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# Meaning in Life, Pedagogical Practices, and EFL Teaching: A Qualitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

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This case study examines the search for meaning, the presence of meaning, and their roles in teaching as a profession among experienced and novice Iranian EFL teachers. Criterion sampling was used to select 10 EFL teachers (five experienced and five novice teachers) aged 20 to 44. The instruments used were the online focus group interviews and online daily diaries. Analysis of data collected using thematic analysis revealed that these two groups of teachers experienced similarities and differences in the search for meaning and presence of meaning affecting their teaching as a profession. I also observed differences between teachers' global meaning and day-to-day meaning. Whereas the experienced teachers in both focus group interviews and daily diaries focused on the sense of responsibility, the novice teachers were more different in their answers. In their general sense, the novice teachers' teaching centered on generating the opportunity for learners to find their own voice and discover their true self and in their daily meaning, they mainly focused on interaction and communication. This result may indicate that novice teachers are more dynamic and more flowing. Further findings and implications are discussed in the paper.

## 1. Introduction

Kierkegaard states that the aim of man's search for meaning is finding the purpose, finding out what God really asked human beings to do, and discovering the truth for which every man wants to live and even wants to die (Dru, 1938). For Kierkegaard (1813, 1855), the meaning was a quest to find one's values and purposes. Sartre (1948) considered meaning as something without any representation which is unique to each person and should be achieved. Meaning refers to making sense of one's existence and maintaining a purpose or goal toward which one can strive

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(Guthrie et al., 2025; Li & Wu, 2025). According to Steger et al. (2008), “people are thought to be motivated both to have and search for meaning in life. However, people vary in the degree to which they actively search for meaning” (p. 200). Despite the important role of search for meaning and presence of meaning, research investigating EFL teachers’ search for meaning and presence of meaning remained scarce since the existing studies largely focused on the well-being of English language teachers as a variable composed of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment through quantitative or conceptual studies (MacIntyre et al., 2022; Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025).

The present study, specifically addressing the search and presence of meaning through a qualitative design, sought to investigate how Iranian EFL teachers search for and come to understand the meaning of their life and how this meaning affects their teaching as a profession. The present study, gathering data in two different ways (online focus group interviews and online daily diaries), investigated both global meaning and day-to-day meaning. Therefore, the questions addressed by the present study are the following:

1. How do experienced and novice teachers search for the meaning of their life?
2. How do experienced and novice teachers come to understand the meaning of their life?
3. How does the meaning defined by experienced and novice teachers for their life affect their teaching as a profession?

## 2. Review of Literature

The operational definition for meaning in life (MIL) has been proposed by Steger et al. (2006), Steger et al. (2008) and Steger and Kashdan (2009). MIL can be defined as “the extent to which people comprehend, make sense of, or see significance in their lives” (Steger & Kashdan, 2009, p. 682). Two independent but complementary components were also identified for this concept including the search for meaning (SML) and the presence of meaning (PML). SML concerns the extent to which people seek to gain more understanding of the meaning and the purpose of their lives (Steger et al., 2008), whereas PML refers to “the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose, mission, or over-arching aim in life” (Steger & Kashdan, 2009, p. 43).

The meaning of life has recently attracted the attention and interest of researchers in different fields. Steger and Kashdan (2007) investigated the stability and specificity of meaning in life and life satisfaction over a year and found that there was moderate stability for presence of

meaning in life, search for meaning in life, and life satisfaction. Steger et al. (2008) conducted a multistudy research addressing the relations between the search for meaning and well-being, cognitive style, and the Big Five, Big Three, Approach/Avoidance, and Interest models of personality, with a particular emphasis on understanding the correlates of search for meaning. Based on the findings of this multistudy, the search of meaning did not necessarily lead to its presence.

Steger et al. (2009) assessed the structure, levels, and correlates of the presence of meaning in life, and the search for meaning, within four life stage groups including emerging adulthood, young adulthood, middle-age adulthood, and older adulthood concluding that the presence of meaning has similar relations to well-being across life stages, whereas searching for meaning is more strongly associated with well-being deficits at later life stages. Park and George (2013) delineated a meaning-making framework integrating current theorizing about meaning and meaning making. They also described and evaluated global meaning and situational meaning constructs.

Machell et al. (2014) also examined how people's daily experiences influence their perceived sense of meaning on a daily basis. Findings of the study suggested that daily events may have an important role in fluctuations in people's sense of meaning in life. Although these studies focused on the meaning of life, there have been very few studies exploring the meaning of life in EFL teachers. The aim of the present study is to investigate the search for meaning and presence of meaning in day to day responsibilities of teachers as well as an understanding of how it functions differently for each teacher due to the important role that teachers have in shaping and reshaping society.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This research employed a case study method. A case study is a story about something unique and special which may be about individuals, organizations, processes, programs, and even events (Yin, 2003). Focus group interviews and Experience Sampling Method were used for data collection and analysis. Criterion sampling was used to select participants and the predetermined criterion of importance was experience of teachers. The variables involved in the study were the

search for meaning (SML) and the presence of meaning (PML) and teachers' teaching as a profession.

### **3.2. Participants**

Participants of this study were 10 EFL teachers (5 experienced and 5 novice teachers) aged from 20 to 44. Their educational degree also varied from associate degree and bachelor of art to master of art and doctor of philosophy. Criterion sampling was used to select participants. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2002, p. 238). In the present study, the predetermined criterion was experience of teachers.

The definition of experienced teachers seems to hinge principally on the number of years taught. Most commonly, studies identify experienced teachers as those who have approximately five years or more of classroom experience (Gatbonton, 1999; Richards et al., 1998; Tsui, 2003, 2005). Novice teachers are often student teachers or teachers who have less than two years of teaching experience (Gatbonton, 2008). Tables 1 and 2 provide information on these teachers:

### **3.3. Instruments**

#### **3.3.1. Online Focus Group Interview**

Focus group interviews nurture different attitudes and are used to collect information for discovery and verifying perceptions, feelings, and thoughts (Patton, 1990). The main advantage of a focus group is the opportunity to observe the group and interact on a particular topic (Morse & Field, 1995). To gather information, I conducted online focus group interviews. According to Millward (2012), there are two types of online focus group or e-focus group:

Real-time focus groups who log on to the network at a set time for a set period to discuss a topic or issue, and ongoing focus groups whose members sign on and off whenever they wish, and contribute whenever convenient and/or appropriate.

In the present study, real-time E-focus group was used. All 10 EFL teachers were interviewed through G-chat. In focus groups, I tried to use open-ended questions and avoided dichotomous questions which could be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' and tried to apply questions that made participants involved using reflection, examples, choices, rating scales, drawings.

### **3.3.2. Experience Sampling Method**

In order to study research questions within each teacher, Experience Sampling Method (ESM) was used. Experience sampling methods are also referred to as Daily Dairy (DD) methods (Bolger et al., 2003). ESM is a methodological approach that allows researchers to gather detailed accounts of people's daily experiences over time and capture the ebb and flow of these experiences as they occur in the natural environment (Hormuth, 1986). In fact, experience sampling is a powerful method for understanding a range of psychological phenomena as they occur in the daily lives of individuals (Christensen et al., 2003).

Conner et al. (2009) explain that experience sampling studies can last from several days to several months using a range of technologies from paper-and-pencil questionnaires to computerized personal digital assistants, electronic diaries, and mobile phones. According to Fisher and To (2012), there are two main reasons for using ESM/DD methods "The first is to reduce the bias and error that is inherent in global retrospective reporting of transient experiences. The second reason is to study within-person processes as they unfold over time" (p. 866).

Three types of ESM protocols are (a) interval contingent, (b) event contingent, and (c) signal contingent (Reis & Gable, 2000; Wheeler & Reis, 1991). The interval-contingent protocol requires participants to report on their experiences at regular and predetermined intervals. Signal-contingent protocol relies on some signaling device to prompt participants to provide diary reports at fixed, random, or a combination of fixed and random intervals. Event-contingent protocol requires participants to provide a self-report each time the event in question occurs.

In the present study, interval-contingent and event-contingent protocols were used as is explained below:

1. Interval-contingent protocol in which teachers selected as participants of the study were asked to report their thoughts and feelings at regular predetermined intervals (after each working day).
2. Event-contingent protocol in which participants were also allowed to report each time a specific event occurred and made them think about questions to be answered in diaries.

It should be added that the diaries were gathered through a weblog which was developed for the purposes of this study. Blogging is increasingly popular as a means of publishing a

regular diary online, where bloggers can daily command audiences numbering tens of thousands (Kamel Boulos et al., 2006). The diaries were placed online to make it possible for participants to add hyperlinks, upload pictures, and use emoticons in their diaries.

### **3.4. Data Collection Procedure**

In order to study differences and similarities between experienced and novice teachers selected as participants of the present study in their attempt to search and find the meaning of life and the effect of their meaning on their teaching as a profession, three focus group interviews were conducted with each group of teachers. Calls for participants, initial and follow-up contacts, plus the organization of the time interviews were carried out by phone and by Gmail. I preferred to use online focus group interviews. These interviews were conducted via G-chat and were semi-structured. A list of important questions was predetermined and was used. Participants were interviewed via three G-chats based around the following subjects:

1. How do you search for the meaning of life?
2. What is the meaning of life?
3. How does this meaning affect teaching as your profession?

For G-chat interviews, follow-up Gmails were used by which participants had this opportunity to send their reflections, views, or everything they ignored to refer to in interviews. To analyze search of meaning, presence of meaning, and effect of perceived meaning within each individual teacher, participants of the study were also asked to write a diary of self-report forms with open-ended items to record their thoughts and feelings in real-life everyday situations in sequential episodes for four weeks. Participants were asked to answer the following open-ended questions after each working day.

1. How do you define life?
2. How do you search for the meaning of life?
3. How do you define teaching?
4. Which strategies and methods do you use in teaching?

Participants were also allowed to report each time a specific event occurred and made them think about questions to be answered in diaries. “Thank You” letters were immediately sent to all participants at the end of both online focus group interviews and diary writing.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

In order to answer research questions and to study how experienced and novice teachers search for and come to understand the meaning of their lives and how the meaning defined by experienced and novice teachers for their life affect their teaching as a profession, thematic analysis was used. Data set included all entries sent by five experienced and five novice teachers. Indeed, “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis includes familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, I followed the following stages:

1. Creating initial codes
2. Revisiting initial coding
3. Developing an initial list of categories
4. Modifying the initial list based on additional rereading
5. Revisiting categories and subcategories
6. Moving from categories to themes

I also switched between reading entries line by line and tried to process the data in an attempt to identify meaningful qualitative units for analysis. A code might either consist of one line of text or part of a text including several lines. Brief phrases were used as codes. Then, it was tried to rename initial codes, delete redundant ones, and integrate those which seemed to be indicators of a similar concept. Many codes were generated and were organized into larger categories where some codes were considered as subsets of those larger categories. Some codes were taken from participants’ own words which are called “in vivo codes” (Glaser & Strauss, 1976).

In order to judge the validity of the present research, I observed four criteria of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) including credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability. Credibility of the study was established through triangulation involving different methods to gather information about participants, which include focus group interviews and diaries.

Transferability or external validity of the study “is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). According to Benz and Newman (1998), “In fact, we have assumed that, if the purpose of the research is to generalize, one should employ quantitative methodology (p. 54). But there are researchers believing that generalizability is also important in qualitative research. As Firestone (1993) argues it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide sufficient contextual information in order to enable readers of the research study to make such a transfer. Thus, I provided information about the following aspects of the study:

1. Factors based on which participants of the study were chosen
2. The number of the participants of the study
3. The data collection methods used
4. The number and length of data collection methods
5. The time period over which the data was collected

In order to address the dependability of the study, all the processes within the study were reported in detail. Another aim of triangulation or gathering data using different methods was addressing confirmability or objectivity of the study. In-depth methodological descriptions were also provided.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. The Analysis of Focus Group Interviews**

#### **4.1.1. The analysis of Focus Group Interviews with Experienced Teachers**

Two hundred thirty codes were identified in analyzing interviews with experienced teachers. Seven categories and three main themes corresponding to three main research questions were extracted from these codes. The three main themes included outer world, meaningful happiness, and accountability. Outer world entailed the two sub-themes: social relations and interactions, and reading books. Meaningful happiness was composed of helping others, loving others, and making others happy. Also, accountability involved duties and obligations as well as

commitment and devotedness. It was revealed that experienced teachers searched for the meaning of life in their social relations and interactions and in books as examples extracted from focus group interviews can show:

- C1) The meaning of my life is hidden in the world where I live. My life is the result of my interaction with my friends, my colleagues and my communities.
- C2) I seek to find the meaning reading books written by great persons. These books and those who wrote them can give me great insights.
- C3) I am part of a greater world that is like a network consisting of me, my people and our relations. It is very hard but I should have a journey in this complicated net to find myself.

Outer world is defined as the learners' social constructing of knowledge by having social relations and interactions and reading books. It seemed that these teachers also found their meaning of life in helping others, loving others and making others happy as the following examples show:

- C4) I want to become prosperous and happy but it is not possible when I live in a dark world or when my friends and neighbors are sad. I want to make my world happy.
- C5) We should help each other to get calm.
- C6) I want to take all their pains, illness, hopelessness from them. I want to make them smile and feel prosperity and happiness in their heart.

I used the term meaningful happiness in order to label the theme resulted from integration of three categories of helping others, loving others and making others happy. Sirgy (2002) in explanation of meaningful happiness using the term of meaningful life argues "the person who lives a meaningful life is one that serves what is larger and more worthwhile than just the self's pleasures and desires" (p. 187). The meaningful happiness is one dimension of authentic happiness introduced by the psychologist Martin Seligman (2002) in his positive psychology theory. Seligman in his theory and in his explanation of authentic happiness specifies three dimensions for happiness including pleasure and gratification, embodiment of strengths and virtues, and meaning and purpose and refers to a progression from the first one to the meaning and purpose. Pleasure is about happiness in hedonic sense, engagement refers to happiness coming through engagement in satisfying activities and meaningful happiness is the fruit of connectedness to a greater whole (Sirgy & Wu, 2009).

Experienced teachers in their answers to the third question addressing the effect of the meaning of life on teaching mainly focused on duties and obligations and commitment and devotedness as it can be seen from the following examples:

C7) I now understand that as a teacher I have many duties, not only as a teacher but as a friend of students.

C8) I try to do my best and use all my abilities and efforts.

C9) Although there are many problems especially financial problems, I have accepted this job. I must be the best in my job and accomplish all my duties in the best way.

#### **4.1.2. The Analysis of Focus Group Interviews with Novice Teachers**

One hundred eighty-four codes were also identified in analyzing focus group interviews of five novice teachers leading to seven categories and three main themes related to three research questions. The three themes included inner world, meaningful happiness, and authenticity. Inner world was composed of my own experience and my own emotions. Meaningful happiness consisted of helping others, loving others, and making others happy. Authenticity was composed of self-discovery and helping students find their voice. It was revealed that novice teachers searched the meaning of their life looking at their own world or through what they called as their own experience and their own emotions or their own self as the following examples show:

C10) I search it [the meaning of life] by looking deeply at myself and my feelings. I start having my own experiences to see who I am and why I am here.

C11) There should be something more important than what I see. Something like my own thoughts, dreams, beliefs and feelings. These are what I should find out to see why I am living.

C12) Yes, I search by looking at my actions and their results on myself and my own world.

Inner world is defined as the learners' cognitive constructing of their own experience and emotions. It also seemed that five novice teachers participated in the present study tried to find their meaning of life in helping others, loving others, and making others happy as examples extracted from focus group interviews can show:

C13) When I help others I get happy and happier. I am not very important but I try to make life easier for others.

C14) My friends are right we should love each other to know what the meaning of life is.

C15) The meaning of my life, I think is to love others and to make others happy.

I used the term meaningful happiness in order to label the theme resulted from integration of these three categories. Novice teachers mainly referred to activities used to make their learners find their own voice and reveal their own true being in response to the question of “how does your meaning of life affect teaching as your profession”. They also emphasized the importance of self-discovery and any activity making learners find their own voice as some examples extracted from focus group interviews can show:

C16) I want to hear my students’ real views not what is in the book. I want to know them as they are.

C17) In my classes, I try to follow my philosophy. I try to provide a warm environment in which my students can express who they are and reveal their own world.

C18) I want my students reveal their self to find who they are as a unique student or a unique person.

The third theme extracted was authenticity. The most specific definition of authenticity comes from psychologists Goldman and Kernis (2002) who define authenticity as “the unobstructed operation of one’s true or core self in one’s daily enterprise” (p. 18). They also explain that “authenticity reflects acting in accord with one’s values, preferences, and needs as opposed to acting merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments, even if it means acting falsely” (Goldman & Kernis, 2002, 19). To be authentic, people must assert their will in the choices made when they face possibilities (Sartre, 1992). Erickson (1994) states:

When thinking of how authentic or inauthentic we feel, we are not only concerned with upholding our rights and duties to others, or to our-role based identities of spouse, parent, and teacher, but we are also (and perhaps even more seriously) concerned with maintaining our commitment and expectations for self as an entity in its own right.

Analyzing focus group interviews showed that both groups of teachers tried to find the meaning of their life in making others happy and loving others. Seligman in his positive psychology theory tried to explore why happy people are happy: “[Positive Psychology] takes you through the countryside of pleasure and gratification, up into the high country of strength and virtue, and finally to the peaks of lasting fulfillment: meaning and purpose” (Seligman,

2002, p. 61). Positive psychology theory explains that happiness resulted from doing for others is much greater and long lasting.

Both groups of teachers also searched for the meaning of their life. As was argued by Steger et al. (2008), “the search for meaning should be a natural, healthy part of life, spurring people to seek out new opportunities and challenges, and fueling their desire to understand and organize their experiences” (p. 200-201). Although experienced and novice teachers considered the meaningful happiness as the meaning of their lives, they were different in their search for meaning. Based on this result, search for meaning and presence of meaning seem to be independent. Search for meaning concerns people’s perceptions of the presence of their meaning in their lives, while presence of meaning refers to the extent to which people feel their lives matter and make sense to them on a subjective level (King, 2006). Novice teachers explained that they tried to search for the meaning of their life looking at their own feelings, thoughts, experiences, and inner world, whereas experienced teachers searched for the meaning of life in their social interactions and relations.

It seemed that such a difference in the search of meaning affected how teachers taught or at least what was of primary importance in their teaching. Novice teachers sought to make their learners find their voice which was labeled as authenticity. “Being authentic is generally understood as saying what I really mean, doing what I really believe, or simply being myself, that is, acting in accordance with something fundamental and unique about myself” (Bialystok, 2009, p. 25).

According to Kenyon (2000), meaningful living has been directly equated with authentic living. Experienced teachers focused on their own sense of accountability. They focused on being a devoted teacher and doing assigned duties. Freeman and Auster (2011) argue that authenticity not only involves acting on one’s value or being true to one’s true self, but also covers relations with others and acting on values for individuals and organizations. Thus, authenticity and responsibility resulting from meaningful life are intricately integrated despite being different.

## **4.2. The Analysis of Daily Diaries**

In order to investigate similarities and differences between and within both experienced and novice teachers, 10 teachers chosen as participants of the present study were asked to write diaries after each working day for four weeks and answer questions related to the search for meaning, achievement of meaning and the effect of meaning of their life on their teaching. One hundred twenty diaries were collected.

Thematic analysis was used in order to analyze Daily Diaries. Codes identified were organized into broad themes which were then analyzed in details. Detailed analyses led to finding categories in each broad theme. While Broad higher-order codes make it possible to achieve a general overview of the direction of the diaries, detailed lower order codes enable fine distinctions to be made, both within and between cases (King, 2004).

### **4.2.1. The Analysis of Daily Diaries for Experienced Teachers**

Two hundred eighty codes were identified in diaries written by experienced teachers. The final themes involved my world, engagement and meaningful happiness, and sense of responsibility. Analysis of diaries collected from experienced teachers revealed that they searched for their meaning of life in their social relations, interactions, and in their own self which were categorized as outer world and inner world. Some examples of participants' diaries leading to these categories are presented below:

C19) Definition of life comes from our own culture and our own world, our own people, how we are living beside each other and it shapes our life and future.

C20) When I see how nature is changing, everything is green but what happens in the last week of Shahrivar? everything is changed into red, orange, yellow, I ask myself how and why? I ask myself what is the meaning of life?

C21) Such questions were engraved into my heart from my childhood when I tried to discover the hidden meaning of each event and tried to construct my own reality based on what I felt or what I thought.

Analysis also showed that they tried to be involved in activities they could flourish in and were also in search for higher meanings such as devoting their life to make others happy:

C22) I devout myself completely to my job that is my life.

C23) A genuinely happy person is one who brings happiness to those around them.

C24) When we make a decision just based on our own benefits and when we forget values, we will not become prosperous. Happiness resides in those moments when we try to live as a real human.

I made use of the term engagement and meaningful happiness in order to label the theme resulted from integration of categories of involvement, helping others, loving others and making others happy. Experienced teachers also emphasized on commitment and sense of duty:

C25) I try to be responsible and teach it to learners.

C26) I know there is a reason behind everything in this world and we should be aware that we have many duties.

C27) We should be responsible to the world in which we live and to people who live beside us.

The third theme extracted from categories of responsibility and duties and obligations was named sense of responsibility. Sense of responsibility is defined as the personal willingness to take on responsibilities and to fulfil duties and obligations. I tried to reread diaries of experienced teachers to make comparisons within them and across time based on themes extracted from analyzing data. The result revealed a constant conflict between inner world and outer world, and a constant conflict between engaged life and meaningful life.

#### **4.2.2. The Analysis of Daily Diaries for Novice Teachers**

Two hundred fifty codes were identified in diaries written by novice teachers. The higher order and lower order themes extracted from analyzing their diaries involved my own worlds, pleasure and meaningful happiness, and sense of creation and inter-communications. Analysis of diaries collected from novice teachers revealed that they search for their meaning of life in their social interactions and in their own self:

C28) We are here interacting with each other and sharing our ideas and feelings. It is meaning of our life.

C29) The meaning of our life is not something external. It comes from our inner world. Life itself teaches us its meaning. But we should be ready to learn.

C30) It depends on my role in society.

Analysis also showed they are in search for pleasure and meaningful happiness:

C31) I let myself enjoy everything because I have one chance to live.

C32) Life is pleasure and pleasure comes with money!!!

C33) Everything is clear for me. Happiness and making others happy.

I made use of the term pleasure and meaningful happiness in order to label the theme resulted from integration of categories of companionship and pleasure, helping others, loving others and making others happy. Teachers tried to teach their students how to express their own self and focused on interaction and communication:

C34) I ask my students express their understanding and tell me their own conclusion. I hate making learners parrot what doesn't belong to them.

C35) I try to use communicative and interactive method in teaching. I hate methods focusing the texts while forgetting the world of students.

C36) Thus my teaching centers on interaction, communication and sharing ideas because we want to know each other better and better to help each other and understand our world.

The third theme extracted from categories of self-expression and interaction and communication was sense of creation and inter-communication. I reread diaries of each novice teacher to make comparison within them and across time based on themes extracted from analyzing data. The results revealed a constant conflict between inner world and outer world. There was also a constant conflict between pleasant life and meaningful life. According to Baumeister et al. (2013):

Happiness may be rooted in having one's needs and desires satisfied, including being largely free from unpleasant events. Meaningfulness may be considerably more complex than happiness, because it requires interpretive construction of circumstances across time according to abstract values and other culturally mediated ideas.

It seemed that there was a consistency in making the opportunity for generating the sense of creation and inter-communication. Analyzing diaries of both groups of teachers revealed that they were in constant conflict between searching for meaning in either their inner world or their outer world. They were also in constant conflict between pleasant life, engaged life and

meaningful life. This result showed a difference between participants' global meaning and day to day meaning. According to Park and George (2013) "Global meaning refers to individuals' systems of beliefs about the world and themselves and their overarching goals along with their concomitant subjective sense of life meaningfulness or purpose" (p. 484). As Frankl (1963) states:

For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment.

Machell et al. (2014) explains that "daily sense of meaning should be dynamic, constantly ebbing and flowing with ordinary life events" (p.2). They also believe that a person's global MIL influences his/her daily meaning. Steger et al (2008) found out a positive correlation between global and daily MIL, "but daily MIL is more sensitive to the mundane experiences that characterize day-to-day living" (p. 2).

Whereas experienced teachers in both focus group interviews and daily diaries focused on sense of responsibility, novice teachers were more different in their answers to the third research question in focus group interviews and daily diaries. In their general sense, their teaching centered on creating the opportunity for learners to find their own voice and discover their true self and in their daily teaching, they also gave significant attention to interaction and communication. This result may show that novice teachers are more dynamic and more flowing.

## **5. Conclusion and Implications**

The present study tried to investigate the search for meaning and the presence of meaning of life in experienced and novice EFL teachers, and this makes the present study different from previous studies addressing the search for and the achievement of the meaning of life. Data were collected via focus group interviews and daily diaries. The results of the analysis of data revealed some similarities and differences between experienced and novice teachers affecting their teaching as their profession.

The difference between results of the analysis of focus group interviews and diaries drew my attention to an important point I overlooked in the questions they asked from their

participants i.e. the effect of teaching on the meaning of life. This also reminds us of complexity and dynamism of human identity. As is expressed by Buckingham (2008):

On one level, I am the product of my unique personal biography. Yet who I am (or who I think I am) varies according to who I am with, the social situations in which I find myself, and the motivations I may have at the time, although I am by no means entirely free to choose how I am defined.

The main sample of the study consisted of 10 EFL teachers who participated in focus group interviews and diary writing and this could curtail inferences from the study. Longitudinal and multimethod studies with a larger number of participants can be used to more clearly uncover the reasons for which experienced and novice teachers may be different or similar in their search for meaning, presence of meaning, and teaching. The results of this study will be helpful for teachers as they can understand the ways in which their existential questions, their unique search for meaning and their fitness within the world interact with their teaching. The results may also have direct implication for learners, as teachers and learners are intricately related.

### **Bio-data**

Hojjat Jodaei is an assistant professor in applied linguistics, department of language and literature, Imam Ali University. His main area of research includes educational psychology and motivation. His field of interest involves the use of AI and Technologies in English language teaching and learning process and positive psychology.

### **Declarations**

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**Availability of data and materials:** The data will be accessible upon request.

**Authors' contributions:** Conceptualization-writing-revising-methodology

**Declaration of generative AI-powered tools in the process of writing:** The author has not used AI-powered tools through various stages of this study.

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