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INVESTIGATING EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Teacher professional engagement is essential in driving success in education, both in student and teacher personal development. This study aims to determine EFL teachers' perceptions of professional engagement in terms of commitment to the profession, devotion to the profession, and dedication to students. The data was collected from 107 EFL teachers from various school levels in Jakarta. This study uses a quantitative descriptive approach. Researchers used the Teacher Professional Engagement Scale Questionnaire (TPES) developed by Kozikoğlu & Senemoğlu (2019) to collect data. This study found that the dedication to students subscale obtained the highest mean score ($M=37.59$, $SD=2.753$). This subscale also obtained the highest response results on two items. The first highest item consisted of 10 EFL teachers (9.3%) agree and 97 EFL teachers (90.7) strongly agree. The second highest item consists of 11 EFL teachers (10.3%) agree and 96 EFL teachers (89.7%) strongly agree. This shows positive perceptions of EFL teachers towards professional engagement. This study is also useful to show teachers' level of professional engagement in their profession.

Keywords: *EFL teachers, teachers' perceptions, teachers' professional engagement*

Introduction

Professional engagement in the teaching profession has recently become increasingly important, especially in education. Professional engagement is needed to improve the quality of a teacher. Teacher quality is the most important factor influencing student learning. Teachers who are professionally engaged in their work will have a strong desire to improve students' academics because the teacher will spend more time to be able to help students improve their learning achievement. In educational studies, it is important to study teacher engagement discussions to encourage student engagement (Klassen et al., 2012). In addition, professional engagement can enhance the professional development of teachers and students. Based on Shukla (2014) teachers' professional engagement can increase student success and encourage more effective educational reforms. Moreover, living in this increasingly developing world, teachers are required to contribute more and be professionally engaged in the development of

their profession and their students. They also help to create a better education system. In this way, teachers can improve their skills and competence in teaching their students.

In this regard, the researcher is very interested in researching EFL teachers' perceptions of professional engagement. Researchers chose EFL teachers as respondents in this study because more research needs to address EFL teachers' perceptions of professional engagement. Perception is defined as how an individual observes, understands, evaluates, or interprets an action, result, experience, or event (Bennett, 2016). With a discussion of teachers' professional engagement, the aim of this research is that researchers want to know EFL teachers' perceptions towards professional engagement.

Engagement is defined as a positive thing related to work characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and full concentration on a job (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Engagement also refers to one's profession related to physical involvement, mental

awareness, and emotional attachment to something (Aronson & Janke, 2015). Therefore, professional engagement is an action taken by an individual or a person towards their duties in the hope of carrying out their duties in the best way (Kozikoglu, I., & Ozcanlı, 2020). Several recent studies have also discussed the importance of professional engagement in teaching (Dilekçi & Limon, 2020; Granziera & Perera, 2019; Kozikoglu, I., & Ozcanlı, 2020; Kozikoglu & Senemoglu, 2021). Professional engagement is based on dedication, the experience of teacher mastery in teaching, and teacher self-efficacy toward their profession (Granziera & Perera, 2019). Teachers who are dedicated to their profession will have high enthusiasm and emotional attachment to their work. Many researchers are in the field of education research related to professional engagement (Alev, 2022; Dilekçi & Limon, 2020; Kozikoglu & Senemoglu, 2021; Kozikoğlu & Senemoğlu, 2019). Based on a study conducted by Watt et al. (2014) explains that the professional engagement of teachers is formed based on their experience during their teacher education.

The teacher's teaching experience is one of the most important parts of increasing teacher engagement. Criteria that show aspects of professional teacher engagement, among others, as teachers must be competent, able to communicate new information, show concern for students, and carry out teacher duties as well as possible (Dilekçi & Limon, 2020). In addition, teacher engagement can also cover a variety of tasks, including creating learning activities, facilitating lessons, and encouraging students (Elrayah, 2022). Two indicators included in teachers' professional engagement are based on teachers' commitment to teaching and the teachers' efficacy towards their profession (Buettner et al., 2016). According to Bashir (2017), teachers who are committed to their work will strive to improve their individual professional development and the development of their students. In other words, teachers must be committed to their work to educate their students effectively. Moreover, feelings of attachment to a profession, including pride and a strong desire for professional development advancement, are two key components of professional commitment (Kozikoglu & Senemoglu, 2021) and (Sudarmaji & Yusuf, 2021). Professional

commitment is one aspect of the teacher's professional engagement. Professional engagement in the form of commitment is one of the most important elements that influence teacher productivity and success in their work (Tarihi et al., 2021).

Studies mainly focus on EFL teachers' perceptions of professional engagement. Teachers who are less committed to their students can cause student achievement to decline because these two things are closely related to one another (Altun, 2017; Tarihi et al., 2021). This study shows that teachers' professional engagement in the form of teacher commitment can influence student achievement results. Furthermore, based on a study by (Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012) found that teachers who are committed to their work can motivate students and make students successful in their academic fields. According to Butucha (2013), professionally engaged teachers have a strong desire to improve the academic achievement of their students and always value their work. Teachers who are professionally engaged must have professional competence and commitment to their work to realize quality learning for students (Shukla, 2014). Several studies have also shown a significant relationship between teacher professional engagement and student achievement (Alev, 2022; Butucha, 2013; Cansoy et al., 2022; Dilekçi & Limon, 2020; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Shukla, 2014).

Besides teachers must be committed to students, teachers must also be committed to the teaching profession. Commitment to the teaching profession is a form of teacher loyalty to the profession (Vaitzman Ben-David & Berkovich, 2021). Teachers with this kind of commitment will devote themselves completely to their work. The teacher's commitment to the profession and dedication to the profession are also indicators of professional engagement (Kozikoğlu & Senemoğlu, 2019). Apart from these two things, professional engagement also includes teacher dedication to students. Based on research by Tarihi et al. (2021) states that teachers are also dedicated to their students both emotionally and academically. Basically, they dedicate all their abilities to increase student success in learning. Therefore, teachers who are committed to their profession and dedicated to their students will enhance the development and success of students.

Considering all this, it is clear that teachers' professional engagement can enhance student success. It is also a key element in ensuring teacher motivation and commitment to the profession. Quality teachers will produce quality students as well. Therefore, based on the discussion above, this study aims to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of professional engagement.

Method

This study uses a quantitative research method with a descriptive approach. A descriptive approach is used in this study to present information in a few words to show frequency, mean, and standard deviation (SD) (Mishra et al., 2019). A total of 20 questionnaire items were used to collect data in this study. The method was used to determine EFL teachers' perceptions of professional engagement.

Participants in this study consisted of 107 EFL teachers from various school levels, starting from elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school level. They consisted of 34 men (31.8%) and 73 women (68.2%) (see Table 1.) The age of the participants ranged from 20 years to more than 40 years. They hold B.Ed. (90.7%) and M.Ed. degree (9.3%) with teaching experience of less than 5 years (26.2%), 6-10 years (31.8%), and more than 10 years (42.1%) respectively. Moreover, they have very good (14.0%), good (54.2%), and moderate (31.8%) English skills.

Table 1
Demographic Data

Demography	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	34	31.8
	Female	73	68.2
Age	21-30 years	30	28.0
	31-40 years	44	41.1
	>40 years	33	30.8
School levels	Elementary School	19	17.8
	Junior High School	45	42.1
	Senior High School	43	40.2
Teaching experiences	1-5 years	28	26.2
	6-10 years	34	31.8
	>10 years	45	42.1
Educational status	B.Ed.	97	90.7
	M.Ed.	10	9.3
English proficiency	Very good	15	14.0
	Good	58	54.2

The time needed for this research is about two months (December 2022 and January 2023). The location of this research was conducted in Jakarta. The research instrument used the Teacher Professional Engagement Scale Questionnaire (TPES) to collect data. This questionnaire developed by Kozikoğlu and Senemoğlu (Kozikoğlu & Senemoğlu, 2019) is used to assess aspects of teacher professional engagement in the form of commitment to the profession (8 items), dedication to students (8 items), and devotion to the profession (4 items). This questionnaire has 20 items on five Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with total reliability of the questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.93$). A closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect responses from EFL teachers. This aims to determine the perceptions of EFL teachers towards professional engagement in their teaching profession.

The data were collected from 107 EFL teachers from various levels of education. Researchers collected data by distributing questionnaires via Google form to English teachers through social media platforms such as Whatsapp and Telegram. Apart from that, the researchers also visited various schools in Jakarta to seek permission to conduct research at these schools. After that, the researchers explained the purpose of the research which aimed to find out the perceptions of English teachers towards professional engagement. The researchers explained aspects of professional engagement which consisted of commitment to the profession, devotion to the profession, and dedication to students. Then, the researchers gave the google form to the English teachers to answer the existing questionnaire.

The researchers then analyzed the quantitative data collected in this study through Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to show the mean, standard deviation, and frequency. The data that has been analyzed will help to find out what are the perceptions of EFL teachers toward professional engagement.

Findings and Discussion

This study used 20 questionnaire items. The results of this study were obtained based on EFL teachers' perceptions of professional engagement in general. Three subscales are discussed in this study, including a commitment

Table 2. Descriptive statistics based on all items in the commitment to the profession subscale

No	Items	Frequency and percentage		
		Strongly Agree and Agree	Mean	SD
1	I love the teaching profession	102 (95.4%)	4.80	0.621
2	As a teacher, I enjoy working with students	105 (98.1%)	4.93	0.328
3	I am proud to be a teacher	105 (98.2%)	4.92	0.340
4	I feel like I belong to this profession	102 (95.3%)	4.70	0.618
5	I think there is an emotional bond between me and my job	100 (93.5%)	4.50	0.719
6	If I had a choice once again, I would choose to teach again	85 (79.4%)	4.29	0.585
7	For me, teaching is an important part of my life	102 (95.3%)	4.69	0.621
8	I want to spend the rest of my life as a teacher	85 (79.4%)	4.10	0.857

to the profession, devotion to the profession, and dedication to students (see Table 3). Based on the results of the descriptive statistical test, it can be described the distribution of data on the three subscales obtained by the researchers as follows, namely dedication to students is identified as having the highest mean score (M=37.59, SD=2.753). However, the lowest mean score was obtained from devotion to the profession (18.18, SD = 2.359).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics based on the three subscales

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Commitment to the Profession	107	36.93	3.813
Devotion to the Profession	107	18.18	2.359
Dedication to Students	107	37.59	2.753

The first eight items on the questionnaire indicate the EFL teachers' perceived

commitment to their profession. Based on the results of the commitment to profession subscale item responses (see Table 2) in the first item it shows that 95.4% of EFL teachers love their profession, namely the teaching profession with a mean score (M=4.80, SD=0.621). As many as 98.1 % of EFL teachers really enjoyed working with their students in the second item with a mean score (M=4.93, SD=0.328). In the third item, 98.2% of EFL teachers feel proud of their profession with a mean score (M=4.92, SD=0.340). They really like their profession in the fourth item as much as 95.3% with a mean (M=4.70, SD=0.618). As many as 93.5% of EFL teachers feel there is an emotional bond between themselves and their work in the fifth item with a mean score (M=4.50, SD=0.719). In the sixth item, 79.4% of EFL teachers felt if they had one more choice in their life, they would choose to teach again with a mean score (M=4.29, SD=0.585). In this case, it shows their commitment to the teaching profession is quite large. 95.3% of EFL teachers also think that teaching is an important part of their life on the seventh item with a mean score (M=4.69, SD=0.621). On the eighth item, 79.4% of EFL teachers want to spend the rest of their lives as teachers with a mean score (M=4.10, SD=0.857).

Furthermore, based on the responses from the devotion to the profession subscale items (see Table 4) it can be seen that 91.6% of EFL teachers are trying hard to continue their profession according to the qualifications in the first item with a mean score (M=4.62, SD=0.668). 89.7% of EFL teachers also worked hard to improve their professional status on the second item with a mean score (M=4.56, SD=0.703). On the third item, 81.3% of EFL teachers felt that they sacrificed many things in other areas of life for their professional development with a mean score (M=4.30, SD=0.838). 98.1% of them chose to prioritize life to follow developments in their field in the fourth item with a mean score (M=4.71, SD=0.495).

Table 5
Descriptive statistics based on all items in the dedication to students subscale

No	Items	Frequency and percentage		
		Strongly Agree and Agree	Mean	SD
1	It is very important to me to maximize the potential of my students	107 (100%)	4.91	0.292
2	It is a great pleasure for me to spend time with my students and help them during extracurricular times	100 (93.5%)	4.68	0.592
3	I try to do my best so that every student can be successful	107 (100%)	4.90	0.305
4	I also help students with individual problems outside of school/class	80 (74.8%)	4.06	0.775
5	I refer to different resources to be useful to students	106 (99%)	4.89	0.346
6	Whenever my students need help, I will be there for them	105 (98.1%)	4.83	0.423
7	I work with my students regardless of time and place for effective learning of my students	99 (92.5%)	4.48	0.635
8	I use all the opportunities I can for the future of my students	103 (96.2%)	4.86	0.444

Based on the results of the responses from the dedication to students subscale items (see Table 5) it shows that 100% of EFL teachers feel it is important to maximize the potential of their students in the first item with a mean score ($M=4.91$, $SD=0.292$). This is the highest percentage result with perfect results from the 3 existing subscales. On the second item, 93.5% of EFL teachers enjoy spending time with students and helping them during their extracurricular activities with a mean score ($M=4.68$, $SD=0.592$). On the third item, 100% of them tried their best so that each student could succeed with a mean score ($M=4.90$, $SD=0.305$). This is also the perfect result with the second highest percentage after the first item above. Furthermore, 74.8% of them also help students who have individual problems outside of school/class on the fourth item with a mean score ($M=4.06$, $SD=0.775$). In the fifth item, 99% of EFL teachers try to refer to different learning sources so that they are beneficial to students with a mean score ($M=4.89$, $SD=0.346$). In the sixth item 98.1% of EFL teachers will always be there for their students even when students need teacher assistance with a mean score ($M=4.83$,

$SD=0.423$). 92.5% of EFL teachers also worked with their students regardless of time and place for effective student learning on the seventh item with a mean score ($M=4.48$, $SD=0.635$).

Table 4
Descriptive statistics based on all items in the devotion to the profession subscale

No	Items	Frequency and percentage		
		Strongly Agree and Agree	Mean	SD
1	I put a lot of effort into continuing my profession as qualified	98 (91.6%)	4.62	0.668
2	As a teacher, I put a lot of effort into raising the status of my profession	96 (89.7%)	4.56	0.703
3	I am sacrificing many things in other areas of my life for my professional development	87 (81.3%)	4.30	0.838
4	It is a priority in my life to follow the developments in my field	105 (98.1%)	4.71	0.495

In the eighth item, 96.2% of EFL teachers took every opportunity available for their students' future with a mean score ($M=4.86$, $SD=0.444$).

EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Commitment to the Profession

In this session, the researchers will discuss the first professional engagement subscale, namely commitment to the profession. Based on the results of the questionnaire above, the commitment to the profession subscale obtained a mean score ($M=36.93$, $SD=3.813$). This is the second-highest mean score of the 3 subscales. The commitment to profession subscale also received high response results in the agree and strongly agree categories. The highest response results were obtained in the third item, "I am proud to be a teacher," with 98.2% with a total frequency of 105 EFL teachers. The total frequency of this item consisted of 5 (4.7%) EFL teachers agreeing and 100 (93.5%) EFL teachers agreeing strongly. Followed by the second and third highest response results on this subscale, in the second item with 98.1% with a total frequency of 105 EFL teachers, and in the first item with 95.4% with a total frequency of 102 EFL teachers. The study shows that EFL teachers have a strong commitment to their profession. EFL teachers

feel proud of their profession as teachers. They also enjoy doing their jobs as teachers and work teaching their students, and they also love the teaching profession. Having this commitment can make their profession as teachers more productive and can achieve effective teaching goals. The results of this study are in line with study conducted by Ibrahim et al. (2014), showing that teachers who have a high commitment to their profession will be greater in their desire to achieve better teaching goals. This view is also supported by Tarihi et al. (Tarihi et al., 2021) and (Sipayung & Pangaribuan, 2019), which state that a teacher's commitment to the profession will affect the productivity and success of teachers in their profession. It can be seen from the attitude of the teachers who love and enjoy their profession and make the teaching profession one of the most important parts of their life. Therefore, the study's results revealed that EFL teachers had positive perceptions of the commitment to the profession subscale.

EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Devotion to the Profession

The second professional engagement subscale is devotion to the profession. This subscale obtained a mean score (18.18, SD = 2.359). It is the lowest mean score compared to the other 2 subscales. Although this subscale obtained the lowest mean score results compared to the other two subscales, this subscale also obtained high responses in the agree and strongly agree categories. The highest response results on this subscale were obtained in the fourth item, namely the item "It is a priority in my life to follow the developments in my field" with a total frequency of 105 EFL teachers. The total frequency of this item consisted of 27 (25.2%) EFL teachers agreeing and 78 (72.9%) EFL teachers agreeing strongly. Followed by the second highest response result on this subscale, in the first item with 91.6% with a total frequency of 98 EFL teachers. This shows that teacher devotion to the profession is also a priority in life following the development of the teaching profession. Furthermore, EFL teachers also sacrifice many things in other areas of their lives for the professional development of their profession. This is supported by the study conducted by Heggen & Terum (2013), which found that participating in programs aimed at professional development will foster a great

sense of devotion to the profession. Therefore, the results of the study revealed that EFL teachers also had positive perceptions of the devotion to the profession subscale.

EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Dedication to Students

The last subscale of teacher professional engagement is dedication to students. This subscale obtained a mean score (M=37.59, SD=2.753). This is the highest mean score of the three existing subscales. The commitment to profession subscale also received the highest response results in the agree and strongly agree categories. The highest response results were obtained in the first and third items. The first item "It is very important for me to maximize the potential of my students" with 100% with a total frequency of 107 EFL teachers. The total frequency of this item consisted of 10 (9.3%) EFL teachers agreeing and 97 (97.3%) EFL teachers agreeing strongly. In addition, the third item "I try to do my best so that every student can be successful" is also 100% with a total frequency of 107 EFL teachers. The total frequency of this item consisted of 11 (10.3%) EFL teachers agreeing and 96 (89.7%) EFL teachers agreeing strongly. Followed by the third highest response result on this subscale, the fifth item with 99% with a total frequency of 106 EFL teachers. This shows that EFL teachers are very dedicated to their students. EFL teachers also feel it is important to maximize their students' potential. Therefore, they will do their best so that each student can be successful in the future. They also strive to find lots of learning resources to benefit their students, and it is a great joy to spend time with their students. The results of this study are in line with the study conducted by Lee et al. (2011), showing that teacher dedication and commitment to students can help students in learning and regardless of difficulties or academic problems. Therefore, the results of the study revealed that EFL teachers had very positive perceptions of the dedication to students subscale.

Conclusion

This recent study investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of professional engagement in their teaching profession. Based on the research objectives, findings, and discussion sessions, EFL teachers' professional engagement perceptions are categorized as positive perceptions. The findings show that almost all EFL teachers have professional

engagement within them. It is based on each subscale having positive perceptions. They realize the importance of professional engagement in supporting teacher success in their profession. Several factors of professional engagement were examined in this study, including a commitment to the profession, devotion to the profession, and dedication to students. The dedication to students subscale is the subscale that obtains the highest mean results and item percentages in terms of the professional engagement of EFL teachers. Based on the findings of this study, the scale developed to determine EFL teachers' perceptions of professional engagement has shown positive results for all EFL teachers involved in this study. However, this study also had a limited number of participants and this research was only conducted in Jakarta and its surroundings. It is hoped that other similar studies will increase the number of participants and investigate the factors of professional engagement of EFL teachers with qualitative research so that the results can be compared using different methods.

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