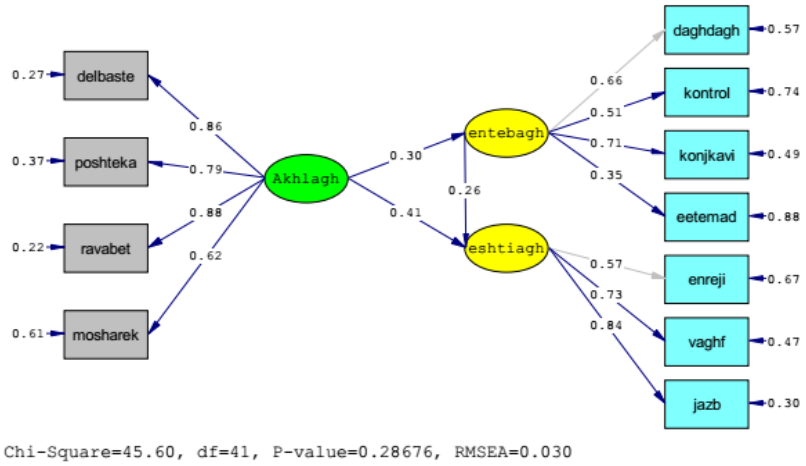


Figure 1. Standard estimation coefficients of the tested structural model.

(Note: In the LISREL output, "Akhlagh", "Eshtiagh", and "Entebagh" represent Occupational Ethics, Job Engagement, and Career Adaptability, respectively).

According to Figure 1, the direct effect of occupational ethics on career adaptability (β = 0.30) was positive and significant. The direct effect of occupational ethics on job engagement (β = 0.41) was also positive and significant. Furthermore, career adaptability had a positive and significant direct effect on job engagement (β = 0.26). Since all direct paths in the model were significant, the research hypotheses are confirmed. Table 2 reports the direct, indirect, and total effects of the variables.

Table 2. Coefficients of direct, indirect and total variables

total	**Indirect effect**	**Direct effect**	**independent variable**	**dependent variable**
2.51		0.30	Occupational ethics	**career adaptability**

3.41	0.70	0.41	Occupational ethics	**Job Engagement**
2.02		0.26	career adaptability	**Job Engagement**

According to table (2), the indirect effect of Occupational ethics on job engagement is significant with beta (0.41). Since this effect mediated by career adaptability influences Job engagement, the mediating role of this variable in the relationship between Occupational ethics and Job engagement is confirmed.

Table 3. Fitting the research model based on fit indices

RMSEA	**PNFI**	**AGFI**	**CFI**	**GFI**	**X2/d.f**
0.03	0.92	0.91	0.98	0.95	**1.12**

The results of table (3) show that the RMSEA root mean square error index is equal to (0.03), the (CFI) is equal to 0.98, the (GFI) is equal to 0.95, The (AGFI) is equal to 0.90, the normalized goodness of fit index (NFI) is equal to 0.92, and the chi-square index on the degree of freedom (X2 / df) is equal to 1.12, indicating the appropriate fit of the model. has a desired concept.

Discussion

Studying occupational ethics and gaining a proper understanding of how it affects various aspects of an organization's work and functioning provides the possibility to take more appropriate measures to develop occupational ethics in organizations. Career adaptability can also act as a factor for developing ethics, showing respect toward the characteristics of others. Furthermore, it can be described as a combination of characteristics such as commitment, seriousness, supportive participation, responsibility, and adaptability.

The results obtained from the first hypothesis showed that occupational ethics has a direct and significant effect on Job Engagement; thus, the first hypothesis is confirmed. This finding is consistent with the results of Kong (2019). In explaining this hypothesis, it can be said that occupational ethics will identify and employ qualified teachers in schools, and Job Engagement is a tool for improving and developing motivated, responsible, and committed human resources. In fact, the supremacy of professional ethics brings many benefits, such as improving relationships and mutual understanding. It further increases commitment and responsibility and reduces conflicts and costs of control for the organization and employees. It also increases legitimacy based on a social responsibility

outlook, moral commitment in paying attention to the importance of the beneficiaries, profitability, and improving the competitive advantage and success of the organization (Gholami, Heydari, & Nasrabadi, 2022).

In fact, employees who are moral consider their job as a tool for personal growth and social development; they are probably more involved than others in activities related to their job and are passionate about their work. In other words, if work is viewed as a tool to help peers and colleagues, it can probably be effective in creating a friendly and appreciative atmosphere in the work environment, which in turn can increase the Job Engagement and job involvement of employees. Therefore, Job Engagement can be increased by encouraging and cultivating occupational ethics and ethical employees.

The results showed that career adaptability has a positive and significant effect on Job Engagement (Figure 1). This finding is in line with Hangli and Hirschi (2020) and Kohi, Soleimani, and Shafizadeh (2021). In explaining this finding, it can be stated that in order to have high energy and engagement, the employees of organizations must have the ability to adapt to challenges and job conditions; on the other hand, they need the abilities and attitudes necessary to perform job duties, that is, career adaptability. In fact, people with a higher level of career adaptability will show up in the workplace with more motivation and spend more energy doing their job, because these people believe that they have the power to adapt to different job challenges and situations; that is why they are attracted to their work with more motivation and devote themselves to their duties. Therefore, when teachers experience job passion, they gain a high level of psychological interest in the job due to the perception of power, attraction, and dedication in their job, which have a psychological aspect. These teachers have an emotional and cognitive response to their job due to their high level of energy and enjoyment of their work. All the psychological reactions that arise in teachers with the presence of Job Engagement provide the conditions for adaptability to the school and help education in achieving organizational goals.

Regarding the role of occupational ethics on career adaptability, the results showed that occupational ethics has a positive and significant effect on career adaptability (Figure 1). This finding is consistent with the research results of Fury, Bullman, and Rossier (2015), Chen, Liu, and Chen (2018), and Coetzee and Stoltz (2015). In explaining this finding, it can be said that occupational ethics are the basis of theoretical and practical ethics in terms of philosophical assumptions, values, beliefs, and ideas of employees towards society, organization, and work. In fact, employees' perception of ethics leads to loyalty, job satisfaction, and more satisfaction in the work environment. On the other hand, how employees understand the restrictions, norms, and ethical behavior procedures in society and the organization is based on motivational aspects, and if it is manifested at a high level in the work environment, it can provide reasons for strengthening job attitudes.

Therefore, employees with high occupational ethics, having this personality trait, can cope with and adapt to complex job challenges and situations. This adaptation, which is the same as adaptability, can positively affect the occupational ethics of employees and their perception of the moral atmosphere of the organization.

By adding the mediating role of career adaptability to the research model, the results demonstrated that the indirect effect of occupational ethics on Job Engagement was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.078$). This indicates that career adaptability acts as a partial mediator; meaning that occupational ethics not only directly increases Job Engagement, but also indirectly enhances it through the improvement of career adaptability. In other words, when teachers possess high occupational ethics, this characteristic simultaneously strengthens their ability to adapt to career challenges, which in turn leads to higher Job Engagement. Since investigating the impact of these variables and reaching an appropriate criterion to enhance Job Engagement has been the subject of many past studies, the present model provides a coherent framework for understanding how ethical traits translate into engaged behaviors through adaptability mechanisms.

Also, considering the central and key role of career adaptability in the progress of organizations in achieving goals and continuing organizational survival, the need to pay attention to career adaptability in the organizational environment is inevitable. The present findings regarding the mediating role of career adaptability are consistent with the research results of Yao, Yang, and Han (2022), Gigol (2020), Hangli and Hirschi (2020), and Lee, Hamudodin, and Lee (2023).

Despite the valuable findings, this study has some limitations that should be considered in interpreting the results and guiding future research. First, the statistical population was limited to primary school teachers in Rasht; therefore, the generalization of the findings to teachers of other educational levels or other cities should be done with caution. Second, the data were collected using self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias or perceptual biases of the respondents. Third, due to the descriptive-correlational nature of the study, definitive causal relationships cannot be claimed, although structural equation modeling helps to understand the directional relationships. Based on these limitations, it is suggested that future researchers conduct similar studies in other educational levels and cities, use multi-source data collection methods (such as evaluating teachers by principals or students), and conduct qualitative studies to deeply explore the mechanisms through which occupational ethics and career adaptability influence job engagement.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that occupational ethics and career adaptability play a fundamental and determining role in promoting Job Engagement among teachers. The proposed structural model provides a coherent framework that explains how these two

variables interact; occupational ethics not only directly enhances Job Engagement but also acts through career adaptability as a significant partial mediator.

Given the central role of career adaptability in achieving organizational goals and ensuring long-term survival, it is inevitable to pay attention to this variable in the educational environment. Job Engagement increases creativity among teachers, which can ultimately lead to improved individual and organizational performance. To maintain high energy and engagement, organizations must cultivate career adaptability among their employees. Career adaptability can serve as a factor for expanding ethics, respecting the individual characteristics of others, and integrating characteristics such as commitment, seriousness, supportive participation, responsibility, and adaptability. Ultimately, enhancing these qualities can significantly increase teachers' Job Engagement and job involvement.

Based on the results, it is recommended that educational administrators and policymakers focus on developing and strengthening occupational ethics and career adaptability among teachers. Holding specialized workshops, providing supportive environments, and designing career development programs can empower teachers to adapt to job challenges, which in turn will lead to higher Job Engagement and improved educational outcomes.

Disclosure Statements

There is no conflict of interests to declare. In addition, with the final approval of this article, the authors accept the responsibility for the accuracy and correctness of its contents. This research has not received any financial assistance from funding organizations in the public, commercial or non-profit sectors.

Conflict of interest

This study did not have any conflict of interest for the authors

Ethical considerations

All ethical standards for research involving human participants were observed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to completing the questionnaires. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. Additionally, all data were analyzed anonymously and reported only in aggregate and general form.

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