The Effect of Principal's Spiritual Leadership on Teachers' Work Engagement in Junior High Schools – the Mediating Effect of Meaning and Membership

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to explore the differences in spiritual leadership, teacher dedication, work meaning, and school belonging across various background variables. It also aimed to examine the influence of principals' spiritual leadership on teachers' work dedication, with work meaning and school belonging as mediating variables. The study primarily involved teachers from public middle schools in Tainan City. A total of 480 questionnaires were distributed to 32 schools, and 447 valid questionnaires were recovered (effective recovery rate = 93.13%). Regression analysis results indicated that principals' spiritual leadership, teachers' work meaning, and school belonging significantly predicted teachers' work engagement, with a predictive power of 40.2%. Teachers' work meaning had the strongest positive impact. Furthermore, work meaning and school belonging fully mediated the relationship between principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work dedication, with school belonging having the strongest mediating effect at 51.71%.

Keywords: Spiritual leadership, Work engagement, Meaning, Membership

1. Introduction

The educational environment is rapidly changing, and the reform of the 12-year compulsory education system and the military and public education pension system have sparked various debates and repercussions in society. Middlewood and Abbott [1] noted that the annual reform system has significantly reduced the benefits of teachers, resulting in overpayment of retirement funds, lower pensions after retirement, and delayed retirement age, which has caused military and public education personnel to protest and created conflicts between different occupations in society, affecting the campus atmosphere and disrupting many teachers' future career planning. Additionally, the new

curriculum for the 12-year compulsory education system places great emphasis on the design of teachers' curricula, the development of school-based education, the inclusion of student representatives on the curriculum review committee, and the requirement for teachers to give public lectures once a school year and invite parents to participate, all of which have increased the workload of incumbent teachers.

In 2014, the Kang Hsuan Cultural and Education Foundation conducted the first survey on "Are Teachers Happy?", and the results found that the low interaction between teachers and parents, unstable education policies, and the public's diminished respect for teachers had led to nearly 2 out of 9 teachers being unwilling to continue teaching, and they may develop a sense of dissatisfaction with their school environment in the long run [2]. With the gradual implementation of various educational reform programs and the changing structure of society and family, the challenges faced by schoolteachers are no longer limited to teaching, but have become more diverse in terms of the roles they are expected to fulfill. The transformation and adjustment of these roles has also become a significant issue in the current stage of educational reform [3].

Scholars have noted that job involvement is a crucial topic in the study of organizational behavior [4,5]. Previous studies have found that work engagement affects individuals' ability to cope with work-related stress and frustration, as well as employee turnover and absenteeism rates. However, positive feedback, work resources, social support, and supervision can provide a boost to work engagement, and even the innovative atmosphere and social environment are related to work engagement [6,7]. If teachers feel the hardships and challenges of their work due to changes in the educational environment, have no desire to continue teaching, lose their enthusiasm for education, or view teaching solely as a means to material ends rather than a calling to shape lives, then how can they be expected to fulfill the weighty responsibility of educating the next generation? Examining the current state of teachers' work dedication in Tainan City, a southern Taiwanese city, is one of the questions researchers aim to explore.

There are many factors that affect job engagement, including the leadership style of managers. Studies have found that spiritual leadership is positively correlated with work engagement [8,9]. The Academy of Management (AOM) has established the Management, Spirituality, and Religion (MSR) group, which focuses on the relevance of spirituality and religion in managerial and organizational life, as well as the relationship between interdisciplinary theory and applied research [10]. Therefore, in recent years, organizational management has identified spirituality as an important topic, and workplace spirituality explores the experience of employees finding ultimate meaning in their work and a sense of connection among organizational members [11]. Especially for organizations or enterprises that prioritize corporate ethics and the needs of stakeholders, understanding the spiritual needs of employees in the workplace and their desire for personal growth cannot be overlooked. As such, spiritual leadership is a topic that cannot be ignored in the current workplace.

Some studies have suggested that leadership and management also require a spiritual dimension [12,13]. As a school leader or principal, one must exert influence to change adverse factors in the external environment, while also transforming the inner and deeper consciousness of the educational

staff. This involves caring for the psychological needs of members, motivating their work engagement, and achieving common educational goals. Momennasab, Homayoon, and Torabizadeh [14] state that spiritual leadership is based on an intrinsically motivated model that combines vision, hope, confidence, and altruistic love, creating personal value and dedication to organizational goals by instilling a sense of meaning and belonging in followers. Northouse [15] believes that spiritual leaders lead by example, stimulating the intrinsic values of self and members, and working towards a common goal. Whether this new type of leadership allows members and others to care for themselves, constantly discover new meanings and values in their work, and rediscover the value and purpose of life can have an impact on teachers' work dedication.

It is often said that education is the foundation for cultivating the future pillars of a country. However, with changing social environments and shifting value systems, the interpretation of education policies varies, leading to many doubts. Additionally, the professional autonomy of teachers is subject to excessive external interference, diminishing their enthusiasm in the field of education compared to the past [16]. The decline in teachers' job satisfaction, the impairment of their work dedication, the deterioration of teaching attitudes, and the uneven quality of education not only infringe on students' right to learn but also affect the organizational atmosphere of the school, resulting in a poor social perception. There is a positive correlation between work engagement and job satisfaction, and the more teachers are invested in teaching, the more the flow experience can improve the quality of teaching [17]. For any organization to develop, thrive, and survive in a competitive environment, it must have a dedicated workforce. The leadership model of the school principal is closely related to school management, and the relationship between the spiritual leader and the follower is based on an intrinsic motivation model, fostered through a learning organization [13,16]. When the two parties in this relationship build trust, they can truly experience the happiness and satisfaction brought by their work and achieve common ideals. Therefore, one of the motivations of the researcher is to explore whether the principal's spiritual leadership style can improve teachers' work dedication.

Researchers believe that teachers are the key factors affecting the quality of school teaching and school performance. How to help teachers maintain efficiency and motivation under work pressure and exhaustion cannot ignore the importance of providing them with a sense of meaning in their work and belonging to the school community. Only when teachers experience a sense of happiness and fulfillment can they sustain the motivation to face the constant challenges that arise. Therefore, based on the research motivations outlined above, this study suggests the need to further explore the relationship between principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work dedication, sense of work meaning, and feelings of school belonging.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Spiritual Leadership and Related Studies

2.1.1. The Definition of Spiritual Leadership

When people hear the term "spirituality," they often associate it with religion. However, spirituality is fundamentally different from religion. The word "spirituality" originates from the Latin word "spiritus," which means an indispensable part of life, and the English word "spirit." Widodo and Suryosukmono [18] argued that spirituality is the way in which individuals manifest their self-transcendent values in their daily lives, while religion is a formal institution with doctrinal, ritual, and dogmatic norms that operate in the form of social beliefs [19].

Wood [20] pointed out that the concept of spirituality refers to a state of self-reflection formed by the individual through life experience, leading to the realization of the essence of life, the value of one's own existence, and the relationship between the individual and all things. This results in a state of self-transcendence, self-forgetfulness, harmony, or peace. On the other hand, workplace spirituality refers to the spirituality that members of the organization perceive due to the work environment, or the spirituality that the members of the organization become aware of and develop within the work environment because of the meaning they find in their work [21].

The term "spiritual leadership" has been translated by Taiwanese scholars as "spiritual leadership" [22]. Sheikh et al. [9] argue that spiritual leadership is the causal development of an intrinsically motivated model, aiming to create a learning organization that connects the vision and values of the team and individual work with altruistic love. This approach fully empowers and inspires members of the organization, instilling them with the confidence to achieve their vision and strive for excellence.

This study synthesizes the definitions and perspectives of foreign scholars on spiritual leadership. It finds that spiritual leadership primarily inspires meaning in life through the cultivation of inner spiritual values. Leaders interact with others through positive traits (trust, integrity, honesty, caring, gratitude, humility) and make followers feel cared for and supported. This altruistic value elicits a positive response from followers, and the influence of spirituality can lead to individual and organizational improvement. It was defined the spiritual leadership of principals as the close interaction between principals and teachers through spiritual values. This involves establishing a shared vision, valuing the feelings of group members, creating an environment full of hope and confidence, and guiding the practice of altruistic love and the meaning of life.

2.1.2. The Theoretical bases of Spiritual Leadership

Pioneers of spiritual leadership theory abroad include Fairholm [23] and Fry [24]. Fairholm [23] was the first scholar to introduce the concept of spiritual leadership into the workplace. His spiritual leadership model was primarily based on Greenleaf's [25] concept of servant leadership, in which the leader, as a servant, ensures that the highest priority needs of others are met. The goal is to inspire and develop others, and most importantly, to cultivate a culture that supports continuous improvement and enhanced customer service. The aim is to build and operate a constantly improving learning organization that can inspire personal growth and maintain the peace of mind of all members.

Fry's [24] spiritual leadership model is based on intrinsic motivation, where leaders use their intrinsic values to enhance the spirituality of their followers and foster their spiritual well-being.

Leaders provide employees with meaningful missions, and members are more willing to work for the organization due to a heightened sense of belonging, which promotes organizational commitment and work efficiency. Frynas and Yamahaki [26] pointed out that the goal of the spiritual leader is to change the core attitudes and values of the follower so that they align with the leader's vision. To achieve this shared perspective, the leader must create it on the deep and stable values of the follower, and clearly express this vision, so as to help the follower see the vision as a reflection of their own values, rather than just an external imposition.

Based on the perspectives from the foreign literature, it is found that most of the connotations of spiritual leadership are still derived from or extended by the theoretical framework proposed by Fry [24]. Therefore, this study on the spiritual leadership of principals also adopts the three dimensions of "vision", "hope and confidence", and "altruistic love" as outlined by Fry et al. [27] as the research framework, which are explained in further detail below.

2.1.3. The Related Studies

In recent years, research on principals' leadership through the lens of spiritual leadership has not been widely discussed in Taiwan's education sector. Prior studies have primarily focused on areas such as teachers' organizational commitment, job satisfaction, work engagement, well-being [2], organizational learning [28], teachers' satisfaction with principals' leadership [14], and school effectiveness [28].

Based on studies examining the relationship between principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' organizational commitment, the results have shown a significant positive correlation between the two [29]. Similarly, research on principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' job satisfaction has also found a significant positive correlation between the two constructs [17]. In a study on principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work engagement, with primary school teachers as the research participants, the results revealed a moderate positive correlation between principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work engagement [18].

2.2 The Work Engagement

2.2.1. The Definition of Work Engagement

The Chinese dictionary of the Ministry of Education defines the term "dedication" as being conscientious and responsible in one's work or duties. In other words, dedication means respecting one's profession in the workplace, doing one's best, and striving for perfection. Fairholm [29] mentioned in "Empowerment" that Confucius encouraged his disciples to "be respectful in their dwellings, respectful in their deacons, and loyal to others." Here, the term "deacon" refers to dedication, that is, respect for the cause, profession, and vocation in which one is engaged. Therefore, the concept of "deacon's respect" should be seen as the precursor to the notion of dedication.

Schaufeli et al. [30] define work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Khan et al. [31] argue that the key difference between work engagement and dedication is that work engagement is more concerned with how

individuals express themselves through their work performance. In addition to the cognitive aspect, work engagement also encompasses emotional and behavioral components. Furthermore, work engagement can be considered a precursor to dedication, as when individuals have a deep sense of dedication to their work role, they are more likely to identify with their work.

Building on the perspectives of the aforementioned scholars, it is evident that most definitions of work engagement are still largely derived from Kahn et al.'s [31] conceptualization, which explains work engagement from different angles and demonstrates the inextricable link between work engagement and an individual's role-related behaviors. Synthesizing the views of various scholars, this study defines work dedication as a state of mind in which teachers exhibit positive thinking, identify with their work, approach their work with enthusiasm and vigor, focus on self-actualization, and feel competent and content in performing their duties.

2.2.2. The Theoretical bases of Work Engagement

There are two main theoretical foundations underlying work dedication - the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and Role theory. Hobfoll [32] first proposed the COR theory, which explores the job demands-resources model of job burnout and work engagement. In this model, work resources can reduce employee burnout [33] and increase work engagement [34] by providing valuable resources. Conversely, a lack of work resources can lead to alienating behaviors in the organization [35]. Gabriel and Aguinis [33] point out that burnout and work engagement are two opposing ends of a spectrum. They compare the three dimensions of job burnout (exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of professional efficacy) to the three dimensions of work engagement (energy, dedication, and effectiveness). Job demands are often cited as a major cause of burnout due to the threat of losing valuable work resources.

Based on the reviewed literature, the conceptual content of work dedication is well-established, as proposed by Saks, Gruman, and Zhang [34], and the manifestation of work dedication can be observed through employees' work behaviors [32,33,34]. The most widely used instrument to measure work dedication is the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which has been validated across several countries, including China, Finland, Greece, Japan, South Africa, Spain, and the Netherlands [36]. Therefore, this study will utilize the work engagement scale developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006), which encompasses three dimensions: "vigor", "dedication", and "absorption".

2.2.3. The Related Studies

There has been growing academic discussion on work dedication in the Taiwanese context, with common variables examined including principals' leadership models and job satisfaction. Other variables explored include teachers' psychological contract [37], autonomy and core self-evaluation [38], organizational commitment [39], person-organization fit and workplace friendship [40], positive psychological capital [41], work performance [42], innovative behavior [43], physical and mental health, and well-being [44].

Research examining the relationship between work dedication and principals' leadership models, such as studies on principals' authentic leadership targeting teachers in tertiary institutions [45],

principals' servant leadership [46], principals' leadership behaviors targeting primary school teachers [47], principals' leadership styles targeting middle school teachers [48], and principals' service leadership targeting primary and secondary school teachers [46], all support the positive impact of principals' leadership models on work dedication.

In the study of work dedication and job satisfaction, Wang and Zhou [49] targeted middle school and primary school teachers respectively, and the results supported the positive relationship between job satisfaction and work dedication. In summary, while there are many factors influencing work dedication, and they are generally positively correlated, research on the relationship between principals' leadership models and teachers' work dedication remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of principals' spiritual leadership on teachers' work dedication.

2.3 Meaningful Work

2.3.1. The Definition and Theoretical Bases

What gives work its sense of meaning? Why does the meaning of work vary so much from person to person? How do the different types of meanings or outcomes people derive from their work shape their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors? Questions about where and how employees find meaning in their work are crucial to understanding how they cope with challenges, role demands, and emotions at work and in the workplace [50].

Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson [51] proposed that workplace spirituality can be conceptualized at three levels - individual, group, and organizational. At the individual level, this refers to the concept of "meaningful work", which encompasses an individual's deep sense of the meaning and purpose of their work, as well as the connection between their work and their life. This includes how work can promote the holistic development of the worker or enhance their emotional and spiritual growth.

Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski [52] define the subjective perception of how individuals view themselves and their work, and identify four main sources of meaning in work: the self, others, the work environment, and one's spiritual life. Steger, Dik, and Duffy [53] define the meaning of work as not only the unique personal significance it holds for the individual, but also the broader positive value and importance of the work itself.

In summary, the search for meaning has a profound impact on one's work. The meaning of work encompasses not only the personal significance it holds for the individual, but also the alignment between one's work and one's life values, the sense of personal growth and development, and the desire to make a meaningful difference.

In this study, the meaning of work is defined as the value teachers ascribe to their work, the respect they feel through the value of their performance, and their willingness to make a positive impact in their lives. Currently, research on the meaning of work in the Taiwanese academic context remains limited. Therefore, this study will utilize the meaning of work as a mediating variable to explore its influence on the relationship between principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work dedication.

2.4 The School Membership

2.4.1. The Definition and Theoretical Bases

Belonging refers to the feeling of being an accepted and valued member of a group, and the identification with the group's beliefs and the fulfillment of one's needs through group membership [54]. Wakefield et al. [55] have shown that one's group affiliations can have significant benefits for overall well-being. In addition to the groups that support us in times of crisis, we tend to identify with groups that share our values, interests, and life priorities, as we seek the support of others to become our best selves.

Neri [56] noted that humans are inherently social beings, and in work settings, individuals often automatically form groups or subgroups. When group members feel attracted to and accepted by one another, they develop a sense of pride in belonging to the group. A cohesive group, whose members are attracted to and accepted by each other while sharing the group's goals, must foster a sense of empathy among its members, i.e., they must promote their identification with the organization. The stronger the alignment between organizational and individual goals, the higher the group cohesion, and the more efficient the group. A member who strongly identifies with the organization will exhibit the following: 1) taking pride in being part of the organization and strengthening their status through it, 2) internalizing organizational goals as a decision-making framework, and 3) exhibiting loyalty and attachment to the organization's growth and development [54,56].

In summary, this study defines school belonging as a sense of belonging to a school where teachers care for and appreciate one another in the work environment, value each person's contributions, have close relationships due to mutual understanding and support, and are proud to be members of the school and willing to contribute to it.

2.4.2. The Related Studies

Randel et al. [54] argue that the school's organizational climate is the product of the interaction between the principal's and teachers' behaviors, and that this organizational climate affects members' sense of belonging and organizational performance. However, there is limited research on the relationship between principals' spiritual leadership and school belonging.

From the existing literature, it is known that teachers' sense of belonging is positively associated with principals' servant leadership [57], principals' emotional labor [58], school organizational trust [59], and teaching effectiveness [60]. The empirical research on the causal model of spiritual leadership indicates that the two follower factors of meaningful work and belonging affect organizational performance. Yet, research on teachers' sense of belonging within the school context remains scarce in the academic literature. Therefore, it is necessary to explore whether teachers' sense of belonging mediates the relationship between principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work dedication.

2.5 The Spiritual Leadership Cause-Effect Model

Much of the research on workplace spirituality includes two key elements: meaning in work and

sense of community [61]. This is similar to the spiritual well-being (meaning of work, sense of belonging) components in the causal model of spiritual leadership proposed by Fry [24,27]. Fry's model posits that spiritual leadership is a causal model for organizational change (see Figure 2), where intrinsic motivation drives self and organizational commitment, productivity, and employee well-being.

Çimen and Karadağ [28] argued that workplace spirituality refers to a community that allows members to experience meaningful work and has a mutually reinforcing relationship with one's inner spirit. This study proposes that teachers' work meaning and sense of school belonging will also impact the relationship between principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work dedication. Therefore, this study will apply Fry's [24] work meaning and belonging scales within the causal model of spiritual leadership to conduct an empirical investigation, thereby enhancing the comprehensiveness of the research framework.
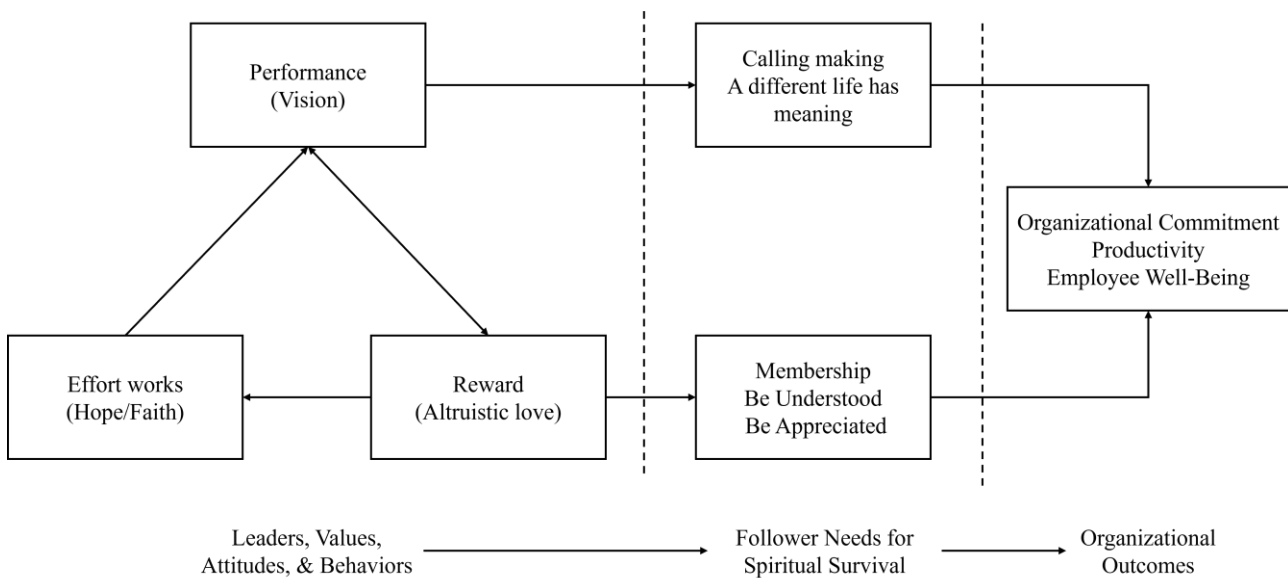

Figure 2. Cause model of spiritual leadership theory.
Source: Fry et al. [27], p.838.

Based on the existing literature, it is evident that spiritual leadership and work engagement, spirituality and work meaning, spirituality and sense of belonging, work engagement and work meaning, as well as sense of belonging and job satisfaction are all correlated. However, this area of research remains limited in scope.

Currently, the research in China has only explored the relationship between "Principal's Spiritual Leadership" and "Teachers' Work Engagement", but has not examined "Work Meaning" and "School Belonging". This study takes the teachers of National Middle School in Tainan City as the research participants, and aims to explore the relationships between the four variables of "Principal's Spiritual Leadership", "Teachers' Work Dedication", "Meaning of Work", and "School Belonging". Specifically, it will investigate the relationships between "Principal's Spiritual Leadership and Teachers' Work

Engagement", "Principal's Spiritual Leadership and Teachers' Work Meaning", "Principal's Spiritual Leadership and School Belonging", "Teachers' Work Dedication and Work Meaning", and "Teachers' Sense of School Belonging".

In this study, "School Belonging" will serve as the predictor variable, "Teachers' Work Engagement" will be the outcome variable, and "Work Meaning" and "School Belonging" will be examined as mediating variables. This will further the understanding of the mediating effects of work meaning and school belonging on the relationship between principal's spiritual leadership and teachers' work dedication.

2.6 The Hypotheses Development

2.6.1. The Study of Principle's Spiritual Leadership and Work Engagement

Sheikh et al. [9] argue that individuals tend to reflect their own spiritual values in their work values and integrate their work life with their spiritual pursuits. People are intrinsically motivated to learn and find meaning in their work, as well as to be part of a community that contributes to organizational performance. Workplace spirituality not only leads to beneficial personal outcomes, such as increased joy, peace, serenity, job satisfaction, and commitment, but also enhances productivity and reduces absenteeism and employee turnover [10,13,18,23,29]. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Principal's spiritual leadership has a positive impact on teachers' dedication.

2.6.2. The Study of Principle's Spiritual Leadership and Meaningful Work

Spirituality allows individuals to gain a deeper understanding of themselves [14,19,22]. The traditionally narrow religious connotations of spirituality have been expanded to encompass working relationships, especially in the context of holistic leadership. These two conceptualizations provide an opportunity to reflect on how work can enhance the spiritual dimension of life. Whether it stems from interactions with other groups in the workplace, work can imbue our lives with additional spiritual meaning [9,10,11].

Meesri et al. [12] pointed out that work has inherent meaning and value. Gupta et al. [11] noted that workplace spirituality at the individual level refers to the meaning of work. Additionally, Rothausen [13] mentioned that spiritual well-being enhances employees' sense of interconnectedness and provides empathy and joy for one another. Widodo and Suryosukmono's [18] synthesis of relevant research indicates that workplace agility improves individual happiness, quality of life, and the meaning of work, while also enhancing the connection between communities and organizational effectiveness.

H2: Principal's spiritual leadership has a positive impact on the meaning of work.

2.6.3. The Study of Principle's Spiritual Leadership and School Membership

Maslow's [62] hierarchy of needs theory highlights the love and belonging needs (or social needs) that people have, illustrating the human desire for emotional connections, a sense of belonging to a group, caring for one another, a sense of identity and belonging, and a willingness to share with others.

In Fry's [24] Spiritual Leadership Theory, a sense of belonging is another factor that influences followers. Feeling altruistic love within the social/organizational culture, being free from various fears, exhibiting caring and appreciative behaviors towards each other, and receiving recognition through understanding and appreciation all contribute to generating a sense of belonging among members.

Belonging is another indicator of spiritual well-being for followers in Fry's [24] Spiritual Leadership Theory. This suggests that spiritual well-being can help individuals discover their intrinsic value, motivate them to transcend themselves, and improve the well-being of both individuals and organizations.

Scholars have proposed that workplace spirituality encompasses a community in which individuals perceive an inner life, feel meaning and joy in their work, and connect with members of the work community - this is also the second dimension of workplace spirituality [11,13,18,19]. A community is an organizational group formed by people under common conditions and goals, representing a type of communal relationship.

Hisam [19] suggested that workplace spirituality involves the degree to which an individual is aware of their own spirituality, in addition to developing their work skills. This includes considering the individual's inner life, finding meaning in work experiences, and creating a sense of connection with the work community.

H3: Principal's spiritual leadership has a positive impact on the sense of belonging to the school.

2.6.4. The Study of Teachers' Work Engagement and Meaningful Work

Research has demonstrated that work meaning is positively correlated with job engagement and organizational commitment [34,36]. This can enable individuals and teams to make positive contributions at work, leading to favorable organizational outcomes [34]. Importantly, work meaning [52,53], work engagement [3,17,30] have been shown to significantly predict important work-related outcomes, and work meaning has a positive impact on work engagement [31,34].

Additionally, scholars have found that spiritual leadership has a negative and significant impact on cynicism through the meaning/calling dimension of spiritual well-being. This indicates that higher levels of spiritual well-being are associated with lower levels of change-related cynicism [8,11,14,19,24]. Cynicism is a negative work attitude, but its impact can be minimized through the effects of spiritual well-being.

H4: Teachers' dedication has a positive impact on the meaning of work.

2.6.5. The Study of Teachers' Work Engagement and School Membership

Yandi and Havidz [5] concluded that belonging is a strong innate desire for individuals to connect with others. Social relationships are measured by quality rather than quantity, with limited encouragement. Belonging plays a role in human emotion, well-being, and cognition, and human behavior is influenced by motivation.

Similarly, Mark and Smith's [63] research confirms that high levels of workplace satisfaction are associated with individuals' social support, job control, and personal factors (coping strategies and

attribution styles). In other words, with the support of colleagues and supervisors, a sense of belonging can be fostered.

Demmin, Silverstein, and Shors [44] argue that workplace belonging is an individual's psychological feelings in the work environment, including the degree of acceptance and support. Belonging is related to emotional well-being (depression, anxiety, stress), and workplace social relationships also play an important role in employees' subjective well-being.

Scholars have proposed that organizational identity is related to job satisfaction and turnover intention. Having an identity and a sense of belonging to the organization will have a positive impact on job satisfaction and reduce turnover intention [17,42,49,63].

H5: Teacher dedication has a positive impact on the sense of belonging to the school.

3. Research Design

3.1 The Research Framework

As shown in Figure 3, the Path H1 examines the predictive relationship between Principals' Spiritual Leadership (X) and Mining of Work (M1). Path H2 examines the predictive relationship between Principals' Spiritual Leadership (X) and Teacher Engagement (Y). Path H3 examines the predictive relationship between Principals' Spiritual Leadership (X) and A Sense Belonging to the School (M2). Path H4 examines the predictive relationship between Mining of Work (M1) and Teacher Engagement (Y). Path H5 examines the predictive relationship between A Sense Belonging to the School (M2) and Teacher Engagement (Y). H6 assumed the "Teachers' Work Meaning has a significant mediating effect on Principals' Spiritual Leadership and Teachers' Work Engagement". The H7 assumed "School Belonging has a significant mediating effect on Principals' Spiritual Leadership and Teachers' Work Engagement".
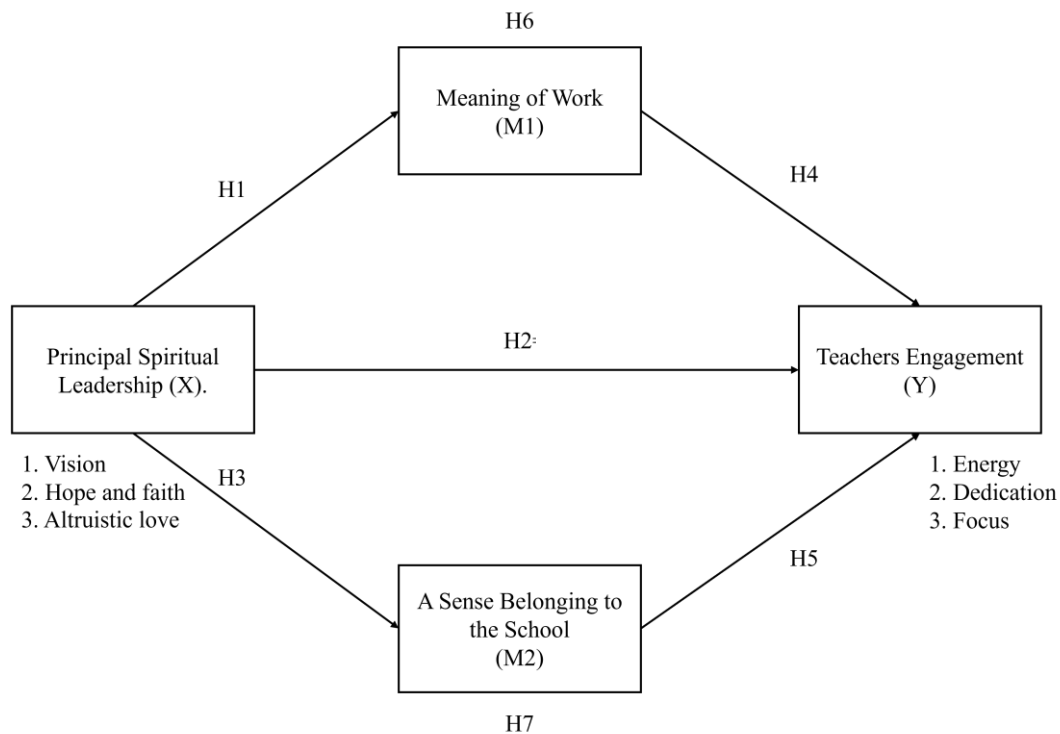
Figure 3. The framework of this study
Source: By authors.

3.2 Sample Selection

Based on the purpose of the study, the survey participants were teachers from public national middle schools in Tainan City. The sample included regular teachers (such as classroom teachers, team leaders, deputy team leaders, tutors, and full-time teachers), excluding non-formal teachers (substitute teachers, trainee teachers, and specialty teachers).

3.2.1. Pilot-test

Based on Howard's [64] recommendation, the pre-test sample size was determined to be 3 to 5 times the number of items on the questionnaire scale with the most items. For this study, the pre-test sample was drawn from five public national middle schools in Tainan City, comprising a total of 100 participants. The survey was conducted from May 15 to 31, 2017. Out of the 100 questionnaires distributed, 88 were recovered, and 88 valid questionnaires were obtained for pre-test analysis after excluding those that were not fully completed and any invalid questionnaires. The effective recovery rate was 88.00%.

The results of the Principal's Spiritual Leadership scale showed that the internal consistency Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the 17 items was 0.976, which is consistent with the recommended value of $\alpha > 0.7$. Additionally, the adjusted correlation value of the total score of the subscale reached a significant level of 0.3 or above, so all the items were retained.

In the analysis of the Teacher Work Engagement scale, the internal consistency Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the 9 items was 0.960, which met the standard. The adjusted correlation value of the total score of the subscale reached a significant level of more than 0.3, so all the items were retained.

For the Work Meaning scale, the internal consistency Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the 4 items was 0.872, which met the standard. The adjusted correlation value of the total score of the subscale reached a significant level of more than 0.3, so all the items were retained.

In the analysis of the School Belonging scale, the internal consistency Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the 5 items was 0.898, which met the standard. The adjusted correlation value of the total score of the subscale reached a significant level of more than 0.3, so all the items were retained.

3.2.2. The Survey

Due to limitations in resources and time, this study used a sample of regular teachers from public national middle schools (including municipal and national high schools) in Tainan City, Taiwan. According to the basic database of schools at all levels provided by the Tainan City Education Bureau's Information Center (http://163.26.2.28/sch_data/reports/repClass.aspx) in the 2015-2016 academic year, there were 63 public national middle schools. Based on the number of classes in the 2015-2016 academic year, the schools were divided into four size categories: 12 classes or fewer, 13-24 classes, 25-48 classes, and 49 classes or more, with 22, 10, 21, and 10 schools in each category, respectively. In total, there were 3,777 regular teachers.

For this study, the schools were sampled based on the geographical location, which was divided into seven administrative districts according to the Tainan City Government Education Bureau's previous (2013) data. A total of 32 public schools were selected, with a sample size of 480 teachers. The sample size for each administrative region was determined proportionally to the total number of teachers in the region. The sample included 44 teachers from schools with 12 or fewer classes, 55 teachers from schools with 13-24 classes, 203 teachers from schools with 25-48 classes, and 178 teachers from schools with 49 or more classes.

A total of 458 questionnaires were recovered, and 447 valid questionnaires were collected, resulting in an effective recovery rate of 93.13%. The sampling distribution is shown in Table 3.2. Prior to the survey, the teachers from each school were contacted by telephone to inquire about their willingness to participate, and the survey was conducted from June 5 to June 30, 2017.

3.3 The Instrument

The scoring method of the research scale was based on the Likert five-point scale, and the answers were based on five levels: "strongly agree" (5 points), "agree" 4 points, "ordinary" 3 points, "disagree" 2 points, and "strongly disagree" 1 point.

3.3.1. The Principle's Spiritual Leadership Scale

This study utilized the "Spiritual Leadership Questionnaire" (SLQ) developed by Fry et al. (2005). The questionnaire content was translated into Chinese, with reference to the work of Huang [65] and Lin [66], to ensure the questions were appropriate for the survey participants. The scale consists of a total of 17 measurement items, comprising 5 items for "Vision", 5 items for "Hope/Faith", and 7 items for "Altruistic Love". The three dimensions are described as follows:

Vision: Principals have a clear vision and plan for the future of the school, and collaboratively

construct a shared vision for the school's development based on the common ideals of the school community. This not only attracts members to join, but also enables teachers to realize their potential, perform at their best, and achieve the shared vision through lofty ideals.

Hope/Faith: The principal's actions instill a sense of hope and confidence in teachers, motivating them to improve and prove their worth through their work. Teachers firmly believe in the educational mission and are willing to do their utmost to help the school succeed.

Altruistic Love: Principals proactively show care, tolerance, understanding, and compassion for others. This considerate and selfless dedication fosters a sense of trust and dedication among teachers, who are then willing to care for and serve others together to improve the school.

3.3.2. The Principle's Spiritual Leadership Scale

This study utilized the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) developed by Schaufeli et al. [67]. The original 17-item scale was reduced to 9 items without compromising the internal consistency, stability, reliability, and validity, allowing for a more accurate evaluation of work engagement. The scale comprises 3 items for "Vigor", 3 items for "Dedication", and 3 items for "Absorption". The three dimensions are described as follows:

Vigor: Teachers are enthusiastic about their work, have abundant energy and adaptability, are willing to invest effort in their work, derive spiritual satisfaction from their work, and can persevere in the face of setbacks.

Dedication: Teachers recognize the importance of their work, are actively engaged in their work, are willing to accept work challenges, have strong enthusiasm, and are satisfied with their level of dedication.

Absorption: Teachers are engrossed in their work and enjoy it, feel that time passes quickly, and find it difficult to detach from their work, approaching a state of "flow".

3.3.3. The Meaningful Work Scale

This study utilized the "Spiritual Leadership Questionnaire" (SLQ) developed by Fry et al. [27] and referred to the work of Chen [68] to translate the questionnaire content into Chinese. One of the follower factors measured was "Meaning of Work", which consisted of a total of 4 items. In this study, the "Meaning of Work" dimension is characterized by teachers valuing their work, feeling respected for the value of their performance, and being willing to make a meaningful difference through their work.

3.3.4. The School Membership Scale

This study utilized the "Spiritual Leadership Scale" (SLT) developed by Fry et al. [27]. The questionnaire content was translated into Chinese, with reference to the work of Chen [68], to ensure the questions were appropriate for the study participants. The "School Belonging" dimension consisted of a total of 5 measurement items.

In this study, the "School Belonging" dimension is characterized by teachers feeling that they can care for and appreciate their colleagues in the work environment, value each other's contributions,

have close connections with one another, feel understood and supported, and are willing to contribute to the school.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Demographic Variables of Subjects

In terms of gender, 308 (68.90%) were females, 321 (71.81%) were married teachers, 125 (27.97%) were under the age group, 153 (34.23%) were teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience, and 274 (61.30%) had graduate school qualifications or higher There are 156 tutors (34.90%), 182 (40.72%) of the 25-48 classes, and 248 (55.48%) of the teachers in the suburbs.

4.2 The Predications

4.2.1. The role of the principal's spiritual leadership in predicting the significance of teachers' work and the sense of belonging to the school on the overall work engagement of teachers

The results showed that the two predictor variables of "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" were statistically significant predictors of teachers' work engagement. The positive beta values indicate that higher levels of teachers' perceived meaning of work and school belonging were associated with higher levels of work engagement.

Specifically, the beta value for "Meaning of Work" was the highest, suggesting that this variable had the strongest predictive power on teachers' work engagement (F=216.688, $p < .001$). The overall model accounted for 40.2% of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = 0.402$).

These findings indicate that enhancing teachers' sense of meaning in their work and their feelings of belonging within the school context are important factors in promoting higher levels of work engagement among teachers.

Table 1. A stepwise regression analysis of principals' spiritual leadership, teachers' work meaning, and school belonging to the whole teachers' work engagement (n=447).

Predict variables	R^2	$\triangle R^2$	$\triangle F$ value	Regression coefficient(b)	Standardized regression coefficient (β).	t-value
Constant terms				0.615		2.344
Meaning of work	0.327	0.327	216.688***	0.746	0.457	11.457***
A sense of belonging to the school	0.402	0.074	55.253***	0.430	0.296	7.433***

Note: *** $p < .001$. Source: By authors.

4.2.2. The Predictive Effect of Principals' Spiritual Leadership and Teachers' Work Significance and

School Belonging on Teachers' Dedication and Vitality

The results showed that the two predictor variables of "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" were statistically significant predictors of teachers' work engagement (see Table 2). The positive beta values indicate that higher levels of teachers' perceived meaning of work and school belonging were associated with higher levels of work engagement.

Table 2. A stepwise regression analysis of principals' spiritual leadership, teachers' work meaning, and school belonging to teachers' dedication and vitality (n=447).

Predict variables	R^2	$\triangle R^2$	$\triangle F$ value	Regression coefficient(b)	Standardized regression coefficient (β)	t-value
Constant terms				0.581		1.898
Meaning of work	0.236	0.236	137.534***	0.645	0.360	8.497***
A sense of belonging to the school	0.325	0.088	58.117***	0.515	0.323	7.623***

Note: *** $p < .001$. Source: By authors.

Specifically, the beta value for "Meaning of Work" was the highest, suggesting that this variable had the strongest predictive power on teachers' work dedication and vigor (F=137.534, $p < .001$). The overall model accounted for 32.5% of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = 0.325$).

These findings indicate that enhancing teachers' sense of meaning in their work and their feelings of belonging within the school context are important factors in promoting higher levels of work dedication and vigor among teachers.

4.2.3. The Predictive Effect of Principal's Spiritual Leadership and Teachers' Work Meaning, and School Belonging Sense on Teachers' Dedication and Dedication

The results showed that the two predictor variables of "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" were statistically significant predictors of teachers' work dedication (see Table 3). The positive beta values indicate that higher levels of teachers' perceived meaning of work and school belonging were associated with higher levels of work dedication.

Specifically, the beta value for "Meaning of Work" was the highest, suggesting that this variable had the strongest predictive power on teachers' work dedication (F=187.777, $p < .001$). The overall model accounted for 37.7% of the variance in work dedication ($R^22 = 0.377$).

These findings indicate that enhancing teachers' sense of meaning in their work and their feelings of belonging within the school context are important factors in promoting higher levels of work dedication among teachers.

Table 3. A stepwise regression analysis of principals' spiritual leadership, teachers' work meaning, and school belonging to teachers' dedication and dedication (n=447).

Predict variables	R²	△R²	△F value	Regression coefficient(b)	Standardized regression coefficient (β)	t-value
Constant terms				0.493		1.740
Meaning of work	0.297	0.297	187.777***	0.734	0.425	10.444***
A sense of belonging to the school	0.377	0.080	56.951***	0.471	0.307	7.547***

Note: *** $p < .001$. Source: By authors.

4.2.4. *The role of principals' spiritual leadership in predicting teachers' work significance and school belonging to teachers' dedication and concentration*

The results showed that the two predictor variables of "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" were statistically significant predictors of teachers' work engagement (see Table 4). The positive beta values indicate that higher levels of teachers' perceived meaning of work and school belonging were associated with higher levels of work engagement.

Specifically, the beta value for "Meaning of Work" was the highest, suggesting that this variable had the strongest predictive power on teachers' work dedication and absorption (F=238.618, $p < .001$). The overall model accounted for 38.4% of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = 0.384$).

These findings indicate that enhancing teachers' sense of meaning in their work and their feelings of belonging within the school context are important factors in promoting higher levels of work dedication and absorption among teachers.

Table 4. A stepwise regression analysis of principals' spiritual leadership, teachers' work meaning, and school belonging to teachers' dedication and concentration (n=447).

Predict variables	R²	△R²	△F value	Regression coefficient(b)	Standardized regression coefficient (β)	t-value
Constant terms				0.772		2.816
Meaning of work	0.349	0.349	238.618***	0.859	0.511	12.641***
A sense of belonging to the school	0.384	0.035	25.449***	0.305	0.204	5.045***

Note: *** $p < .001$. Source: By authors.

4.3 The Test of Mediation Effects

First, a regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work engagement (see Table 5). Then, additional regression analyses were performed to investigate the mediating roles of teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" in the relationship between principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work engagement.

Table 5. Analysis of the mediating effect of teachers' work meaning and school belonging in the principal's spiritual leadership on teachers' work dedication (n=447).

Variant facets	Teacher Engagement (Y)		Teachers' Meaning of Work (M1) School Belonging (M2)	
	Mode I	Mode III	Mode II	
Predictive Variables (X)			M1	M2
Principal Spiritual Leadership	0.389***	0.043	0.195***	0.508***
Mediation Variable (M)				
Meaning of Teacher's Work (M1)		0.744***		
School Belonging (M2)		0.396***		
Quantification of mediation effects		a*b=	0.145	0.201
	c=0.389 c'=0.043 c-c'=0.346 ∑a*b=0.346			
Verification of the mediation effect				
Sobel Test			5.370***	5.197***
The strength of the mediation effect				
SM (%)			37.31	51.71

Note: *** $p < .001$. Source: By authors.

The results from the Sobel test indicated that the regression coefficients for the paths from principals' spiritual leadership to teachers' "Meaning of Work" (a) and "School Belonging" (b), as well as the path from these mediators to teachers' work engagement (c), were statistically significant. However, the direct effect of principals' spiritual leadership on teachers' work engagement (c') was not significant.

As shown in Table 5, both "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" were significant mediators. The mediating effect of "School Belonging" was the strongest, accounting for 51.71% of the total effect, indicating that teachers' sense of belonging to the school had the most prominent mediating effect on the influence of principals' spiritual leadership on teachers' work engagement.

These findings suggest that principals' spiritual leadership influences teachers' work engagement primarily through enhancing teachers' perceived meaning of work and sense of belonging within the school context.

Hypothesis 6: "Teachers' work meaning has a significant mediating effect on principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work engagement", and hypothesis 7: "School belonging has a significant mediating effect on principals' spiritual leadership and teachers' work engagement", both of which
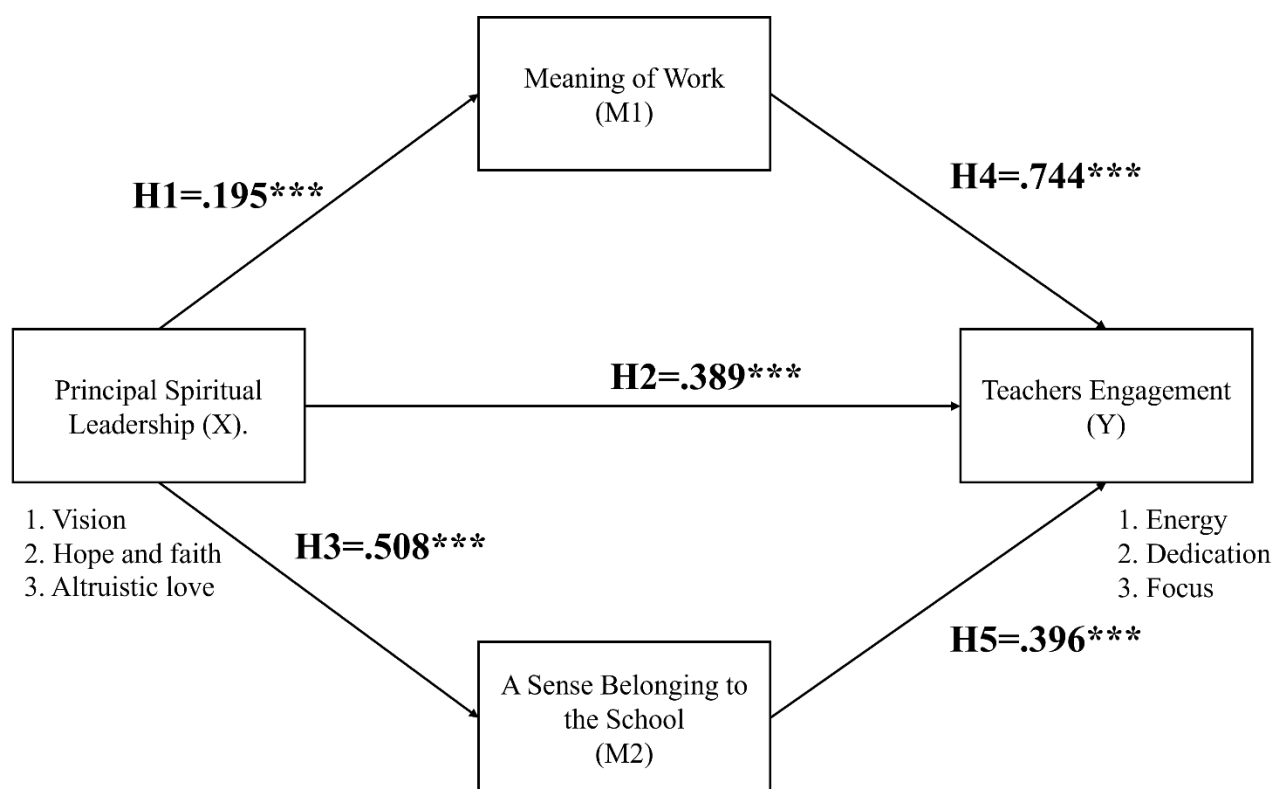
are validated.

Figure 4. The standardized path coefficients of mediation effects

Source: By authors.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusions

5.1.1 The Importance of Meaningful Work and School Belonging in Promoting Teacher Work Engagement

The results showed that teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a positive and significant predictive effect on overall teacher work engagement (R^2 = 0.402). Comparing the incremental explanatory power, it was found that teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a stronger predictive effect on teachers' work engagement compared to principals' spiritual leadership. This suggests that creating a sense of meaningful work and fostering teachers' feelings of belonging to the school may be more important than principals' spiritual leadership behaviors in promoting overall teacher work engagement.

Specifically, "Meaning of Work" had the strongest predictive power, accounting for 32.7% of the variance in teacher work engagement. This indicates that when teachers place greater value on

the significance of their work, they are more likely to be motivated and fully engaged, rather than feeling resentful. These findings highlight the importance of cultivating teachers' perceptions of meaningful work and a strong sense of belonging within the school context as key factors in enhancing overall teacher work engagement.

5.1.2 The Pivotal Role of Meaningful Work in Sustaining Teacher Work Engagement and Dedication

The results showed that teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a positive and significant predictive effect on the vigor dimension of teacher work engagement (R^2 = 0.325). Among these, "Meaning of Work" had the strongest predictive power, accounting for 23.6% of the variance in teacher work vigor. This suggests that maintaining a sense of meaningful work is crucial in sustaining teachers' enthusiasm and energy for their profession, even in the face of frustration or pressure.

Similarly, teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a positive and significant predictive effect on the dedication dimension of teacher work engagement (R^2 = 0.377). "Meaning of Work" was the strongest predictor, accounting for 29.7% of the variance in teacher work dedication. This indicates that when teachers perceive their work as meaningful, they are more willing to actively engage in their work and derive spiritual fulfillment, regardless of personal gains or losses. These findings highlight the importance of fostering teachers' sense of meaningful work as a key factor in promoting both the vigor and dedication dimensions of teacher work engagement. Enhancing teachers' perceptions of the significance and value of their work can help sustain their enthusiasm, commitment, and overall work engagement.

5.1.3 The Pivotal Role of Meaningful Work in Sustaining Teacher Work Engagement and Dedication

The results showed that teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a positive and significant predictive effect on the vigor dimension of teacher work engagement (R^2 = 0.325). Among these, "Meaning of Work" had the strongest predictive power, accounting for 23.6% of the variance in teacher work vigor. This suggests that maintaining a sense of meaningful work is crucial in sustaining teachers' enthusiasm and energy for their profession, even in the face of frustration or pressure.

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5.1.4 The Pivotal Role of Meaningful Work in Fostering Teacher Work Engagement and Dedication

The results showed that teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a positive and significant predictive effect on the vigor dimension of teacher work engagement (R^2 = 0.325). Among these, "Meaning of Work" had the strongest predictive power, accounting for 23.6% of the variance in teacher work vigor. This suggests that maintaining a sense of meaningful work is crucial in sustaining teachers' enthusiasm and energy for their profession, even in the face of frustration or pressure.

Similarly, teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a positive and significant predictive effect on the dedication dimension of teacher work engagement (R^2 = 0.377). "Meaning of Work" was the strongest predictor, accounting for 29.7% of the variance in teacher work dedication. This indicates that when teachers perceive their work as meaningful, they are more willing to actively engage in their work and derive spiritual fulfillment, regardless of personal gains or losses.

Furthermore, teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a positive and significant predictive effect on overall teacher work engagement (R^2 = 0.384). Among these, the predictive power of "Meaning of Work" on teacher work dedication was the strongest, accounting for 34.9% of the variance. This suggests that when teachers find their work to be inherently meaningful, they are naturally enthusiastic and happy to engage in their work to the fullest.

These findings highlight the crucial importance of fostering teachers' sense of meaningful work as a key factor in promoting both the vigor and dedication dimensions, as well as the overall level of teacher work engagement. Enhancing teachers' perceptions of the significance and value of their work can help sustain their enthusiasm, commitment, and overall work engagement.

5.1.5 The Pivotal Role of Meaningful Work and School Belonging in Fostering Teacher Work Engagement and Dedication

The results showed that teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a positive and significant predictive effect on the vigor dimension of teacher work engagement (R^2 = 0.325). Among these, "Meaning of Work" had the strongest predictive power, accounting for 23.6% of the variance in teacher work vigor. This suggests that maintaining a sense of meaningful work is crucial in sustaining teachers' enthusiasm and energy for their profession.

Similarly, teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a positive and significant predictive effect on the dedication dimension of teacher work engagement (R^2 = 0.377). "Meaning of Work" was the strongest predictor, accounting for 29.7% of the variance in teacher work dedication. This indicates that when teachers perceive their work as meaningful, they are more willing to actively engage in their work and derive spiritual fulfillment.

Furthermore, teachers' "Meaning of Work" and "School Belonging" had a positive and significant predictive effect on overall teacher work engagement (R^2 = 0.384). The predictive power of "Meaning of Work" on teacher work dedication was the strongest, accounting for 34.9% of the variance. This suggests that when teachers find their work to be inherently meaningful, they are naturally enthusiastic and engaged.

Additionally, the meaning of teachers' work and their sense of school belonging were found to

have a complete mediating effect on the relationship between principal's spiritual leadership and teacher work dedication. The mediating effect of school belonging was the strongest, with a mediating effect intensity of 51.71%. This indicates that the principal's spiritual leadership influences teacher work dedication through the teachers' sense of belonging to the school.

5.1.6 Summary

The study presents a comprehensive exploration of the interplay between principals' spiritual leadership, teachers' work dedication, work meaning, and school belonging among middle school teachers in Tainan City. The findings identify significant predictive relationships and the mediating roles of work meaning and school belonging, providing valuable insights into the factors that enhance teacher engagement.

The emphasis on the spiritual leadership of principals as a catalyst for improving work dedication through intrinsic motivators aligns well with contemporary organizational behavior theories. The results demonstrate that work meaning has the strongest positive impact, underscoring the importance of fostering a meaningful work environment in educational settings.

While the research successfully highlights the mediating effects of work meaning and school belonging, it could further explore practical strategies for principals to implement spiritual leadership effectively. Additionally, a more nuanced analysis of how different background variables influence the study's outcomes could provide a deeper understanding of the varying needs and responses of teachers. Future research directions could also include longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of spiritual leadership on teacher dedication and student outcomes.

5.2 Suggestions

5.2.1 To Principals

Cultivating teachers' sense of meaningful work and school belonging may be more important than the principals' own spiritual leadership behaviors in promoting teacher work engagement. Meanwhile. The principals should focus on creating a meaningful work environment and enhancing teachers' sense of identification and value in their work. Principals should emphasize building teachers' sense of belonging to the school, fostering a strong connection between teachers and the school.

5.2.2 To Educators

Educators should focus on how to help teachers establish a sense of meaning in their work, to increase their work enthusiasm and engagement. Educators should explore how to enhance teachers' sense of belonging within the school environment, to promote their work dedication. Educators should research how to enhance overall teacher work engagement by cultivating teachers' sense of meaningful work and school belonging.

5.2.3 To Educational Decision-Makers

Policymakers should develop relevant policies and measures to help schools create meaningful

work environments and strengthen teachers' sense of work value. Policymakers should emphasize building a strong connection between teachers and the school, to increase teachers' sense of belonging. Policymakers should focus on how to improve teacher work engagement and teaching effectiveness by enhancing teachers' sense of meaningful work and school belonging.

5.2.4 To Parents

Parents should support schools in creating meaningful work environments to strengthen teachers' sense of work value. Parents should pay attention to whether schools can establish a good sense of teacher belonging, to promote teacher work dedication. Parents should understand the importance of teacher work engagement and cooperate with the school's relevant measures.

5.2.5 To Stakeholders

Stakeholders should focus on how schools create meaningful work environments to increase teachers' sense of work value. Stakeholders should support schools in building a good sense of teacher belonging, to promote teacher work engagement. Stakeholders should understand the important impact of teacher work engagement on student development and provide necessary support.

5.2.6 To Future Researchers

Researchers should further explore how to effectively implement principals' spiritual leadership to enhance teacher work engagement. Researchers should deeply analyze how different background variables affect the relationship between sense of meaningful work, school belonging, and work engagement. Researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to understand the long-term impact of spiritual leadership, sense of meaningful work, and sense of belonging on teacher work engagement and student outcomes.

Acknowledgements

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