

Explaining the Mediating Role of Organizational Learning Capacity in the Relationship Between Teachers' Religious Beliefs and Professional Development and Job Engagement

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Abstract

Background and Aim: One of the most significant challenges in the educational system is enhancing teachers' professional development and job engagement, which can substantially impact the quality of education. In this regard, religious beliefs, as an individual factor, and organizational learning capacity, as an organizational capability, can play a crucial role in improving these indicators. This study aims to examine the mediating role of organizational learning capacity in the relationship between religious beliefs and the professional development and job engagement of primary school teachers in Ilam Province.

Materials and Methods: This research is descriptive-correlational and based on structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population included all primary school teachers in Ilam Province, and a proportional stratified random sampling method was used to select the sample. Data were collected using standardized questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS and LISREL software.

Results: The results indicated that religious beliefs have a direct and significant impact on teachers' job engagement and professional development. Additionally, organizational learning capacity played a significant mediating role in these relationships. The findings also revealed that organizational learning capacity directly influences teachers' professional development and job engagement.

Conclusion: The results highlight the importance of religious beliefs and organizational learning capacity in enhancing teachers' professional development and job engagement. Accordingly, it is recommended that policymakers and educational administrators design and implement programs to strengthen religious beliefs and improve organizational learning capacity in educational environments.

Keywords: *Religious Beliefs, Professional Development, Job Engagement, Organizational Learning, Teachers*

Introduction

The survival and continuity of organizations depend on the performance of their employees. In this regard, various organizations invest extensively in the professional development and enhancement of employee performance. Successful organizations strive to achieve better outcomes by identifying and managing factors that influence employee performance and behavior (Ghasemzadeh, 2015). Education, as a complex, challenging, and influential process, plays a vital role in the reform and reconstruction of society from one generation to the next. Therefore, one of the fundamental goals of governments is to focus on effective and efficient educational systems (Zhang et al., 2020). Teachers, as the most important and valuable human resources in any school, play a key role in the teaching and learning process (Dirsa et al., 2022). Thus, their professional development and empowerment are essential.

Professional development for teachers is a process that enables the review of educational topics, the enhancement of learning skills, and the cultivation of a commitment to professional ethics. This process promotes knowledge, skills, emotional intelligence, instructional design, and professional interactions. Gorski defines professional development as a systematic effort to transform teachers' classroom experiences (Coppe et al., 2024). Particularly for novice teachers, professional development is a fundamental strategy to prevent educational challenges (McKeown & Taylor, 2022). Research has shown that teachers play dual roles in educational reforms, both as subjects and agents of change (Wang & An BG, 2023).

Job engagement refers to an individual's strong commitment and interest in their work and career advancement. This concept is one of the most important components of human resource management, influencing work attitudes and organizational outcomes (Eddy et al., 2020). Job engagement reflects the extent to which an individual is mentally, cognitively, and psychologically engaged in their work and values it. Individuals with high job engagement experience greater job satisfaction and find their work inherently rewarding (Ghazanfari & Ahmadi, 2022). Brown suggests that individuals' perceptions of their job's potential to meet psychological needs enhance their job engagement (Brown & Militello, 2016). Classical sociologists also believe that an individual's sense of self-worth stems from their job, and neglecting this personal value leads to job dissatisfaction (Akhoondi & Safaei Movahhed, 2015).

Factors influencing employees' organizational attachment include human resource activities, organizational relationships, and management structures. Selecting the right person for the right job, aligned with organizational culture, level of authority, and job characteristics, can increase employee attachment. Focusing on spiritual activities also strengthens organizational attachment in individuals with emotional and mystical attachment models (Najafi et al., 2021). Consequently, organizations need motivated and enthusiastic employees who are fully engaged in their work, perform at high levels, and effectively fulfill their job responsibilities (Cui et al., 2023). Job engagement and professional development directly impact school productivity and the effectiveness of educational systems (Brown & Militello, 2016).

Religious beliefs are a significant variable related to teachers' job performance (Athar et al.,

2016). Religion is considered an influential factor on individual behavior and cognition (Hadianfard, 2005). Religious beliefs are associated with self-control, mental health, and the reduction of depression and job burnout (Brunsting et al., 2014). Religious beliefs, as an individual factor, and organizational learning capacity, as an organizational capability, can play a crucial role in improving these indicators. This study aims to examine the mediating role of organizational learning capacity in the relationship between religious beliefs and the professional development and job engagement of primary school teachers in Ilam Province.

Literature Review

Kelly et al found that religious beliefs, by creating meaning and purpose in life, social support, and hope in divine assistance, can mitigate the adverse effects of job-related stress (Kelly et al., 2022; Komariah & Nihayah, 2023). Additionally, religious beliefs not only fulfill individual psychological needs but also promote social cohesion and enhance general well-being (Bahrinajafy & Mirshahjafari, 2017). Numerous studies have emphasized the role of spirituality in improving individual performance and coping with job-related challenges (Heshmati et al., 2018).

Organizational learning capability helps organizations develop more effective strategies by leveraging new knowledge. This capability goes beyond organizational learning and refers to an organization's ability to acquire and process new information (Ghasemzadeh, 2015). Educational organizations are no exception. However, various challenges faced by teachers, such as low-quality education, insufficient income, declining social status, and lack of meritocracy, affect their job satisfaction and necessitate a reevaluation of educational policies (Ahmadi & Ahmadi, 2019).

Learning in education occurs at two levels: adaptive and generative. Adaptive learning improves the existing situation, while generative learning fosters innovation and desirable organizational changes (Udin, 2023). Therefore, transforming educational systems into environments that facilitate continuous learning at various levels is essential (Toulabi & Rasekhi, 2022). Previous studies have shown that religious beliefs are significantly related to teachers' professional development and job engagement (Narenji Thani et al., 2022). Additionally, the relationship between spirituality and organizational learning (Mohseni & Abbasnezhad, 2020) and between organizational learning capacity and professional development (Toulabi & Rasekhi, 2022) has been confirmed.

The lack of studies examining the variables of religious beliefs, professional development, job engagement, and organizational learning capacity within an integrated model was one of the reasons for conducting this research. Elementary schools, due to their fundamental role in shaping students' personalities and values, are considered an appropriate setting for this study. Moreover, selecting teachers as the research population was based on their pivotal role in the success of educational organizations. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between teachers' religious beliefs, professional development, and job engagement, mediated by organizational learning capacity.

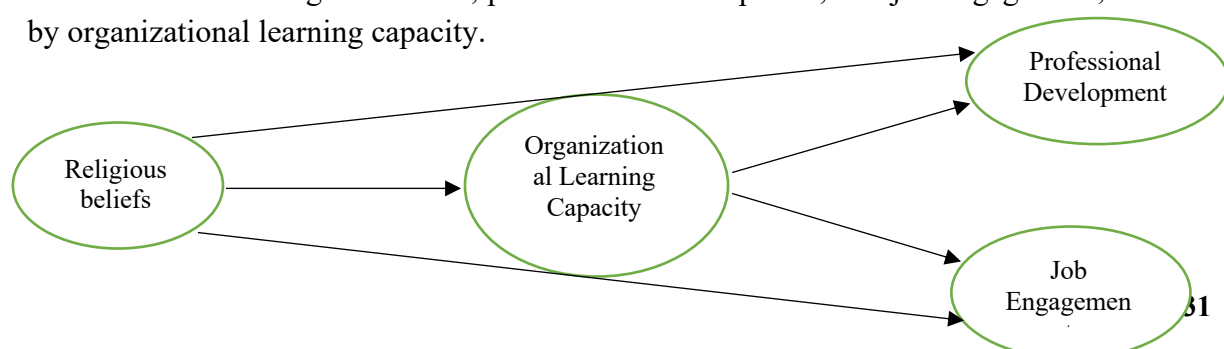


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Research

Materials and Methods

The present study is applied in terms of purpose and cross-sectional in terms of data collection timing. Methodologically, it falls under descriptive-correlational studies using structural equation modeling (SEM).

The statistical population of this research includes all primary school teachers in Ilam Province during the academic year 2023-2024, totaling 3,225 individuals. A proportional stratified random sampling method was used to determine the sample size, and Cochran's formula was applied to calculate a sample size of 347. However, to ensure greater reliability, 380 questionnaires were distributed, and ultimately, 365 questionnaires were collected.

In this study, organizational learning capacity was considered as the mediating variable, religious beliefs as the predictor variable, and professional development and job engagement as the criterion variables. The following tools were used to measure these variables:

Religious Beliefs Questionnaire

A questionnaire developed by George (1998) was used in this study. This questionnaire consists of 33 items and aims to assess the components of religious beliefs. Scoring is based on a 5-point Likert scale (from very low to very high). Lawrence et al (1997) confirmed its validity and reliability. In Iran, Haghighi et al. (2002) also examined its validity and reliability, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

Organizational Learning Capacity Questionnaire

A questionnaire developed by Chiva et al (2007) was used in this study. This questionnaire consists of 14 items and aims to assess the components of organizational learning capacity based on dimensions (experimentation, risk-taking, interaction with the external environment, dialogue, and participatory decision-making). Scoring is based on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree), ranging from 1 to 5. The validity of this questionnaire was confirmed by experts, and its reliability was reported with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 (Karimi et al., 2013).

Professional Development Questionnaire

A questionnaire developed by New Jersey (2014) was used in this study. This questionnaire consists of 11 items and aims to assess the components of professional development based on dimensions (learner and learning, content knowledge, educational practice, professional responsibility). Scoring is based on a 5-point Likert scale (from very low to very high), ranging from 1 to 5. The validity and reliability of this questionnaire were confirmed by Sarmad et al. (2007) and Alizadeh Chavarchi (2018), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

Job Attachment Questionnaire

Kanungo's (1982) questionnaire was used in this study. This questionnaire consists of 10 items and aims to assess the components of job attachment. Scoring is based on a 5-point Likert scale (from very low to very high), ranging from 1 to 5. Mirhashmi (2008) confirmed its validity and reliability in his dissertation, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 (Zarifi et al., 2013).

Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis was conducted in two parts: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. In the descriptive statistics section, measures such as mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and frequency were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample and the research variables. In the inferential statistics section, structural equation

modeling (SEM) was employed using LISREL software to examine the relationships between variables and the conceptual model of the research. First, the normality of the data was confirmed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Then, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyze bivariate relationships. The conceptual model was tested using the partial least squares (PLS) method, and model fit indices (CFI, RMSEA, GFI, AGFI, and SRMR) were reported. Additionally, the mediating role of organizational learning capacity in the relationship between religious beliefs and professional development and job attachment was examined using the bootstrapping method.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in full compliance with ethical principles. Prior to data collection, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and their informed consent was obtained. All collected information was kept confidential, and the data were analyzed anonymously. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without facing any negative consequences. Additionally, all efforts were made to prevent any psychological, social, or professional harm to the participants. Furthermore, proper scientific attribution was given to all sources and research tools, adhering to principles of academic integrity, and any distortion or misuse of data was avoided. This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Helsinki Declaration and the ethical standards for human research.

Results

In this study, 365 primary school teachers from Ilam Province participated. Of these, 66.7% were female, and 33.83% were male. The distribution of educational levels revealed that 3.33% of participants held an associate degree, 56.11% held a bachelor's degree, and 40.56% held a master's degree or higher. In terms of work experience, 61.53% of the teachers had 5 years or less of teaching experience, 15.38% had between 6 to 10 years, 13.7% had between 11 to 15 years, and 9.39% had more than 15 years of work experience. Additionally, the age distribution of participants showed that 38.46% were in the 20-25 age range, 30.76% were between 26-30 years, 7.69% were between 31-35 years, and 23.9% were over 35 years old.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables and Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Z Statistic	P-value
Religious Beliefs	114.31	11.764	1.876	-1.740	0.975	0.162
Organizational Learning Capacity	49.04	6.040	-0.889	-1.013	0.739	0.197
Professional Development	43.55	5.427	0.998	1.765	1.043	0.098
Job Engagement	37.82	3.513	-0.474	1.005	1.235	0.072

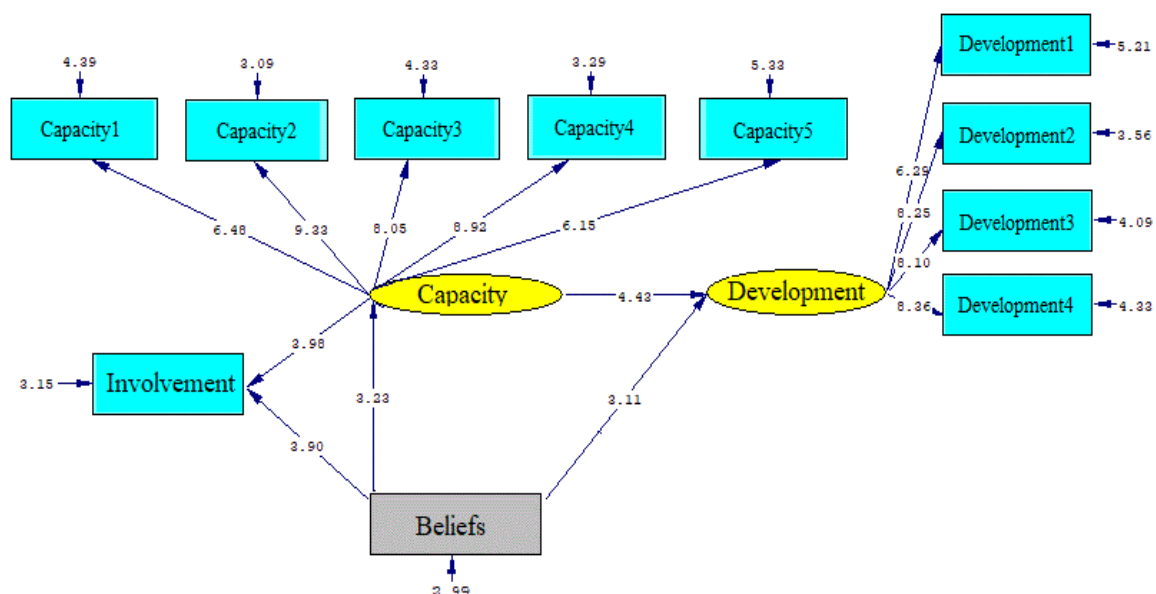
The results of Table 1 indicate that the mean scores for religious beliefs, organizational learning capacity, professional development, and job engagement are 114.31, 49.04, 43.55, and 37.82, respectively. Additionally, the standard deviations of these variables range from 3.513 to 11.764, reflecting the dispersion of data for each variable. The examination of skewness and kurtosis indices shows that the distribution of scores for all variables deviates to varying degrees from a normal distribution, particularly for religious beliefs, which exhibit higher skewness (1.876) and kurtosis (-1.740) compared to other variables. To assess the normality of

the data distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted. The results revealed that the p-values for all variables are greater than 0.05 (ranging from 0.072 to 0.197), indicating that the data distribution is normal and supporting the use of parametric statistical methods in subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Covariance Matrix of Constructs in the Structural Model of the Research

Variables	Religious Beliefs	Organizational Learning Capacity	Professional Development	Job Engagement
Religious Beliefs	1			
Organizational Learning Capacity	**0.42	1		
Professional Development	*0.38	**0.56	1	
Job Attachment	**0.47	**0.44	*0.39	1

Based on the results of Table 2, the covariance matrix between the research variables indicates that all relationships between the variables are statistically significant. Religious beliefs show a positive correlation with organizational learning capacity (0.42), professional development (0.38), and job Engagement (0.47), highlighting the potential influence of this variable on other constructs in the study. Additionally, organizational learning capacity has a significant relationship with professional development (0.56) and job attachment (0.44), emphasizing the importance of organizational learning in enhancing professional development and increasing job attachment. Furthermore, the relationship between professional development and job attachment is also positive and significant (0.39), suggesting that improved professional development can lead to stronger job engagement. In terms of significance levels, relationships marked with two asterisks (**) are significant at the 1% error level, while those marked with one asterisk (*) are significant at the 5% error level, indicating the robustness of the relationships between variables and confirming the conceptual model of the research.



Chi-Square=78.98, df=47, P-value=0.06534, RMSEA=0.043

Diagram 1. Fit of the Structural Model of the Research in Standardized Estimation Mode

In Diagram 1, it can be observed that all observed variables (items or indicators) in each construct have factor loadings higher than 0.50, indicating the adequacy of the measurement indices in the conceptual model of the research. Additionally, the standardized path coefficients show that religious beliefs have a direct and positive impact on organizational learning capacity (0.37), professional development (0.32), and job attachment (0.43). Furthermore, organizational learning capacity also has a direct and positive impact on professional development (0.51) and job attachment (0.39). These results demonstrate the significant and influential relationships between the research variables within the framework of the structural equation model.

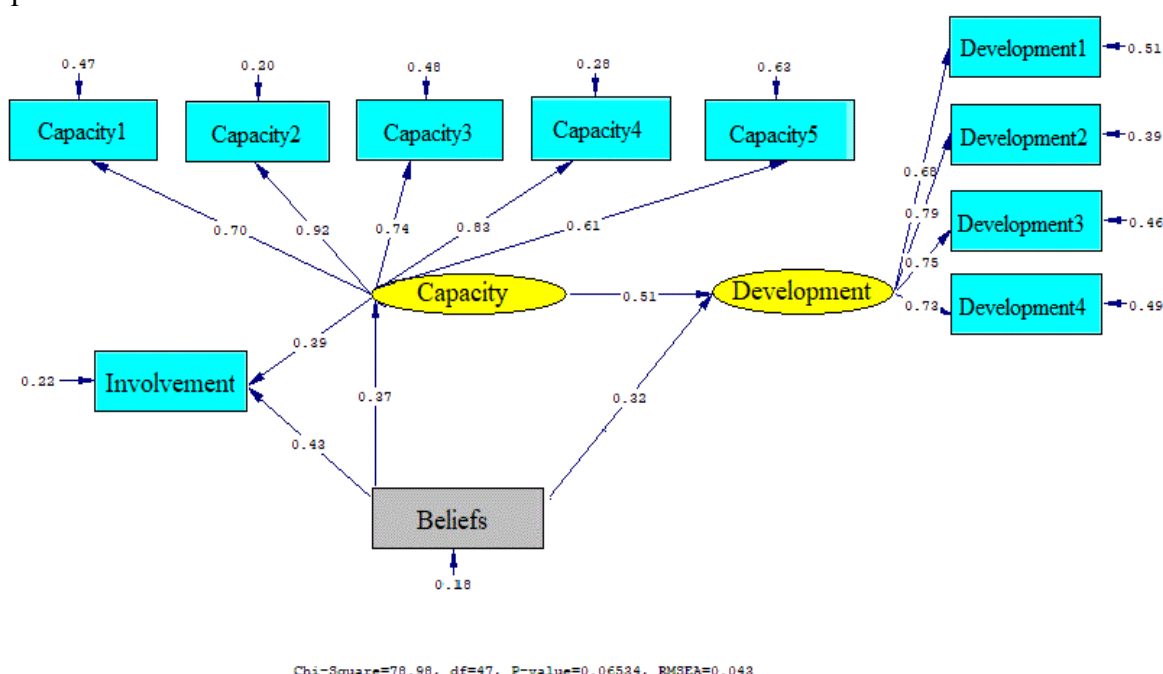


Diagram 2. Fit of the Structural Model of the Research in T-Test Mode

In Diagram 2, it can be observed that the t-statistic values for all factor loadings are greater than the critical value of 1.96 ($t > 1.96$), indicating that all factor loadings are significant at the 5% error level. This finding suggests that none of the indicators (components) will be removed from the structural model. Additionally, the estimated t-statistic values show that all these values fall outside the critical range of -1.96 to 1.96 ($t > 1.96$ or $t < -1.96$), confirming the significance of the relationships between variables at a 95% confidence level.

Moreover, the goodness-of-fit indices, used to evaluate the compatibility of the conceptual model with the observed data, are presented in Table 3. As can be seen, the values of these indices, calculated by the LISREL software, fall within the acceptable range. This indicates that the observed data in the statistical sample align well with the structural model of the research. Overall, the obtained fit indices confirm that the proposed research model has a satisfactory fit and effectively explains the structural relationships among the research variables.

Table 3. Estimation of Fit Indices to Assess the Suitability of the Structural Model of the Research

Index	Approximate Acceptance Range	Estimated Value
Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom (CMIN/DF)	Less than 3	1.68
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	Less than 0.08	0.043
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.80 to 1	0.96
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.80 to 1	0.95
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.80 to 1	0.92
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0.80 to 1	0.89

To evaluate the compatibility of the structural model of the research with the observed data, goodness-of-fit indices were examined, and the results are presented in Table 3. The value of the Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom (CMIN/DF) index is 1.68, which is below the threshold value of 3, indicating a satisfactory fit of the model. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value is 0.043, which is less than 0.08, reflecting low estimation error and the model's appropriate accuracy in aligning the observed data with the conceptual model of the research.

Additionally, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) were calculated as 0.96, 0.95, and 0.92, respectively. These values fall within the desirable range (0.80 to 1), confirming the model's compatibility with the empirical data. Furthermore, the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) value is 0.89, which is within the acceptable range. Overall, the values of the goodness-of-fit indices indicate that the structural model of the research has a satisfactory fit, and the observed data significantly support the proposed conceptual model.

Table 4. Results of Parameter Estimation in Structural Equation Modeling to Test the Research Hypotheses

Path	Direct Effect	T-value	Indirect Effect
Effect of Religious Beliefs on Organizational Learning Capacity	0.37	3.23	-
Effect of Religious Beliefs on Professional Development	0.32	3.11	0.19
Effect of Religious Beliefs on Job Attachment	0.43	3.90	0.14
Effect of Organizational Learning Capacity on Professional Development	0.51	4.43	-
Effect of Organizational Learning Capacity on Job Engagement	0.39	3.98	-

To examine the relationships between the research variables and test the hypotheses, structural equation modeling was employed, and the results of parameter estimation are presented in Table 4. According to the findings, the direct effect of religious beliefs on organizational learning capacity is 0.37 with a T-value of 3.23, which is significant at the 0.05 level. Additionally, the direct effect of religious beliefs on professional development is 0.32 (T = 3.11), and its indirect effect through organizational learning capacity is estimated at 0.19,

indicating a positive and significant impact of this variable.

Furthermore, the direct effect of religious beliefs on job attachment is 0.43 ($T = 3.90$), and its indirect effect through organizational learning capacity is 0.14, suggesting that religious beliefs also influence job attachment by enhancing organizational learning capacity. In the same vein, the direct effect of organizational learning capacity on professional development is 0.51 ($T = 4.43$), and the direct effect of organizational learning capacity on job engagement is 0.39 ($T = 3.98$), with both relationships being significant at the 0.05 level.

Overall, the results indicate that religious beliefs have a significant impact on both professional development and job attachment, both directly and indirectly (through organizational learning capacity). Additionally, organizational learning capacity plays a key role in enhancing professional development and increasing teachers' job engagement.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of religious beliefs on the job engagement and professional development of primary school teachers, considering the mediating role of organizational learning capacity. The results revealed that teachers' religious beliefs have a significant impact on their job engagement. This finding indicates that teachers with stronger religious beliefs exhibit greater commitment and motivation in their profession due to the influence of these beliefs on their values, attitudes, and work behaviors. This results aligns with previous studies that have confirmed the impact of religiosity on employees' work attitudes and behaviors (ASGHARPOUR et al., 2013; Koohpaei et al., 2021). Additionally, research by Park et al (2014) and Shirkhani (2014) has shown that religious beliefs can act as a reinforcing factor in fostering job commitment and engagement.

Religious beliefs serve as an internal driving force, enhancing teachers' sense of responsibility and personal commitment. This perspective encourages teachers to view their profession not merely as a job but as a moral duty and mission. Such an attitude strengthens job attachment and increases teachers' satisfaction and performance. The findings also indicated that teachers' religious beliefs have a positive and significant impact on their professional development. This means that teachers with stronger religious beliefs are more inclined to engage in continuous learning, growth, and improvement of their professional skills. This result is consistent with studies by Kennedy (2016) and Esmaili, Sameri and Hassani (2019), which have shown that religious beliefs can facilitate professional growth by reinforcing ethical values, increasing accountability, and fostering intrinsic motivation. Additionally, research by Ghamshadzei and Nastizaei (2019) emphasizes that religious beliefs can serve as a motivational resource for employees' learning and professional development.

Religious beliefs, by promoting values such as honesty, perseverance, and accountability, increase teachers' willingness to improve their professional performance. Furthermore, religious teachings emphasize the importance of acquiring knowledge and learning, which can enhance teachers' motivation to develop their skills. A key finding of the study was that organizational learning capacity plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between religious beliefs and teachers' job attachment and professional development. This suggests that organizations with a stronger learning culture enable religious beliefs to more effectively influence teachers' commitment and professional growth.

This result aligns with studies by Toulabi and Raskhi (2022) and Mohseni et al. (2020), which have shown that organizations that integrate religious and ethical values into their culture create

an environment conducive to learning, innovation, and job commitment. Additionally, the findings of this study are consistent with the perspectives of Marquardt (1996) and Craig et al (2022), who emphasize the role of organizational learning as a key driver of employees' professional development. Organizational learning capacity, as a facilitating factor, creates conditions that allow teachers to apply their religious beliefs in learning and professional development processes. When an organization functions as a learning environment, it not only provides opportunities for teachers' growth and advancement but also strengthens their job attachment by enhancing interactions and knowledge exchange.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that religious beliefs, by influencing values, attitudes, and work behaviors, contribute to increased job engagement and professional development among teachers. Additionally, organizational learning capacity, as a mediating variable, strengthens these effects, demonstrating that organizations emphasizing continuous learning can create a more conducive environment for teachers' professional growth and enhanced job commitment.

Recommendations

It is recommended that policymakers and educational administrators develop programs to promote teachers' religious beliefs and strengthen ethical values in educational environments. Creating opportunities for continuous learning and enhancing organizational learning capacity can be considered an effective strategy for increasing teachers' job attachment and professional development. Organizing workshops on integrating religious and ethical beliefs with professional development can help improve teachers' performance and motivation. These results can serve as a basis for future decision-making in educational policy and highlight the importance of combining individual factors (such as religious beliefs) and organizational factors (such as organizational learning) in enhancing the quality of teachers' performance.

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Footnotes

Author Contributions:

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest, whether financial, personal, or organizational, related to the conduct of this study or the publication of its results. All stages of the research were conducted independently and in accordance with scientific and ethical principles.

Data Availability: The data used in this study will be made available upon request and in coordination with the authors.

Ethical Approval: This study was conducted in compliance with ethical research principles, and all relevant protocols were observed. Necessary approvals were obtained from authorized bodies, and all participants voluntarily joined the study with full informed consent.

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Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from all eligible individuals prior to their participation in the study.

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