

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Causal model and guidelines for enhancing teacher engagement and teacher performance in language schools in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine a causal model of teacher engagement and performance, and to develop guidelines to enhance teacher development in language schools in Thailand. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative phase involved a survey of 517 teachers selected through simple random sampling, while the qualitative phase included focus group discussions with 12 key informants chosen through purposive and convenience sampling. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, structural equation modeling, and content validation. The findings revealed that grit, quality of work life, and teacher engagement significantly predicted teacher performance, whereas workplace learning showed no direct effect. Among these, teacher engagement emerged as the strongest predictor of teacher performance. Based on these results, ten practical guidelines were proposed to strengthen teacher performance and support sustainable school improvement. These included initiatives to provide platforms for showcasing teacher skills, establish fair workload distribution, enhance mentoring and feedback systems, revise compensation methods, improve teaching resources, and incorporate teacher ability assessments into recruitment processes. Collectively, these measures are expected to promote teacher motivation, resilience, and effectiveness, thereby contributing to the overall quality of language education in Thailand.

Keywords: Grit; quality of work life; workplace learning; structural equation modeling; professional development; school improvement

1. Introduction

Teacher engagement has been recognized as a cornerstone of educational effectiveness, strongly associated with improved student outcomes, institutional development, and reduced teacher attrition^[1-2]. Key antecedents include quality of work life (QWL), which reflects fair compensation, security, and supportive working conditions^[3-4]; workplace learning (WPL), which emphasizes collaboration and professional growth^[5-6]; and grit, defined as perseverance and passion toward long-term goals, which enables teachers to persist despite challenges^[7-8]. Together with engagement itself, these factors shape teacher motivation, resilience, and performance, all of which are essential for sustaining instructional quality in schools^[9-10].

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Despite these insights, the context of language schools remains underexplored. In Thailand, language schools play a vital role in providing students and working adults with opportunities to develop language proficiency [11]. However, they face a persistent shortage of qualified teachers, posing significant challenges to institutional sustainability [12]. Unlike formal schools subject to standardized external evaluation, many Thai language schools rely primarily on internal assessments that emphasize test outcomes while overlooking broader institutional conditions such as teacher engagement. Coupled with high teacher turnover, this gap highlights the need for evidence-based models to strengthen teacher development. To address this, the present study applies a mixed-methods design. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to test a causal model linking QWL, WPL, and grit with engagement and performance, while focus group discussions provide context-specific guidelines for practice. The purpose of this research is therefore to validate a causal model of teacher engagement and performance in Thai language schools and to propose actionable guidelines for administrators and policymakers.

2. Methodology

Quantitative method: Structural equation modeling (SEM)

The study focused on language teachers working in non-formal education settings, specifically language schools in Thailand. According to official data from the Private Education Data Center (PEDC) under the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC) for the fiscal year 2023, there were 2,684 teachers employed across 1,227 language schools. Following Kline's [13] guideline of 20 observations per variable, a minimum sample size of 500 was required for a model with 25 observed variables. A total of 517 teachers voluntarily completed an online questionnaire, exceeding this threshold. The survey was distributed through professional networks (Line, Facebook, and WeChat) and supplemented by a snowball sampling technique to broaden coverage.

The questionnaire was adapted from established instruments and provided in both Thai and English. Content validity was confirmed by three experts, yielding an Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC) of 0.948. Reliability was tested through a pilot study with 30 teachers, producing Cronbach's alpha values between 0.941 and 0.984, which exceeded accepted standards. Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM). Descriptive statistics were first applied to summarize participant characteristics, followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the measurement model. Structural relationships among workplace learning (WPL), quality of work life (QWL), grit (GRI), teacher engagement (TEE), and teacher performance (TPM) were then tested. Model fit was assessed using established indices, including CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and χ^2/df .

Qualitative method: Guidelines

To complement the quantitative analysis, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted to develop practical guidelines for improving teacher engagement and performance in language schools. Twelve key informants were recruited through purposive sampling to capture diverse perspectives: two government officials from the Non-Formal and Informal Education sector under the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC), two school administrators, and eight teachers representing four generational cohorts (Baby Boomer, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z).

The discussion was conducted in Thai to preserve the authenticity of participants' views and subsequently translated into English for reporting. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout. Data were analyzed using content analysis with thematic

categorization, to identify recurring themes and generate actionable recommendations for language school management and policy.

3. Results

3.1. Model fit

The base model of teacher performance (TPM) in language schools was refined into the adjusted structural equation model (SEM) shown in Figure 1. Model fit indices indicated an acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2/df = 2.617 (< 3.0)$, GFI = 0.941, AGFI = 0.901, NFI = 0.972, IFI = 0.983, TLI = 0.974, and CFI = 0.983, all exceeding the 0.90 threshold. The RMSEA = 0.056 fell below the 0.08 criterion. Collectively, these indices confirm that the adjusted model provided a good fit to the data.

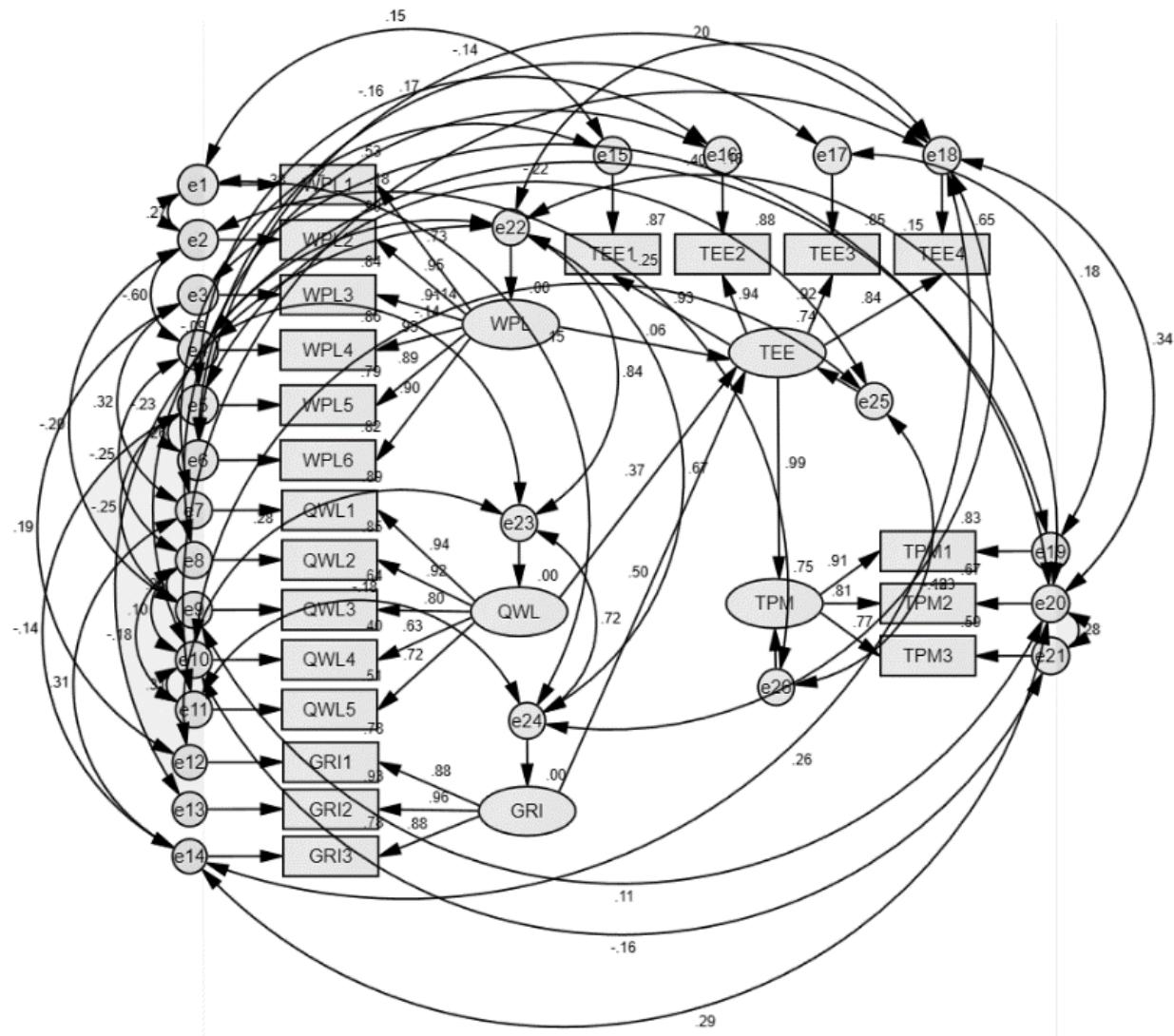


Figure 1. Adjusted SEM of teacher performance (TPM) in language schools

3.2. Measurement model

The structural model included five latent variables: workplace learning (WPL), quality of work life (QWL), grit (GRI), teacher engagement (TEE), and teacher performance (TPM). Table 1 presents the standardized factor loadings and coefficients of determination (R^2) for all observed variables.

All standardized factor loadings (β) were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and above accepted thresholds (0.70–0.95), confirming strong relationships between observed and latent variables. Coefficients of determination (R^2) ranged from moderate (0.397) to very high (0.929), demonstrating substantial explanatory power. Thus, the measurement model was both valid and reliable.

Table 1. Distribution of latent and observed variables in the structural equation model

Latent	R ²	Observed	Estimate	SE	CR	P	B	R ²
WPL	-	WPL1	1.000				0.730	0.533
		WPL2	1.309	0.053	24.799	***	0.951	0.904
		WPL3	1.246	0.057	21.715	***	0.914	0.836
		WPL4	1.358	0.062	21.924	***	0.928	0.861
		WPL5	1.363	0.065	21.002	***	0.887	0.787
		WPL6	1.407	0.066	21.439	***	0.903	0.816
QWL	-	QWL1	1.000				0.943	0.889
		QWL2	1.038	0.026	39.263	***	0.924	0.854
		QWL3	0.811	0.030	26.637	***	0.802	0.643
		QWL4	0.814	0.048	17.101	***	0.630	0.397
		QWL5	0.986	0.046	21.215	***	0.717	0.514
GRI	-	GRI1	1.000				0.885	0.783
		GRI2	1.095	0.030	35.979	***	0.964	0.929
		GRI3	1.002	0.033	30.140	***	0.882	0.777
TEE	0.737	TEE1	1.000				0.935	0.874
		TEE2	0.972	0.024	41.056	***	0.936	0.876
		TEE3	0.996	0.025	39.204	***	0.924	0.853
		TEE4	0.882	0.033	26.843	***	0.836	0.650
TPM	0.747	TPM1	1.000				0.911	0.830
		TPM2	0.894	0.035	25.395	***	0.811	0.665
		TPM3	0.805	0.036	22.501	***	0.769	0.591

3.3. Structural relationships

The analysis of causal paths is illustrated in Figure 2. Results indicate that:

Teacher engagement (TEE) exerted the strongest effect on teacher performance ($\beta = 0.992$), establishing it as the most critical determinant of TPM. Grit (GRI) contributed meaningfully ($\beta = 0.500$), underscoring the importance of persistence and resilience. Quality of work life (QWL) had a moderate positive influence ($\beta = 0.367$), suggesting that supportive conditions and fair compensation enhance performance. Workplace learning (WPL) showed only a negligible direct effect ($\beta = 0.058$), implying that training opportunities may not translate into improved performance unless mediated through engagement or other factors.

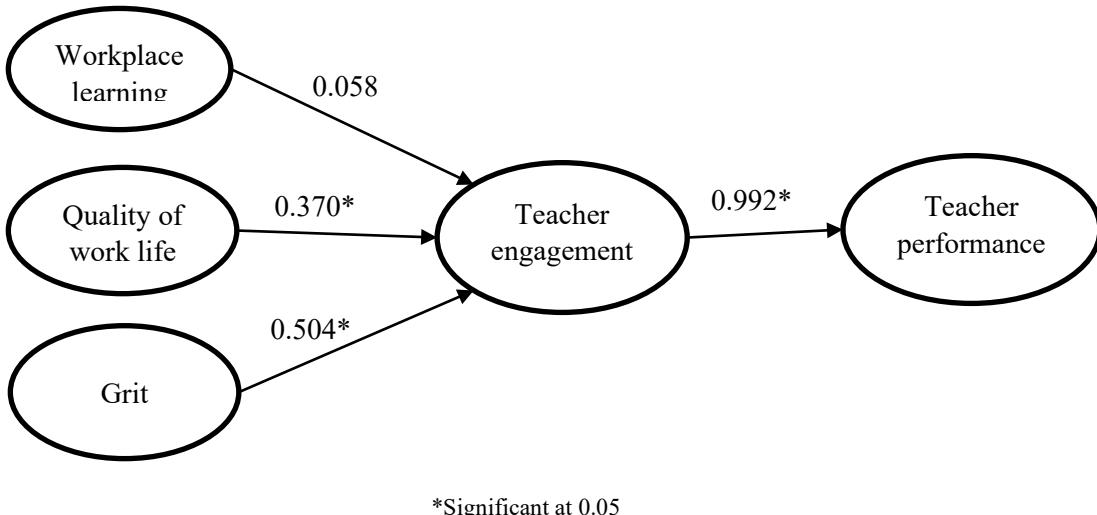


Figure 2. Standardized direct and indirect effects in the SEM of teacher performance

3.4. Guidelines for enhancing teacher engagement and performance

Building on the quantitative findings, where teacher engagement (TEE) was the strongest predictor of performance, followed by grit (GRI) and quality of work life (QWL), and supported by qualitative insights, the following evidence-based guidelines are proposed for government agencies, policymakers, and school administrators.

3.4.1. Government and policymakers

The focus group highlighted that government agencies and policymakers, particularly the Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education (NFE) under the Ministry of Education, play a pivotal role in shaping the conditions that influence teacher engagement and performance. Unlike formal schools, language schools often operate with limited resources and lack structured support systems for teacher development. Therefore, coordinated policies, funding, and recognition mechanisms are critical to ensure sustainable teacher growth. Government intervention can provide the infrastructure and incentives that individual schools may not be able to achieve alone.

- *Workplace learning*

a) Organize workshops, forums, seminars, and study courses tailored for language school teachers.

b) Build a cross-school community for language teachers and encourage language teachers to share their experiences and knowledge through professional development programs within and beyond their language schools as well as via online platforms.

c) Provide funding for language schools to meet quality assurance standards and support for teacher training and professional development, addressing the current lack of government funding and the incomplete quality assurance system.

- *Quality of Work Life*

a) Organize competitions for foreign languages and cultural skills (e.g., singing, storytelling, speeches, cultural performances) to integrate cultural learning.

b) Organize competitions and awards for language schools. covering categories such as innovative teaching methods, outstanding institutions, and exemplary teachers.

3.4.2. School administrators

School administrators were identified as the primary actors in implementing day-to-day practices that directly affect teacher engagement and performance. Their responsibilities extend beyond managing instructional delivery to fostering professional communities, supporting innovation, and ensuring fair and supportive working conditions. Administrators are uniquely positioned to provide teachers with autonomy, recognition, and resources, while also creating systems that promote resilience and grit. By cultivating an enabling environment within schools, administrators can bridge policy directives with classroom realities and sustain long-term teacher effectiveness.

- *Workplace learning*

- a) Build cross-school networks and invite experts to provide training on modern language teaching.
- b) Strengthen in-school professional communities through regular meetings (online/offline) for peer support and knowledge sharing.
- c) Provide teachers with flexibility and autonomy in instructional methods, while minimizing excessive reporting requirements.
- d) Ensure continuous training in digital platforms and online instructional tools for both novice and experienced teachers.

- *Quality of work life*

- a) Create platforms for teachers to showcase their skills and achievements.
- b) Collect and analyze performance data systematically to support instructional improvement.
- c) Establish feedback systems coordinated by administrators to reduce teachers' administrative workload.
- d) Revise compensation policies to reflect workload, teaching difficulty, travel, and years of service.
- e) Provide adequate teaching equipment and materials (e.g., projectors, laptops, worksheets, games).
- f) Balance teaching loads equitably across staff to prevent overwork or underutilization.

- *GRIT*

- a) Establish mentoring programs pairing novice teachers with experienced mentors to foster resilience and professional growth.
- b) Incorporate grit and ability assessments (e.g., Grit Scale, aptitude tests, MBTI) into recruitment processes to identify candidates with persistence, passion, and effective teaching principles.

In summary, the results demonstrate that teacher engagement (TEE) is the most critical driver of teacher performance in language schools, complemented by the roles of grit (GRI) and quality of work life (QWL). While workplace learning (WPL) showed limited direct influence, the focus group revealed that it remains important when supported through targeted policies and school-level initiatives. The combined findings from quantitative analysis and qualitative insights provide a comprehensive evidence base, resulting in practical guidelines that clarify the responsibilities of both policymakers and school administrators. These outcomes establish a solid foundation for the subsequent discussion on theoretical contributions, practical implications, and future directions.

4. Discussion

The quantitative results of this study highlight the central role of teacher engagement (TEE) in predicting teacher performance, followed by grit (GRI) and quality of work life (QWL). These findings are consistent with international research emphasizing that engagement mediates the influence of both psychological and contextual resources on performance outcomes. For example, Liu et al. ^[14] reported that engagement mediated the effects of grit and growth mindset on teaching outcomes among EFL teachers, while Uslukaya and Zincirli ^[15] demonstrated that job resources, analogous to QWL and WPL, predicted engagement over time. Similarly, Sudiro et al ^[16] confirmed that engagement mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence, QWL, and job satisfaction, reinforcing the interpretation that engagement acts as a conduit linking multiple factors to teacher performance.

Building on these quantitative insights, the qualitative phase provided deeper explanations and context-specific recommendations for enhancing teacher engagement and performance in language schools. At the policy level, workplace learning was found to have the weakest direct effect on performance; however, government support remains essential. Suggested measures include specialized training programs, the establishment of cross-school professional communities, and the allocation of financial resources for teacher development and quality assurance, which are currently underfunded in the non-formal sector. In addition, improving QWL through national competitions and recognition programs can motivate teachers and elevate the status of language education.

At the school level, the guidelines emphasize fostering professional communities, granting autonomy in teaching, and providing training on digital platforms to strengthen workplace learning. Enhancing teachers' QWL within schools requires structured recognition systems, transparent feedback mechanisms, equitable workload distribution, and sufficient teaching resources. Such measures create a supportive environment in which teachers feel valued, motivated, and capable of sustaining high performance.

Finally, grit emerged as a strong predictor of engagement and performance. These findings support Duckworth's ^[7] assertion that grit predicts long-term success and align with Bashant ^[17], who emphasized perseverance and resilience as critical for sustained achievement. Schools are therefore encouraged to provide structured mentoring systems, continuous feedback, and resilience-building activities to sustain perseverance and passion for teaching. Recruitment processes should also integrate grit assessments and personality inventories to identify candidates with strong potential for long-term commitment and professional growth.

Taken together, these findings contribute both theoretical and practical insights. Theoretically, the study confirms engagement as a mediator linking psychological traits and workplace conditions to performance. Practically, the guidelines propose actionable measures for both policymakers and school administrators to address systemic and individual factors. Future research may explore longitudinal effects of workplace learning, the interplay of grit with other non-cognitive traits, and the transferability of these guidelines to other non-formal educational contexts.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

This study examined the causal model of teacher engagement and performance in Thai language schools by integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The structural equation modeling (SEM) results confirmed that teacher engagement (TEE) was the strongest predictor of teacher performance, followed by grit (GRI) and quality of work life (QWL). Workplace learning (WPL), although not directly significant, remains important when supported by external policy and internal school initiatives. The qualitative phase

complemented these findings by generating practical guidelines that highlight the responsibilities of both government agencies and school administrators in creating supportive conditions for teachers.

Theoretically, the study reinforces the central role of engagement as a mediator linking psychological traits and workplace conditions to performance, extending previous research to the underexplored context of language schools. Practically, the proposed guidelines offer evidence-based strategies for policymakers to improve systemic support, and for school administrators to enhance day-to-day practices, including professional communities, flexible teaching autonomy, fair compensation, and resilience-building initiatives.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for coordinated efforts at both systemic and institutional levels to cultivate motivated, resilient, and high-performing teachers in language schools. Further research should explore longitudinal effects of workplace learning, investigate the interplay between grit and other non-cognitive traits, and evaluate the transferability of these guidelines to broader non-formal and international education contexts.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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