

Modeling Elementary Teachers' Work Engagement Based on Job Crafting and Emotional Creativity: The Mediating Role of Critical Thinking

Hajar Moeini Korbekandi¹, Reza Borji Bodaghi², Hossein. Aalamdarian³, Rasul. Rezaei Mollajegh^{4*}

1. M.A. in Career Counseling, Faculty of Humanities, Payame Noor University, Semnan Center, Semnan, Iran

2. Master's Student in Rehabilitation Counseling, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran

3. Department of Family Counseling, Faculty of Humanities, Ha.C., Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran

4. Assistant Professor of Department of Psychology and Counselling, Tehran, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: Rs.rezaei@cfu.ac.ir

E d i t o r	R e v i e w e r s
Luis Felipe Reynoso-Sánchez Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Autonomous University of Occident, Los Mochis, Sinaloa, Mexico felipe.reynoso@uadeo.mx	Reviewer 1: Mehdi Rostami Department of Psychology and Counseling, KMAN Research Institute, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada. Email: dr.mrostami@kmanresce.ca Reviewer 2: Azade Abooei Department of Counseling, Faculty of Humanities, University of Science and Art, Yazd, Iran. Email: a.aboei@tea.sau.ac.ir

1. Round 1

1.1 Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the Introduction, the opening paragraph states that “Teacher work engagement is a positive psychological state in which teachers approach their professional duties with energy, dedication, and absorption.” This is conceptually appropriate, but the paragraph should be strengthened with direct citations to foundational and teacher-specific engagement literature. The manuscript currently provides a broad conceptual definition without immediately anchoring it in the cited work of Schaufeli et al., Kahn, Bakker and Bal, or Hakanen et al.; adding citations here would improve theoretical traceability.

In the Introduction, the sentence “The present study examined whether elementary teachers' work engagement could be modeled through two antecedent variables: job crafting and emotional creativity” introduces job crafting and emotional creativity as antecedents, but the cross-sectional design cannot establish antecedence. The authors should revise causal or temporal wording throughout the manuscript and use terms such as “predictors in the proposed statistical model,” “correlates,”

or “theoretically positioned antecedents.” This is especially important because the study later acknowledges that the design is cross-sectional.

In the Theoretical Background section, the paragraph beginning “Job crafting refers to employee-initiated changes in tasks, relationships, or the cognitive meaning of work” would benefit from a clearer distinction between the Wrzesniewski and Dutton conceptualization and the Slemp and Vella-Brodrick measurement model. The manuscript mentions task, relational, and cognitive crafting, but it does not explain why this three-dimensional model was selected instead of the job demands-resources-based job crafting model proposed by Tims et al. This distinction matters because different job crafting scales operationalize the construct differently.

In the theoretical paragraph on emotional creativity, the sentence “Emotional creativity refers to the capacity to experience and express emotions in ways that are original, effective, and authentic” is relevant but underdeveloped for the teaching context. The authors should explain more explicitly how Averill’s components—preparedness, novelty, effectiveness, and authenticity—operate in classroom management, teacher-student relationships, and pedagogical decision-making. Without this elaboration, the link between emotional creativity and work engagement remains plausible but not sufficiently theorized.

In the Measures section, the sentence “Critical thinking was assessed with the California Critical Thinking framework attributed to Facione” requires correction or specification. Facione’s framework is not itself a questionnaire; it is associated with instruments such as the California Critical Thinking Skills Test and related tools. The authors should state the exact instrument used, its version, whether it measures skills or dispositions, and whether it has been validated in Persian and among teachers.

The paragraph stating “The present report is limited by the absence of detailed measurement-model indices such as Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, discriminant validity statistics, and complete item-retention decisions” identifies a major weakness that should be corrected rather than merely acknowledged. In a PLS-SEM study, reporting reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, factor loadings, and collinearity diagnostics is not optional. The authors should provide Cronbach’s alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, AVE, HTMT ratios, Fornell-Larcker results, cross-loadings if necessary, and indicator loadings before interpreting the structural model.

In the Data Analysis paragraph, the authors state that “A two-tailed significance threshold of .05 was used, with t values greater than 1.96 interpreted as statistically significant.” This is insufficient for mediation analysis in PLS-SEM. The manuscript should report the bootstrapping procedure in detail, including the number of bootstrap samples, whether bias-corrected confidence intervals were used, whether the test was one-tailed or two-tailed, and how missing data were handled. These details are essential for evaluating the reported indirect effects.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the updated document.

1.2 Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the paragraph defining critical thinking, the manuscript states that “Critical thinking refers to purposeful, self-regulated judgment involving analysis, inference, evaluation, and reasoning.” This definition is suitable, but the authors should clarify whether critical thinking is treated as a stable cognitive disposition, a cognitive skill, or a professional teaching competence. This distinction is important because the mediation model assumes that critical thinking functions as a mechanism between

job/emotional variables and engagement, yet the current discussion does not sufficiently justify why critical thinking should be placed as a mediator rather than as an antecedent or moderator.

In the paragraph stating “Five direct hypotheses and two mediation hypotheses were considered,” the hypotheses should be formally listed as H1–H7. At present, the hypotheses are embedded in prose, which makes it more difficult to connect the theoretical expectations with the results tables. A clear hypothesis list would improve the logical structure of the manuscript and allow the authors to report whether each hypothesis was supported in a transparent way.

The conceptual model shown in Figure 1 requires revision for clarity and consistency. The diagram appears to place Work Engagement on the left side and Job Crafting/Emotional Creativity on the right side, with arrows pointing toward Work Engagement, which may confuse readers because most SEM diagrams conventionally place predictors on the left, mediator in the center, and outcome on the right. The authors should redraw Figure 1 so that job crafting and emotional creativity appear as exogenous constructs, critical thinking appears as the mediator, and work engagement appears as the final endogenous variable.

In the Method section, the sentence “The study used an applied, descriptive-correlational survey design” is acceptable, but the authors should provide a more rigorous justification for using PLS-SEM through SmartPLS 3. The manuscript should explain whether PLS-SEM was selected because of prediction orientation, model complexity, non-normality, formative/reflexive measurement considerations, or sample-size logic. Without this justification, the choice of SmartPLS appears procedural rather than methodologically motivated.

In the Participants and Sampling paragraph, the sentence “No subgroup analyses are reported because demographic subgroup data were not available in the manuscript records used for this report” is problematic for a publishable empirical article. Demographic data such as gender, age, teaching experience, educational degree, employment status, and school type are basic participant characteristics and should be reported. If these data were not collected, this should be acknowledged as a serious methodological limitation; if they were collected but unavailable, the authors should retrieve and include them before publication.

In the Measures paragraph, the manuscript states that “Data were collected using standardized self-report questionnaires,” but it does not report the number of items, scoring method, Likert scale anchors, possible score ranges, sample items, or interpretation of higher scores. This omission limits reproducibility and makes the descriptive statistics difficult to interpret. For example, readers cannot determine whether the mean work engagement score of 22.79 represents low, moderate, or high engagement unless the scale range and item structure are presented.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the updated document.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.