Chapter 17
Online Work Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic:
The Case of L2 English Instructors

Pınar Ersin
Marmara University, Turkey

Derin Atay
Bahçeşehir University, Turkey

Fatoş Uğur Eskiçırak
Bahçeşehir University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 global pandemic affected many areas adversely, mainly health and education, all over the world. In education, this sudden pandemic led to efforts to bring about a set of rapid and radical solutions. As in many parts of the world, in March 2020, Turkey took steps to mitigate the potentially devastating consequences of the pandemic by changing face-to-face (F2F) education to online education. This unparalleled change in the method of delivery was new to many teachers ranging from subject matter to foreign language teaching, from novice to experienced, and most of them were unprepared. They had to face many challenges, one of which was work engagement. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no studies have been conducted on online work engagement of instructors under the pandemic conditions in Turkey. Thus, the present study was an attempt at contributing to the field by examining second language (L2) English instructors' level of work engagement on online education and their perceptions on work engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the sudden COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, face-to-face (F2F) education shifted to online education throughout the world. The move took place gradually. In Turkey, at the same time with primary

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and secondary schools, both private and public higher education institutions, that are universities, first announced a break and then shifted to synchronous online teaching until the end of the Spring semester in 2020.The pace of the shift varied from one university to the other, depending upon the infrastructure of the institution and the level of instructors' digital literacy. As the effect of the pandemic continued longer than expected, the online education lasted in the 2020-2021 academic year at Turkish universities. The instructors had to keep up with the new mode of delivery; that is, online teaching, as well as staying engaged in their teaching like before. Language instructors at universities were among the ones affected because language teaching has already a demanding nature even in F2F education (King & Gi, 2018). Thus, the present study tried to investigate the work engagement level of language instructors in online education during the COVID-19 pandemic and their perceptions regarding the underlying factors of online work engagement.

WORK ENGAGEMENT

Work engagement is a relatively new construct of positive psychology referring to optimal functioning and positive experiences at work. It is defined as a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Romá & Bakker, 2002, p.74). Vigor is defined as "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence even in the face of difficulties" (p.74). Dedication is defined as "a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge" (p.74). Absorption as the last dimension of engagement refers to "being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work" (p.75).

Workers who are engaged devote energy, time, and effort to work tasks (the vigor component), view their work as significant and meaningful (the dedication component), and fully concentrate on tasks when at work (the absorption component) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Research has shown that work engagement is related to job attitudes, such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Engaged employees perceive that the work they perform has sense and meaning. They show a better performance in the tasks, valuing positively the function that they perform and experiencing greater satisfaction levels (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012).

TEACHERS' WORK ENGAGEMENT

Work engagement of teachers has attracted the attention of researchers and educators lately. How work engagement develops and is fostered in diverse school settings have been explored. Teachers who are engaged in their work are found to be more likely to display higher teaching performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010) and to have students who are engaged in learning (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). In contrast, teachers who are highly engaged display self-determined behaviors that reflect an internal locus of causality, and that may lead to higher levels of students' self-determined academic behaviors (Roth et al., 2007). In a more recent study, emotion regulation and psychological well-being were found to be the predictors of work engagement of language teachers (Greenier, Derakshan, & Fathi, 2021).

Teachers' work engagement is focused on for a number of reasons. First of all, engagement is linked with teacher effectiveness and researchers and policymakers are keen to understand how to foster teacher

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