



Meaningful Work: A Paradigm Model for Iranian EFL Faculty

Shahla Roshani Ghaleh Sheikhi^{1*}, Ali Mohammad Mohammadi²,
Hooshang Yazdani³

^{1*}(Corresponding author) Instructor, Department of English Language and Literature, Payam Noor University, Tehran, Iran. Shahla.Roshani@pnu.ac.ir

²Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Arak University, Arak, Iran. A-mohammadi@araku.ac.ir

³Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Arak University, Arak, Iran. H-yazdani@araku.ac.ir

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Abstract

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Meaningful work, a personally significant, purpose-driven construct, plays a pivotal role in education, where faculty dedication directly influences student success. This qualitative study employed grounded theory to explore the experiences of EFL faculty and develop a paradigm model of meaningful work. The study utilized semi-structured interviews to collect data from 19 participants, selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis, and theoretical saturation was achieved, ensuring the comprehensiveness of the analysis. This indicated that no new themes or insights surfaced, confirming the depth and rigor of the findings. The analysis revealed that meaningful work emerged as the central phenomenon, shaped by a dynamic interplay of factors. These included causal conditions (e.g., personal attributes and professional identity), contextual factors (e.g., organizational culture, workplace climate, and resource availability), and intervening factors (e.g., job demands, personal issues, bureaucratic issues, and student issues). The faculty employed job-crafting strategies to enhance the meaningfulness of their work, which led to positive outcomes for students, teachers, and the organization. The resulting paradigm model presents a multifaceted framework, emphasizing the essential role of supportive environments that align closely with faculty values and principles. The study underscores the necessity of addressing causal, contextual, and intervening factors to cultivate meaningful work effectively. These findings have significant implications for faculty development programs, highlighting the importance of creating environments that reflect faculty values. By fostering meaningful work, institutions can better support faculty in their roles, ultimately benefiting both educators and students.

Keywords: faculty, meaningful work, paradigm model

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1. Introduction

Meaningful work, characterized by a profound harmony among personal values, passions, and skills, has transcended mere job satisfaction to become a critical determinant of both individual well-being and organizational efficacy (Wallace, 2019; Ward & King, 2017). This alignment fosters a deeply resonant sense of purpose, yielding significant benefits, including enhanced psychological well-being, such as reduced burnout and increased resilience (Arnold et al., 2007; Steger, 2019), heightened job fulfilment (Fouché et al., 2017; Ghislieri et al., 2019), and a reinforced sense of purpose (Allan et al., 2019). Beyond individual benefits, meaningful work catalyzes organizational vitality, contributing to improved performance, increased job involvement, enhanced participation, and heightened competence (Kashyap & Arora, 2022; Martela & Riekk, 2018; Scott, 2022; Singh et al., 2020).

To elucidate the multifaceted nature of meaningful work, researchers have developed various theoretical frameworks. For example, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) proposed four essential sources, including personal development, unity with others, service to others, and self-expression, underscoring the intrinsic and relational dimensions of finding purpose in one's occupation. Additionally, the job characteristics model developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976) emphasizes that a well-designed job, incorporating elements like diverse skills, clear task completion, impactful work, independent decision-making, and performance feedback, is vital for employees to perceive their work as meaningful, which leading to greater job satisfaction and effectiveness.

In educational settings, particularly within the dynamic context of EFL instruction, the concept of meaningful work assumes paramount importance, directly impacting teacher well-being and student learning outcomes (Ward & King, 2017). Research demonstrates a positive association between perceived meaningfulness and organizational citizenship behaviors among teachers, fostering a supportive institutional environment (Salamat & Didehkhani, 2017). Furthermore, the relational aspects of teaching, including positive interactions with students and colleagues, are crucial in cultivating a sense of purpose (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2016). However, the realization of meaningful work in EFL contexts is often complicated by a confluence of cultural, institutional, and political factors, which can significantly impact teachers' experiences (Rokita & Jasków, 2023). Policy changes, curriculum reforms, and evaluation systems can influence teachers' perceptions of meaningfulness, either facilitating or hindering their sense of purpose (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Given the unique cultural and institutional dynamics shaping EFL teaching in Iran, comprehending the elements that foster meaningful work is of paramount importance.

While studies within Iran have explored the concept of meaningful work across sectors such as banking and healthcare (e.g., Gorgi et al., 2019; Hakimi, 2020), there has been a notable lack of research focusing on the unique experiences of EFL faculty. However, recent qualitative research by Mohammadi et al. (2024), employing self-determination theory (SDT), explores the motivational dimensions of meaningful work among Iranian EFL university teachers and the contextual factors that affect their motivation. This study reveals that EFL faculty find meaningfulness in their work, particularly when they witness positive impacts on their students. Key themes such as beneficence, competence, relatedness, and autonomy were identified as intrinsic motivators. However, while illuminating significant intrinsic motivators aligned with SDT, the study did not fully encapsulate the broader spectrum of challenges and opportunities faced by these educators. Unlike previous research that has focused on isolated aspects of meaningful work (e.g., intrinsic motivators). The present study aims to develop a holistic, integrated model that captures the multidimensional nature of meaningful work. By exploring the interplay of causal conditions, contextual factors, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences, this research will provide a richer, more precise understanding of how meaningful work is experienced in the Iranian EFL educational setting. The following research questions will guide the pursuit of research objectives:

1. How do causal conditions, contextual factors, intervening conditions, action strategies, and consequences enhance or diminish the experience of meaningful work among Iranian EFL faculty members?
2. How can the complex relationships among the factors influencing the sense of meaningful work among Iranian EFL faculty members be effectively represented in a paradigm model?

2. Literature Review

Frankl (1959) emphasized that values are fundamental to a meaningful life, asserting that meaning is derived through meaningful work, love, and personal growth. This perspective laid the foundation for understanding how individuals find purpose in their work, especially in challenging environments. Building on this, Kahn (1990) argued that meaningful work fosters a sense of unified purpose and belonging, encouraging individuals to become more invested in their roles. His work highlighted the psychological and emotional dimensions of meaningful work, underscoring its contribution to both individual well-being and organizational effectiveness.

In the 1990s, the study of meaningful work gained momentum in organizational psychology. Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) introduced the concept of job crafting, which posits that individuals can reshape their roles to find

greater meaning and satisfaction. This idea emphasized the active role employees play in creating meaningful work experiences. In the early 2000s, meaningful work was integrated into broader psychological frameworks. Seligman (2012) included meaning as one of the five core elements of well-being in his PERMA model, alongside positive emotion, engagement, relationships, and accomplishment. Seligman linked meaning to contributing to something greater than oneself, which often leads to altruistic behavior and deeper engagement with one's work. This framework provided a comprehensive understanding of how meaningful work enhances overall well-being, both personally and professionally.

In the context of education, Steger (2012) explored the relationship between meaningful work and teacher engagement, noting that educators who find meaning in their work exhibit increased vigor, dedication, and absorption. This engagement, in turn, enhances professional fulfillment and organizational commitment (Allan, 2019). These findings suggest that meaningful work not only benefits individual teachers but also the broader educational community, as engaged teachers are more likely to employ active teaching methods and foster meaningful interactions with students.

However, the pursuit of meaningful work is not without challenges. Tan et al. (2019) found that even individuals who derive meaning from their work can experience burnout due to excessive workloads, highlighting the delicate balance between meaningful work and well-being. Similarly, Zábrowská (2018) investigated the links between faculty burnout and psychosocial work environments in Czech public universities, using Demerouti et al.'s (2001) Job Demands-Resources model. The study revealed that work-family conflict was the leading predictor of burnout, both directly and as a mediator between quantitative demands and burnout. This reinforces the importance of maintaining a satisfactory work-life balance in the pursuit of meaningful work.

Additionally, the pursuit of meaningful work can lead to underemployment, where individuals' productive capacities are underutilized (Allan et al., 2019, 2021). This phenomenon complicates the connection between meaningful work and job satisfaction, particularly in educational settings where bureaucratic structures and excessive administrative demands often detract from teachers' focus on actual teaching (Churchman, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001). Heavy workloads and insufficient resources can impede teachers' ability to derive meaning from their work (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Tan et al., 2019). Furthermore, the lack of institutional support and a restrictive organizational climate exacerbate these challenges, undermining teachers' ability to maintain a sense of purpose and motivation in their work (Ashkani et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, meaningful work has transformative potential, particularly in under-resourced organizations. Bunderson and

Thompson (2009) argued that individuals who view their work as a calling may be more willing to endure challenging conditions, fostering a culture of mutual support and professional growth. This idea is supported by Onça and Bido (2019), who found that teachers who derive meaning from their work are more inclined to share resources and assist their colleagues. Similarly, Zeglat and Janbeik (2019) established a positive correlation between meaningful work and organizational outcomes in Jordanian universities, mediated by individual work performance.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

This study employed purposive and snowball sampling strategies to recruit 19 EFL faculty members from various state universities across Iran, specifically in the provinces of Ilam, Khuzestan, Tehran, Sistan and Baluchestan, Fars, and East Azerbaijan. Participants were selected as expert participants based on their minimum of five years of experience teaching TEFL in Iranian universities. The sample consisted of seven female and 12 male faculty members, with an age range of 36 to 59 years. Their teaching experience ranged from five to 27 years. All participants held a PhD. Academic ranks included assistant professors ($n = 8$), associate professors ($n = 3$), full professors ($n = 2$), and instructors ($n = 6$). These individuals were selected based on their established reputations in effective teaching. The sample size of 19 participants was deemed sufficient based on the principle of data saturation and theoretical sampling, which was achieved when no new themes or insights emerged from the interviews. The rationale for focusing on faculty members stemmed from the understanding that teaching is often considered a profession intrinsically linked to meaning-making (Steger, 2012). Ethical guidelines were strictly followed, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity for all participants.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

3.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

The primary instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview protocol designed in accordance with grounded theory principles, as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). This approach was selected to facilitate a detailed exploration of EFL faculty members' perceptions of meaningful work within the Iranian higher education context. The protocol was developed iteratively, with initial questions serving as a starting point and subsequent questions evolving based on emerging themes from the data. The interview protocol featured open-ended questions aimed at generating in-depth and comprehensive participant narratives. Key areas of inquiry included participants' personal definitions and interpretations of meaningful work

within their professional roles, factors that contributed to or diminished feelings of meaningfulness in their teaching experiences, and obstacles that hindered their ability to find meaning in their work. Additionally, questions explored the strategies and coping mechanisms participants employed to enhance or maintain a sense of meaningfulness in their work. The protocol also included inquiries into how the specific personal and institutional context of Iranian higher education influenced participants' experiences of meaningful work. To refine the protocol, the interview was piloted with two EFL faculty members who were not part of the final participant group.

3.2.2. E-Cam Recorder

To ensure a comprehensive and accurate record of the interviews, an e-cam recorder was utilized. This device captured both audio and visual data, preserving subtle expressions, tones of voice, and non-verbal cues crucial for qualitative analysis. The use of an e-cam recorder enhanced the reliability and depth of the data by providing a more complete representation of participants' perspectives.

3.3. Procedure

This study adopted a qualitative, exploratory design grounded in constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2017), building upon the foundational work of Strauss and Corbin (1998). This approach was chosen to facilitate an in-depth exploration of Iranian EFL faculty members' experiences, perceptions, and interactions related to meaningful work. The goal was to develop a comprehensive paradigm model that elucidates the intricate relationships between various factors influencing their sense of professional meaningfulness. Constructivist grounded theory, with its emphasis on inductive reasoning and the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and participants, was deemed particularly suitable for capturing the context-specific nature of meaningful work within the Iranian higher education landscape.

Semi-structured interviews served as the principal tool for data collection. The process began with the identification of potential participants who were recognized by their students and colleagues for their commitment to effective teaching and demonstrated a strong engagement with the concept of meaningful work. Initial participant recruitment was guided by purposive sampling, focusing on individuals known for their dedication to teaching excellence. Snowball sampling was also employed, where participants were asked to recommend colleagues whom they believed could provide valuable insights into the research topic. This dual sampling strategy ensured a diverse and comprehensive pool of participants. Interviews were conducted from November 18, 2023, to August 11, 2024.

Participants were contacted via email, where the study's purpose was explained, and they were invited to participate. Comprehensive details about the study, including its aims, procedures, and ethical considerations, were provided. Informed consent was secured from all participants before the commencement of the interviews. They were assured that their responses would be anonymized and used solely for research purposes. Given the geographical distance, interviews were conducted via telephone and Skype. Prior to the interviews, participants were asked about their preferred interview modality. To ensure participant comfort, interviews were conducted at times and locations of their choosing.

The semi-structured interviews, employing open-ended questions, facilitated natural conversations and enabled participants to freely share their experiences and feelings related to their work, creating a comfortable environment for in-depth discussion (Brinkmann, 2013). The interviews aimed to understand the factors influencing the attainment of meaningful work in their professional lives, the strategies participants used to cultivate it, and the resulting outcomes. Themes of meaning, motivation, challenges, and support within their work contexts were explored. Each interview, lasting 45 to 50 minutes and conducted by the lead researcher, was audio-visually recorded with informed consent, ensuring a rich and detailed dataset of their work experiences.

Following the initial interviews with 16 participants, theoretical sampling was employed. This involved ongoing data analysis, which informed the selection of additional participants to further explore emerging themes and achieve theoretical saturation. It was determined that three additional participants were needed to fully develop the theoretical framework, resulting in a final sample of 19 participants. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the first author, ensuring accuracy and completeness. Simultaneously, the second researcher took reflective notes during the interviews, capturing initial impressions, non-verbal cues, and contextual insights. These notes served as a valuable supplement to the transcripts, aiding in the interpretation of the data.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis involved iterative coding, categorization, and theoretical development, following grounded theory principles. The initial phase consisted of open coding, where the transcripts were meticulously examined line-by-line to identify and label salient concepts, phrases, and recurring patterns in the participants' narratives. Constant comparative analysis was employed, systematically comparing each data segment with existing codes and emerging categories. This process ensured that the coding framework remained grounded in the data and evolved as new insights emerged. For instance, within the paradigm model, the identification of causal conditions

revealed a cluster of open codes, including self-efficacy, creativity, resilience, and emotional intelligence. These initial codes were later abstracted into the axial code “personal resources,” which reflected the participants’ articulation of internal capacities and strengths that directly influenced their experiences of meaningful work.

Further analytical abstraction led to the development of the selective code “personal attributes,” which served as the conceptual category for these causal conditions. This hierarchical coding process—moving from specific data points to broader theoretical constructs—allowed for the identification of a core dimension in the participants’ construction of meaningful work. Data saturation was used to determine the completion of the coding process, defined as the point at which no new conceptual insights emerged and the data became redundant. This criterion ensured that the analysis was comprehensive and that the resulting model was robust and firmly grounded in the data. Measures to ensure validity and reliability were implemented. The interview protocol was piloted with two EFL faculty members to ensure clarity and relevance. Additionally, member checking was employed, where preliminary findings were shared with participants for validation and feedback. This process enhanced the credibility of the study.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis, a collaborative coding approach was adopted. The first and last two authors independently conducted the coding process, and regular consensus meetings were held with the second author to discuss and resolve any discrepancies. This process ensured consistency and agreement in the interpretation of codes. To mitigate potential bias, reflective memos were consistently written during the analysis process, and regular discussions were conducted to ensure interpretations remained firmly rooted in the data rather than the researchers’ preconceived notions. Reliability was assessed using Cohen’s kappa, which yielded a score of .816, indicating high agreement among coders. Additionally, member checking was employed, where preliminary findings were shared with participants for validation and feedback, further enhancing the credibility of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1. Open Codes

Open coding is the first phase of the coding process, in which distinct concepts and themes are identified for classification. This stage focuses on transforming the data into conceptual representations (Flick, 2015). During this phase, researchers examined the interview texts line by line, deconstructing the data into meaningful units, assigning labels based on their meanings, extracting concepts, and developing refined categories (see Table1).

Table 1*A sample of Open Codes*

Categories	Original statements
Preparing students for future work	P07: "I find it incredibly rewarding to prepare students for their future, and it's gratifying to see them communicate effectively".
Devotion	P03: "Teaching is vital not for financial gain, but for the responsibility of shaping capable and successful individuals".
Tolerance	P15: "We often face challenges due to inadequate organizational support, yet we continue to advocate for our students".
Feedback	P19: "In Iran, we've discussed promotion strategies, and the feedback received positively influences our teaching".
Students' demotivation	P18: "Students today are demotivated and hopeless about their futures; universities must strengthen ties with industry to improve career pathways".
Migration	P10: "I'm deeply concerned about student migration and brain drain, as many seek advice on pursuing studies abroad due to a lack of opportunities at home".
Getting tenure	P05: "The biggest challenge in our system is the absence of clear tenure guidelines, causing significant stress and workload overflow for teachers".
Need for new teaching method	P04: "Iran's educational system relies too much on knowledge transfer; it's essential to modernize it and involve professors in decision-making".
Curriculum adaptation	P02: "There's been little change in our traditional educational system, which no longer meets the needs of the new generation; we need to drive positive reforms".
Collective self-efficacy	P14: "Students must believe in their ability to work independently and collaboratively on tasks".
Students' negative mindsets	P08: "Student negativity towards becoming English teachers stems from low job prospects and dissatisfaction with low-paying part-time roles; we must improve their outlook through better teaching".
task crafting	P15: "The curriculum is overly broad; I often modify it to meet my students' specific needs, a flexibility not outlined in the standards".
Autonomy	P15: "I manage my classroom without constraints, focusing on the learners' needs".
Academic buoyance	P09: "My colleagues and I see the university as a second home and strive to support each other towards our shared goals".
Relatedness	P05: "I gain valuable insights from my students' diverse perspectives, often having to rethink my beliefs during discussions".
Proactivity	P04: "I adapt my teaching to my students' needs, such as adding collocations when necessary, and they find it helpful".
Adaptability	P13: "I can adapt to any situation, and my passion for teaching makes challenges easier".
Making a positive impact on students	P12: "Making a positive impact on students' lives and preparing them for a better future is fulfilling to me".
Autonomous motivation	P10: "I refuse to stand by while my students struggle; despite my exhaustion, their success brings me joy".
Creating digital infrastructures	P01: "We must move away from traditional education and invest in digital infrastructures to enhance collaboration and essential skills for students".
Financial issues	P14: "Iranian teachers earn low salaries, comparable to those in underdeveloped countries".
Family issues	P05: "My children often complain about my long hours dedicated to achieving tenure through research, publishing, and conferences".
Time issues	P10: "The overwhelming workload in teaching mirrors trying to fit too much into a limited space, resulting in stress".
Cognitive crafting	P10: "High negativity among students regarding English teaching stems from job insecurity and dissatisfaction with part-time positions

4.1.2. Frequency Distribution of Coded Parts

Using the code frequencies feature, the researcher created a table that displays the number of segments coded with selected codes. Based on the findings, 491 coded sections were identified across the 19 interview files. The highest frequency of coded sections was associated with interviewee P10, with 34 coded sections, while the lowest frequency was associated with interviewee Po4, with only 6 coded sections. In total, 491 coding sections were identified across the 19 interview files. In this research, all factors extracted from the 19 interview files were initially treated as individual codes. Subsequently, based on the conceptual similarities of these codes, they were grouped into broader categories. This process led to the formation of the research themes, as illustrated in the following table.

Table 2

Frequency of Coded Data

Documents	Frequencies	Documents	Frequencies
P01	32	P11	19
P02	27	P12	29
P03	32	P13	27
Po4	6	P14	22
P05	31	P15	21
P06	25	P16	25
P07	21	P17	28
P08	23	P18	30
P09	17	P19	32
P10	44		
Total number of participants: 19		Total codes: 491	

Note. ★P stands for participant

4.1.2.1. Causal Conditions. Causal conditions are circumstances that contribute to the emergence of a phenomenon. These categories, derived from prior events, encompass the incidents that trigger or facilitate the development of a specific phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

Table 3

Open Codes, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding Concerning Causal Conditions

	Selective coding	Axial coding	Open coding
Causal condition	Personal attributes	Personal resources	Self-efficacy, -Creativity-Resilience-Emotional intelligence
		Intrinsic motivation	Challenge seeking-Responsibility
	Professional identity	Academic Buoyancy	Devotion, proactivity, Tolerance, Sacrifice, Self-regulation, Continuous self-Renewal
		Enrichment	Communicative competence, Preparing students for future work,
		Self-transcendence	Spirituality-Consciousness
		Affective commitment	Growth and Development

In this study, causal conditions were identified as the factors that significantly contribute to meaningful work within the EFL university system of Iran. The causal conditions analyzed were centered on personal attributes (personal resources, intrinsic motivation) and professional identity (academic buoyancy, enrichment, self-transcendence, affective commitment) among EFL teachers.

Personal resources encompass internal capabilities and qualities that individuals possess, which aid them in managing challenges, pursuing goals, and enhancing overall well-being. These resources can significantly influence one's resilience, motivation, and ability to find meaning in everyday life, including work. Based on the analysis of interviews and the subsequent coding, personal resources including self-efficacy, creativity, resilience, and emotional intelligence were identified. Among these, 'resilience' appeared with the highest frequency in the codes.

P10: *"I'm able to adjust to any situation that comes my way. I believe that true enthusiasm for your work makes even the toughest tasks feel easier".*

P06: *"Honestly, if I don't know my students as people, the lessons just fall flat... We're just trying to understand each other, and using English as the tool".*

Intrinsic motivation is characterized by an internal drive that arises from an individual's personal interest, enjoyment, and intrinsic satisfaction in engaging in activities, rather than being influenced by external pressures or

rewards (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012). The participants showcased their motivation by actively undertaking meaningful activities.

P10: *"I always try to tailor my teaching activities to what my students need. For instance, if I notice that collocations are lacking in our materials, I like to throw in some extra tasks focusing on them during our lessons. Luckily, the students really appreciate it!"*

Professional identity is an elaborate construct that encompasses teachers' sense of self as educators. It is shaped by their beliefs, values, experiences, and the social and cultural condition in which they work (Clandinin et al., 1999).

P13: *"I believe all my students can learn and succeed. I aim to create a safe and welcoming classroom where they can try new things, make mistakes, and learn from them. I'm always learning and growing as a teacher to give my students the best education possible".*

P05: *"I teach English to connect people, not just grammar. Meaning comes from empowering students to share their stories and bridge cultures through English".*

Academic buoyancy is the teacher's ability to maintain resilience and effectiveness amid the everyday challenges and pressures of the educational environment. Teachers with high academic buoyancy are more likely to promote a positive learning environment, support their students effectively, and continue their professional growth despite obstacles (Comerford et al., 2015).

P07: *"Even though we've faced repeated setbacks and our requests have been disregarded by university management, we remain dedicated to our students and their future".*

P11: *"Despite numerous mental and professional concerns, I forget all those worries when I step into the classroom".*

A substantial number of participants enthusiastically discussed ways to significantly impact the academic lives of learners. Some expressed concerns beyond their personal needs, emphasizing their greatest aspiration to contribute to the upbringing of the younger generation for the enhancement of the nation's future and prosperity.

P15: *"Preparing them for a better life is enough for me".*

P03: *"The true meaning of my work lies in the knowledge that I am empowering individuals to unlock their potential".*

Self-transcendence involves finding meaning and purpose beyond oneself, such as contributing to the growth and development of others. For teachers, this often manifests as a deep commitment to student learning and well-being.

P13: *“I find deep fulfillment in watching my students grow and achieve their language learning goals. It’s more than just a job; it’s about making a difference in their lives”.*

Affective commitment refers to the emotional connection and care that teachers feel toward their students. It fosters strong relationships and creates a positive and supportive learning environment.

P16: *“I feel a deep sense of responsibility to ensure that each of my students reaches their full potential”.*

P18: *“My heart is in this work, and my connection to my students is the driving force behind my passion for teaching”.*

4.1.2.2. Contextual Conditions. Contextual conditions are the “specific set of conditions (patterns of conditions) that intersect dimensionally at this time and place to create a set of circumstances or problems to which persons respond through actions/interactions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The underlying conditions refer to particular circumstances that influence the strategy (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In this study, three key categories—organizational culture, organizational climate, and resource availability—along with student factors played a significant role in the strategies, as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Open Codes, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding Concerning Contextual Factors

	Selective coding	Axial coding	Open coding
Contextual factors	Organizational Culture	Trust	Loyalty, Competency, Adaptability
	Workplace Climate	Teamwork	Mentoring, Supporting, and Professional friendships
	Resource availability	Infrastructural resources	Up-to-date teaching materials, Professional development, Technology

Organizational culture points to the shared beliefs, values, customs, traditions, and practices that define an organization. It influences how individuals interact, make decisions, and behave within the organizational context. For EFL faculty members, organizational culture can significantly shape their experience of meaningful work. A positive and supportive organizational culture fosters a sense of trust, which in turn promotes loyalty and adaptability among faculty members. Research has shown that relational culture is the dominant organizational culture among Iranian EFL learners. This finding underscores the importance of fulfilling the need for relatedness in creating a meaningful work environment.

A significant number of participants highlighted the importance of trust in their colleague relationships. They attributed their professional progress to friendly interactions.

P17: *"I can rely on my colleagues to follow through on their commitments. We collaborate effectively, and there's a strong sense of shared responsibility. I trust that everyone is pulling their weight".*

P11: *"Thank God, our colleagues are honorable people who not only don't neglect their work, but we can also count on their support in times of need".*

Out of the 19 participants, 11 indicated a positive work environment characterized by strong teamwork and mentorship. Notably, junior faculty members expressed significantly greater satisfaction with this environment compared to their senior colleagues. This heightened satisfaction appears to be directly attributable to collaborative efforts and formal or informal mentorship initiatives aimed at addressing the specific challenges encountered by junior faculty during their early career stages.

P09: *"Fortunately, our university president is always a strong advocate for our rights, which puts our minds at ease regarding many issues, allowing us to focus on more effective work".*

P14: *"If it weren't for the advice and empathy of our more experienced colleagues, we wouldn't have been able to navigate many of our issues. They were like experienced mentors, for whom we are always grateful".*

Many interviewees were dissatisfied with the infrastructure and believed that more advanced infrastructure would enable professors to do more meaningful work to improve students.

P18: *"Our students need access to advanced digital libraries so they can access up-to-date online resources such as books, articles, and databases to enhance their information literacy and knowledge. Unfortunately, the internet speed is so slow that even accessing domestic resources is difficult".*

P04: *"Unfortunately, the laptops and computers in our center have broken down and have been repaired several times".*

4.1.2.3. Intervening Conditions. Intervening conditions are environmental factors that influence the process of the primary phenomenon through various strategies. In this study, these circumstances encompass three primary categories: job demands, personal issues, bureaucratic issues, and students' issues.

Table 5

Open Codes, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding Concerning Intervening Factors

Intervening factors	Selective coding	Axial coding	Open coding
	Job demands	Time issue	Teaching, Research, Service to the community, Family
		Research issues	Lack of time due to educational -tasks- Lack of funding Support
	Personal issues	Physical issues	Burnout
		Family issues	Work-life imbalance
	Bureaucratic issues	Financial issues	Low salary
		Tenure	Finance- Workload –Policies
	Students' issues	Demotivation	Absenteeism, Frustration, Drop out, Brain drains

The physical, social, and organizational elements of a job that necessitate ongoing mental or physical exertion and potentially endanger physical and psychological well-being are referred to as job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Participants' interviews revealed that when faculty members are burdened by stress and overwhelmed by the large volume of tasks they must complete, quality teaching is compromised as an educational objective. The challenges faced by Iranian university faculty in this study included time constraints, heavy workloads, and conflicts between work and family responsibilities.

P11: *"It's a common misconception that our job is just teaching and that it's easy. In reality, we juggle teaching, advising, research, and family obligations, which takes up a tremendous amount of time".*

Balancing family life and workload can be stressful for EFL faculty, with research highlighting that work overload, lack of autonomy, and low organizational support contribute to feelings of exhaustion (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 2009). Time constraints emerged as a significant issue, with many teachers expressing a desire to engage in additional classroom activities to enhance students' skills but finding it impractical due to competing demands. This struggle is particularly challenging for those with young faculty members.

P05: *"My kids constantly complain about how much time I spend at work. I'm focused on obtaining tenure, which requires long hours dedicated to research, publishing, and conferences. Achieving work-life balance feels nearly impossible".*

P17: *"My child has autism and needs significant attention. My mother looks after him during my work hours. In addition to this, I must concentrate on research, teaching, and other responsibilities".*

Interviewees described bureaucratic issues as discouraging, time-consuming, and stressful, with a higher prevalence among junior faculty.

P12: *“Unfortunately, we always have this nagging feeling that as new faculty members, we lack job security. Instead of focusing on effective work, we’re constantly preoccupied with job security, which in turn entangles us in bureaucratic procedures”.*

P05: *“All the paperwork and chasing stuff for promotions eats up so much time; we barely get any research done”.*

In the context of an uncertain economic climate, the escalation of financial difficulties and associated anxieties among individuals has profound implications for workplace productivity. Specific financial challenges can be identified as significant stressors. When individuals perceive these issues as particularly severe or overwhelming, it may precipitate adverse physical or psychological health outcomes. Consequently, these health-related consequences are likely to contribute to a measurable decline in productivity (Williams et al., 1996). Several participants in the interview identified economic difficulties as a significant barrier to the attainment of meaningful work.

P13: *“We, as faculty, are paid less than many people in other jobs, whether they work for themselves or the government. When we tell people what we make, they often don’t believe it”.*

P14: *“Teachers in Iran don’t make high salaries; our pay is on par with what you’d find in underdeveloped countries”.*

Tenure among faculty members is the permanent or long-term employment status awarded after a probationary period and rigorous evaluation of teaching, research, and service contributions. It is granted based on strict criteria such as academic qualifications, publications, teaching effectiveness, and administrative or community engagement, making the process highly competitive and challenging. Once achieved, tenure provides job security and academic freedom, safeguarding faculty from arbitrary dismissal (Altbach, 2000).

P05: *“We are constantly dealing with issues such as getting tenure, promotion, and similar matters to ensure our job security. Earning research points requires a significant investment of time”.*

P12: *“We lacked adequate understanding of the tenure acquisition procedure and were not provided with any information, which had a severely negative impact on our situation”.*

4.1.2.4. Students’ Issues. Excessive concern among faculty members for students gives rise to the category of “Student factors,” encompassing elements that impact students’ motivation, engagement in class, and willingness to collaborate with peers. EFL students frequently encounter

various obstacles such as inadequate learning conditions, teachers' instructional methods, insufficient learning resources, and disruptive behavior among peers, which subsequently diminish their motivation (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015). Demotivation can have adverse effects on students' attitudes and behaviors, diminish teachers' motivation, and results in deficient academic achievements (Afshari et al., 2019; Falout et al., 2009).

P19: *“Many students feel disconnected and unmotivated, particularly in learning foreign languages, often due to hopelessness about their futures”.*

P07: *“Fatigue and demotivation are more noticeable than ever in universities today”.*

4.1.2.5. Strategies/Action. Strategies refer to the particular actions or interactions that arise from the central phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007).

Table 6

Strategies Proposed by Participants

	Axial coding	Selective coding	Open coding
Strategies		Cognitive crafting	Focusing on students' competencies, Self-efficacy, and Creativity
	Job crafting	Task crafting	Taking initiatives to support authentic real-life learning, Practical teaching
		Relational crafting	Working together in open physical and digital environments

4.1.2.6. Consequences. Consequences pertain to the results of the phenomena as they are manifested through actions and interactions (Creswell, 2007).

Table 7

Open Codes, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding Concerning the Applied Strategies

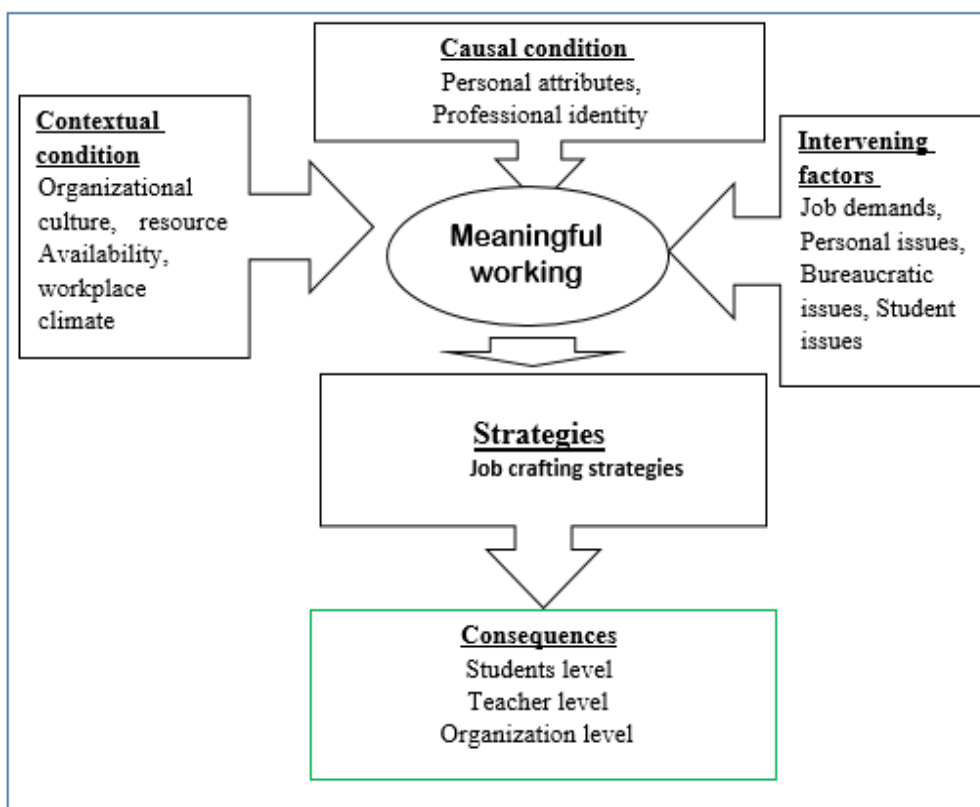
Meaningful Working Outcomes	Teacher outcomes	Inner satisfaction, affective commitment, self-efficacy, proactive motivation, well-being, Professional identity
	Student outcomes	Collective competence- engagement, positive attitude toward learning English
	Organizational Outcomes	Productivity –organizational pride

4.1.3. Paradigm Model

After the data were systematically analyzed and reanalyzed, they were ultimately organized according to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) paradigm model. This framework allowed us to delineate the central phenomenon, its surrounding context, the causal factors driving it, the strategies used to manage it, the intervening conditions that impacted those strategies, and the final outcomes observed (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Paradigm Model According to the Items and Codes Inserted into Core Coding



Based on the findings, meaningful work emerges as a central phenomenon—a dynamic process deeply rooted in the interplay of various factors. This journey begins with the foundational elements of personal attributes and professional identity, where individual values, motivations, and a dedicated commitment to language education serve as the initial drivers. These internal factors then interact within the specific environment of the EFL workplace, shaped by organizational culture, resource availability, and the prevailing workplace climate. A supportive and well-resourced environment,

characterized by open communication and mutual respect, facilitates the pursuit of purpose. However, this path is not without its obstacles. Job demands, personal issues, bureaucratic hurdles, and student-related challenges can all intervene, potentially undermining teachers' sense of meaningfulness.

To navigate these challenges and actively cultivate a sense of purpose, EFL professionals engage in proactive strategies, most notably job crafting. By reshaping their roles and responsibilities to align with their values and interests, they enhance their sense of ownership and agency. Ultimately, these efforts yield significant outcomes across multiple levels. Students experience increased engagement, motivation, and improved learning outcomes, reflecting the positive impact of teachers' meaningful work. Teachers, in turn, experience enhanced job satisfaction, professional growth, and a stronger sense of purpose, leading to greater well-being and commitment. At the organizational level, fostering meaningful work contributes to improved teacher retention, a more positive school climate, and an enhanced institutional reputation, demonstrating the far-reaching benefits of prioritizing purpose in EFL education.

4.2. Discussion

This research aimed to construct a paradigm model of meaningful work from the perspective of Iranian EFL faculty members, utilizing a grounded theory approach. The model, derived from the experiences and perceptions of 19 participants, reveals a complex, multidimensional, and interactive framework encompassing causal conditions, contextual factors, intervening factors, strategies, and consequences. The findings underscore that meaningful work, as perceived by Iranian EFL faculty, is not solely an individual endeavor but is deeply intertwined with personal, professional, and organizational elements. The causal conditions, including personal attributes such as intrinsic motivation and personal resources, align with Frankl's (1959) assertion that meaning is a fundamental human drive. Furthermore, the significance of professional identity, evidenced by themes such as academic buoyancy, enrichment, self-transcendence, and affective commitment, echoes Kahn's (1990) emphasis on the psychological and emotional dimensions of meaningful work.

Contextual factors, such as organizational culture (trust), workplace climate (teamwork), and resource availability (infrastructural resources), play a crucial role in facilitating meaningful work. The presence of trust and collaborative teamwork fosters an environment conducive to purpose and connection, enabling faculty members to engage more deeply with their roles. In contrast, the lack of adequate resources, as highlighted by Ingersoll (2001) and Churchman (2007), impedes faculty members' ability to derive meaning

from their work. This is particularly relevant in the Iranian context, where resource constraints and bureaucratic hurdles are prevalent.

Intervening factors, including job demands (time, research, and student issues), personal issues (physical and family issues), bureaucratic issues (financial and tenure issues), and student demotivation, significantly impact the experience of meaningful work. These challenges align with Tan et al.'s (2019) and Záborská et al.'s (2018) findings, which emphasize the delicate balance between meaningful work and vitality, particularly in the face of excessive workloads and work-family conflict. The prevalence of bureaucratic issues, such as financial and tenure concerns, further underscores the challenges faced by faculty members in the Iranian context. Strategies, such as job crafting, emerged as a key mechanism for navigating these challenges and fostering meaningful work. This finding resonates with Wrzesniewski et al.'s (1997) concept of actively reshaping roles to find greater meaning and satisfaction. By engaging in job crafting, faculty members can proactively address their needs and adjust their work with their values and goals.

The consequences of meaningful work were observed at the student, teacher, and organizational levels. At the student level, engaged teachers who find meaning in their work are more likely to employ active teaching methods and foster meaningful interactions, as suggested by Steger (2012) and Allan et al. (2019). At the teacher level, meaningful work contributes to enhanced well-being, professional fulfillment, and organizational commitment. At the organizational level, meaningful work leads to improved organizational outcomes, as demonstrated by Zeglal and Janbeik (2019), with individual work performance acting as a partial mediator.

The study also shed light on the unique challenges faced by Iranian EFL faculty members. The interplay of personal, institutional, and political dynamics creates a complex landscape that influences their experiences of meaningful work. The lack of empirical research in this specific context, as noted in the literature review, underscores the significance of this study. The findings serve to elucidate the factors that facilitate or hinder meaningful work in this context and lay the foundation for developing strategies to support faculty members in finding purpose and fulfillment in their roles.

Despite the transformative potential of meaningful work, as highlighted by Bunderson and Thompson (2009) and Onça and Bido (2019), it is essential to acknowledge the challenges, such as burnout and underemployment, as discussed by Kim and Allan (2020) and Allan et al. (2019). The study's findings highlight the need for institutions to address these challenges by providing adequate resources, fostering a supportive organizational climate, and promoting work-life balance.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study developed a comprehensive paradigm model of meaningful work from the perspective of Iranian EFL faculty members, utilizing a grounded theory approach. The emergent model highlights the complex interplay of personal, professional, and organizational factors that influence the perception and experience of meaningful work in this specific context. The findings reveal that meaningful work is not merely an individual pursuit but is significantly shaped by causal conditions, contextual factors, intervening factors, and strategic responses, ultimately leading to multifaceted consequences at the student, teacher, and organizational levels. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding the complex realities of meaningful work within the unique cultural and institutional landscape of Iranian EFL education. The identification of specific intervening factors, such as bureaucratic hurdles, student demotivation, and personal challenges, provides valuable insights for policymakers and educational administrators. These findings underscore the necessity of creating supportive environments that address these challenges and foster a sense of purpose and fulfillment among faculty members.

The implications of this study are far-reaching. First, educational institutions should prioritize the development of organizational cultures that promote trust, teamwork, and resource availability. This includes implementing policies that reduce bureaucratic burdens, enhance infrastructural resources, and provide opportunities for professional development and collaboration. Second, faculty members should be encouraged to engage in job crafting strategies to proactively shape their roles and align their work with their values and goals. This could involve fostering a culture of autonomy and creativity, where faculty members are empowered to innovate and adapt their teaching practices. Third, future research should focus on developing and evaluating interventions aimed at enhancing meaningful work among EFL faculty. This could include workshops on job crafting, leadership training for administrators, and the implementation of support systems to address personal and professional challenges.

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