

Exploring the Relationship between Career Calling and Work Engagement among Higher Vocational Educators in China: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of career calling on work engagement among higher vocational education teachers in China. A preliminary study involving 50 teachers from Jiangsu, Guangdong, and Zhejiang provinces was conducted. Regression analysis was used to assess the relationships between the variables. The findings showed that career calling had a significant positive correlation with work engagement, with prosocial orientation having the greatest influence, followed by transcendent summons, and purposeful work, which had a relatively smaller effect. This highlights the importance of fostering a strong sense of career calling to enhance teachers' work engagement. The study also suggests that future research should explore additional factors affecting work engagement, such as school leadership style, organisational support, and institutional culture, as well as the mechanisms by which career calling influences work engagement. These findings offer valuable insights for the development of educational policies and HR management practices that support career calling, which can ultimately drive the high-quality development of higher vocational education in China.

Keywords: Career Calling, Work Engagement, Higher Vocational Teacher, Human Resources Management

Introduction

In China, vocational education has undergone significant changes in terms of both history and structure, and the world's largest vocational education system has been built in recent years. China has continued to deepen the reform of vocational education, such as the revision of the Vocational Education Law in 2022, which has basically formed a vocational education development path and model with Chinese characteristics. With the continuous development of higher vocational education in China, the teacher workforce has expanded steadily over the past few decades. According to statistics released by the Chinese education department, the number of higher vocational teachers increased significantly, growing from 438,300 in 2014 to 684,600 in 2023, as illustrated in Figure 1.

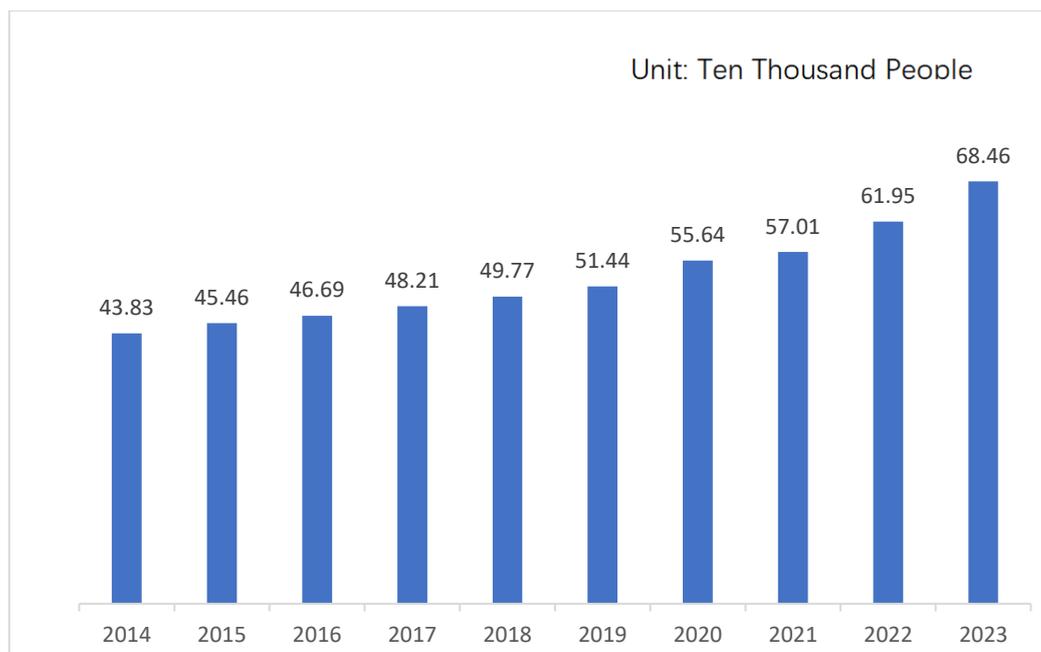


Figure 1. Changes in the Scale of Vocational College Teachers in China from 2014 to 2023

The development of education is inseparable from teachers and the work engagement of higher vocational teachers determines the quality and results of teaching and learning, which is related to student's academic literacy and the long-term development of the school, as well as influencing the development of higher vocational education in China and the personal career development of teachers (You & Cao, 2018). The significance of higher vocational teachers in advancing higher vocational education is indisputable, serving as a cornerstone for its sustainable growth. They are the primary human resources for higher vocational education, and the key practical actors in promoting educational and teaching reforms in higher vocational institutions and deepening the integration of industry and education, which can play a pivotal role in the development of vocational education and promote the development of vocational education. Their work engagement has a direct impact on the development of the teaching force and higher vocational education (Gao, 2021; Zhang, 2019; Li, 2022).

With the increasing social status of higher vocational education in China and the strengthening of policy support, as well as the new challenges brought about by the construction of 'double high', many higher vocational teachers face challenges such as heavy workloads, limited opportunities for career development, and lack of recognition, which may affect their work enthusiasm (Duan et al., 2024). The Chinese media have been reporting on many 'typical people' with a strong calling recently and by publicising the achievements they have made in their jobs, they are inspiring more and more people to engage in the development and construction of the country. Therefore, this study explores whether the career calling of Chinese higher vocational teachers affects their work engagement.

Literature Review

The word 'calling' is originally used in a religious context, as people are understood to be 'called' by God to do morally and socially significant work. While the modern sense of 'calling' in a career may have lost its religious overtones, it is believed that purposeful work is usually

considered socially valuable and that people with a sense of calling do not engage in the job only for financial gain or career advancement, but rather for the sense of fulfilment that comes with it (Wrzesniewski et al., 2009). The research into the concept of 'calling' has continued to develop into a multidimensional understanding. A more typical view is offered by Dik and Duffy (2009) in their study of vocation and career at work, where they define calling as a self-transcending summons to approach a specific life role in a way that is intended to manifest or acquire purpose or meaning, with other-directed values and goals as the primary source of motivation, and there are two states of career calling in an individual's career development, namely the presence of calling and the search for calling, including transcendent summons, purposeful work, and prosocial orientation. They develop the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ) measurement scale to validate (Dik et al., 2012).

The results of research on the conceptual definition of career calling in Chinese culture show that career calling is a dynamic process in which individuals discover meaning and goals that benefit themselves, others, and society through a sense of direction. They constantly persevere and work hard to achieve happiness (Zhang et al., 2015). Liao et al. (2014) conceptualise the career calling of primary and secondary school teachers as their dedication to the cause of education within the framework of contemporary social and historical contexts. It involves the psychological processes of perceiving, understanding, identifying, and internalizing the educational responsibilities, tasks, and expectations entrusted to them by the state and society.

The career calling of higher vocational teachers in China is an intrinsic motivation driven by a sense of being 'called' and achieving self-fulfilment through teaching. Shaped by societal expectations and cultural norms, this calling imbues teachers with both authority and responsibility to fulfil professional duties. By meeting these expectations, teachers gain satisfaction and purpose, reinforcing their dedication to the educational mission. In this context, considering the distinctive characteristics of the teaching profession, Dik et al.'s (2012) three-dimensional framework for career calling proves highly relevant for conceptualising the career calling of higher vocational teachers in China. Career calling can be conceptualised as a multidimensional construct: (i) the first is a transcendent summons, teaching occupies a unique and enduring position in society, exerting a profound influence on social development, personal growth, and cultural transmission. Since ancient times, the teaching profession has been regarded as a vocation with an inherent sense of purpose and responsibility. (ii) the second is purposeful work, teachers serve as central agents in the dissemination of knowledge, the development of skills, and the shaping of values. Their work transcends routine tasks, aiming to educate and inspire future generations, thereby embodying the concept of purposeful engagement. (iii) the third is prosocial orientation, the teaching profession inherently aligns with societal needs, as teachers play a pivotal role in fostering societal development and advancing human civilisation. Their career calling is deeply intertwined with their responsibility to contribute to the collective progress and well-being of society. This conceptualisation aligns with a framework that integrates a sense of purpose, meaningful engagement, and a prosocial orientation, reflecting the multidimensional nature of higher vocational education. It embodies the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, sense of social responsibility and goal-oriented work that is characteristic of higher vocational teachers in the Chinese cultural and educational context.

Career calling has been identified as an important personal resource (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Within the framework of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, personal resources are considered vital in enabling individuals to cope with job demands and to remain motivated and engaged. Schaufeli et al. (2002) define work engagement as a fulfilling, positive, and motivational state of work-related well-being, emphasizing vigour, dedication, and absorption. Schaufeli et al.'s research on work engagement is one of the most widely cited paradigms in both academic and practical fields. Higher vocational teacher work engagement is conceptualised as a proactive and passionate attitude toward teaching, reflecting a teacher's love and dedication to their profession in China (Sheng, 2006), and entails consistent and comprehensive investment in educational innovation and practice, aligning with the mission of cultivating skilled professionals to support the modernized economic system and national strategic goals (Fu & Weng, 2023).

In general, individuals with a calling are clearly aware of the gap between their actual self and their deserving self (Elangovan et al., 2010), and Hall and Chandler (2005) also point out that when a person views his or her career calling as a calling, he or she becomes very focused on goals that reflect his or her purpose. Since the goal is clear, he or she will put in the necessary effort to achieve the calling. Thus, a high level of calling is likely to motivate an individual to pursue the career of his or her calling. Several empirical studies have confirmed that individuals with a high sense of career calling are more likely to have a high sense of responsibility, and higher positive work attitudes, as well as to be able to improve work engagement (Hagmaier & Abele, 2012; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Hirschi, 2012; Xie et al., 2016; Gu et al., 2018).

Based on this explanation, it is clear that career calling is closely related to work engagement, and this positive impact persists across different occupational groups. In order to further stimulate teachers' work engagement, school managers may need to seek effective methods or measures to stimulate and improve work engagement and create work performance, which will help promote the high-quality development of higher vocational education in China. Hence, there is a conceptual framework and four hypotheses in this study, namely:

H1: There is a significant effect of career calling on work engagement.

H1a: There is a significant effect of transcendent summons on work engagement.

H1b: There is a significant effect of purposeful work on work engagement.

H1c: There is a significant effect of prosocial orientation on work engagement.

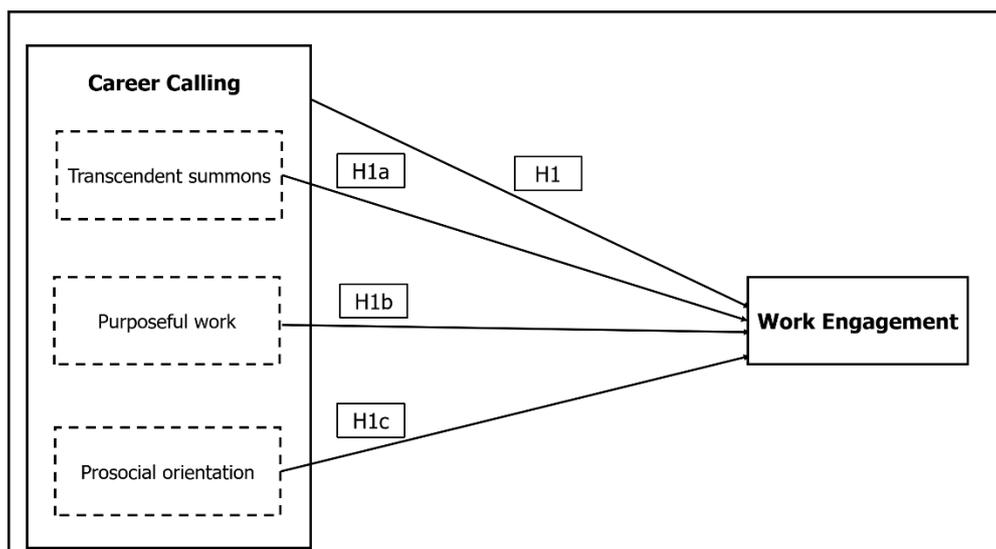


Figure 2. The proposed conceptual framework

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research approach grounded in the positivist paradigm to test objective theories by examining relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It focuses on exploring the impact of higher vocational teachers' career calling on their work engagement through a preliminary study. Career calling is conceptualized into three dimensions: transcendent summons, purposeful work, and prosocial orientation, while work engagement is defined as a positive and enthusiastic attitude toward teaching, reflecting teachers' passion and dedication to their profession.

Based on the China Vocational Education Development Assessment Report (2022), compiled by the China Vocational Education Society (CVES), Jiangsu, Guangdong, and Zhejiang rank as the top three provinces in higher vocational education development. These provinces view vocational education as a vital driver of regional industrial upgrading, characterized by large-scale implementation and high quality. Furthermore, GDP data for 2022, released by the Chinese government website (2023), shows that these provinces rank among the top four nationally, emphasizing the critical role of vocational education in supporting economic and social development, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Development Index of Vocational Education and GDP in Jiangsu, Guangdong, and Zhejiang Provinces in 2022

Province	Vocational Education Development Index	National Ranking of Vocational Education Development Index	Total GDP	National Ranking	GDP
Jiangsu	67.82 points	1st	12.92 trillion CNY	1st	
Guangdong	67.75 points	2nd	12.28 trillion CNY	2nd	
Zhejiang	65.15 points	3rd	7.77 trillion CNY	4th	

The research utilized validated scales for career calling and work engagement. The Career Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ), developed by Dik et al. (2012), measures transcendent summons, purposeful work, and prosocial orientation through 12 items, with established reliability and validity in Chinese studies (Gu et al., 2018; Peng, 2021; Xi, 2016; Zheng, 2020). Work engagement was assessed using the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) by Schaufeli et al. (2006), also validated in China (Niu & Yang, 2014; Song, 2020; Yang et al., 2023; Wang, 2023). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree/dissatisfied) to 7 (strongly agree/satisfied).

Data collection was conducted through an online questionnaire using the Question Star platform, targeting higher vocational college teachers in Jiangsu, Guangdong, and Zhejiang. Measures ensured data validity, such as limiting responses to one per IP address, requiring complete submissions, and avoiding uniform answers.

This preliminary study, a small-scale feasibility test (Porta et al., 2014), involved 50 teachers, meeting the minimum sample size for regression analyses (Hair et al., 2019). Data analysis was performed using SPSS and SmartPLS software. Descriptive statistics and reliability assessments (Cronbach's alpha) confirmed acceptable reliability for career calling, its three dimensions, and work engagement. Regression analyses evaluated the direct effect of career calling on work engagement, while structural models examined the path coefficients and significance of transcendent summons, purposeful work, and prosocial orientation. The results identified the dimension with the strongest impact on work engagement.

Results and Discussion

The results of this preliminary study revealed that career calling has a significant positive impact on the work engagement of higher vocational teachers. Regression analysis showed that career calling accounts for 93.5% of the variance in work engagement. Furthermore, all three dimensions of career calling—transcendent summons, purposeful work, and prosocial orientation—demonstrated positive influences on work engagement. These results underscore the critical role of career calling in enhancing teachers' work engagement, highlighting its importance in fostering a committed and motivated teaching workforce.

Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics, such as the mean, median and standard deviation, of the independent variable career calling and its dimensions, as well as the dependent variable work engagement. Overall, the career calling and work engagement of higher vocational teachers are at a moderate level.

Table 2

Description of variable

	CC	TS	PW	PO	WE
Valid	50	50	50	50	50
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	51.48	17.06	17.40	17.02	38.88
Median	52.00	16.50	16.50	16.00	38.50
Mode	40 ^a	13	13	15	32
Std. Deviation	13.659	5.036	4.699	4.373	10.578
Minimum	32	9	11	10	23
Maximum	76	26	26	26	58
Sum	2574	853	870	851	1944

a: Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

The Cronbach's alpha values for the variables ranged from 0.838 to 0.951, indicating high reliability and internal consistency, consistent with George and Mallery's (2024) guideline that values above 0.70 signify good reliability. Table 3 details the Cronbach's alpha values for the key variables, including the three dimensions of career calling (TS, PW, PO) and work engagement (WE).

Table 3

Cronbach's Alpha Values of Key Variables

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Transcendent summons (TS)	0.879	4
Purposeful work (PW)	0.840	4
prosocial orientation (PO)	0.838	4
Work engagement (WE)	0.951	9

H1: There is a significant effect of career calling on work engagement.

Table 4 shows that the regression coefficient of career calling on work engagement is 0.967. Furthermore, the R square (r^2) value of 0.935 means that career calling contributes 93.5% to work engagement. There is a strong positive correlation between career calling and work engagement.

Table 4

Results of simple linear regression analysis of career calling variable on work engagement

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	Change Statistic df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.967 ^a	.935	.934	2.716	.935	695.294	1	48	.000

Once the regression coefficient and the impact of career calling on work engagement have been established, the next course of action involves conducting a significance test. It aims to ascertain whether the variance of the independent variable (career calling) can explain the

variation in the value of the dependent one (work engagement) using the magnitude of F, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

The regression significance test results of the career calling variable on work engagement

Model	ANOVA Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	5129.184	1	5129.184	695.294	.000 ^b
Residual	354.096	48	7.377		
Total	5483.280	49			

Note: a. Dependent Variable: Work Engagement (WE)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Career Calling (CC)

Table 5 shows that the F value is 695.294 with a significance level of 0.000 and less than 0.05. Therefore, it was presumed that career calling influenced work engagement. The simple regression equation and the test results of the variables are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

The simple regression coefficient analysis results of the career calling variable on work engagement

Model	Unstandardised B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardised Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Tolerance	Statistics VIF
(Constant)	.321	1.512		.212	.833		
Career calling (CC)	.749	.028	.967	26.368	.000	1.000	1.000

Note: a. Dependent Variable: Work Engagement (WE)

Table 6 shows that the B value of .321 means that increased career calling tends to boost work engagement. Based on the table, the regression equation is described as follows. The constant value (a) is determined to be 0.321, indicating that when career calling is at its minimum level, work engagement is estimated at 0.749. Moreover, if the regression coefficient of career calling exhibits a positive value, it signifies that a 1% augmentation in career calling corresponds to a 0.749 improvement in work engagement.

Based on the findings presented in Table 6, it is apparent that the significance value (Sig.) of 0.000 is lower than the predetermined threshold of 0.05. Consequently, the findings of this study support Hypothesis (H1), which posits that there is a significant effect of career calling (CC) on work engagement (WE).

H1a: There is a significant effect of transcendent summons on work engagement.

Table 7 indicates that the Pearson correlation coefficient between transcendent summons (TS) and work engagement (WE) is 0.929, demonstrating a strong positive correlation. The Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.000, which is below the 0.01 threshold. This signifies that the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), confirming that the relationship between transcendent summons (TS) and work engagement (WE) is highly reliable and not due to random chance.

Table 8 illustrates that the path coefficient for transcendent summons (TS) within career calling on work engagement (WE) is 0.298, with a p-value of 0.002. As this value is less than 0.01, it indicates that transcendent summons (TS) have a positive and statistically significant effect on work engagement (WE).

H1b: There is a significant effect of purposeful work on work engagement.

Table 7 indicates that the Pearson correlation coefficient between purposeful work (PW) and work engagement (WE) is 0.931, demonstrating a strong positive correlation. The Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.000, which is below the 0.01 threshold. This signifies that the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), confirming that the relationship between purposeful work (PW) and work engagement (WE) is highly reliable and not due to random chance.

Table 8 illustrates that the path coefficient for purposeful work (PW) within career calling on work engagement (WE) is 0.190, with a p-value of 0.045. As this value is less than 0.05, it indicates that purposeful work (PW) has a positive and statistically significant effect on work engagement (WE).

H1c: There is a significant effect of prosocial orientation on work engagement.

Table 7 indicates that the Pearson correlation coefficient between prosocial orientation (PO) and work engagement (WE) is 0.950, demonstrating a very strong positive correlation. The Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.000, which is below the 0.01 threshold. This signifies that the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), confirming that the relationship between prosocial orientation (PO) and work engagement (WE) is highly reliable and not due to random chance.

Table 8 illustrates that the path coefficient for prosocial orientation (PO) within career calling on work engagement (WE) is 0.513, with a p-value of 0.000. As this value is less than 0.01, it indicates that prosocial orientation (PO) has a very positive and statistically significant effect on work engagement (WE).

Table 7

The correlation analysis results of the dimensions of career calling variable on work engagement

Correlations			WE
Transcendent summons (TS)	Person Correlation		.929**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		50
Purposeful work (PW)	Person Correlation		.931**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		50
Prosocial orientation (PO)	Person Correlation		.950**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		50

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 8

The path coefficient analysis results of the dimensions of career calling variable on work engagement

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/ STDEV)	P values
TS->WE	0.298	0.297	0.096	3.104	0.002
PW->WE	0.190	0.196	0.095	2.004	0.045
PO->WE	0.513	0.508	0.083	6.149	0.000

It can be observed that all three dimensions of career calling – transcendent summons, purposeful work, and prosocial orientation – have a significant positive effect on work engagement. A comparison of the path coefficients reveals that prosocial orientation has the greatest impact on work engagement, followed by transcendent summons, while purposeful work has the smallest effect.

Discussion

This study shows that career calling has a significant impact on teachers' work engagement. From the perspective of previous research, these findings are consistent with the literature that emphasizes the impact of career calling on teachers' work engagement (Hagmaier & Abele, 2012; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Hirschi, 2012; Xie et al., 2016; Gu et al., 2018). This study confirms that career calling plays a role in promoting teachers' work engagement and significantly affects their overall effectiveness and ability.

H1: There is a significant effect of career calling on work engagement.

Based on the results of simple regression analysis, the career calling (CC) has an R-square value of 0.935, which indicates that career calling contributes 93.5% to work engagement. The significance test shows an F value of 695.294 with a significance level of 0.000, which is smaller than 0.01. This shows that career calling significantly influences work engagement, so the working hypothesis (H1) is accepted.

H1a: There is a significant effect of transcendent summons on work engagement.

According to the results of the correlation analysis between the transcendent summons (TS) dimension of career calling and work engagement (WE), the correlation coefficient is 0.929, which is close to 1, indicating a strong positive correlation between transcendent summons (TS) and work engagement (WE). However, based on the path coefficient and significance level, the path coefficient for work engagement is 0.298, with a p-value of 0.002, which is less than 0.01 and therefore statistically significant. This confirms that the transcendent summons (TS) dimension has a significant positive effect on work engagement (WE). Consequently, Hypothesis H1a is accepted.

H1b: There is a significant effect of purposeful work on work engagement.

According to the results of the correlation analysis between the purposeful work (PW) dimension of career calling and work engagement (WE), the correlation coefficient is 0.931, which is close to 1, indicating a very strong positive correlation between purposeful work (PW) and work engagement (WE). However, based on the path coefficient and significance level, the path coefficient for work engagement is 0.190, with a p-value of 0.045, which is less than

0.05 and therefore statistically significant. This confirms that the purposeful work (PW) dimension has a significant positive effect on work engagement (WE), although the impact is weaker compared to other dimensions. Consequently, Hypothesis H1b is accepted.

H1c: There is a significant effect of prosocial orientation on work engagement.

According to the results of the correlation analysis between the prosocial orientation (PO) dimension of career calling and work engagement (WE), the correlation coefficient is 0.931, which is close to 1, indicating a strong positive correlation between prosocial orientation (PO) and work engagement (WE). Furthermore, based on the path coefficient and significance level, the path coefficient for work engagement is 0.513, with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.001 and therefore highly significant. This confirms that the prosocial orientation (PO) dimension has a significant positive effect on work engagement (WE), with the strongest impact among the three dimensions. Consequently, Hypothesis H1c is accepted.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In accordance with the research findings, it is clear that the relationship between career calling and work engagement among higher vocational teachers in China, focuses on the three dimensions of career calling: transcendent summons, purposeful work, and prosocial orientation. The results demonstrated that all three dimensions positively and significantly influence work engagement, though their relative impacts varied. The results of the study support the working hypothesis and also show that career calling can have a positive impact on work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) and increase work engagement (Hagmaier & Abele, 2012; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Hirschi, 2012; Xie et al., 2016; Gu et al., 2018), providing theoretical and practical insights into career calling and work engagement.

Transcendent summons has a significant positive impact on work engagement, aligning with previous research findings (Dik et al., 2012). For individuals with a strong sense of professional calling, the belief that their profession is a vocation inspires them to focus their energy and attention on their work (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dik & Duffy, 2009). Within the Chinese cultural context, teaching is inherently associated with a mission, positioning teachers as key figures in knowledge dissemination, personal development, and cultural transmission. This sense of mission fosters intrinsic motivation consistent with the concept of transcendent summons, where work is perceived as a higher calling beyond personal interests. Consequently, higher education teachers in China demonstrate greater dedication to their roles in teaching, research, and social services.

Prosocial orientation, among the three dimensions, exerts the strongest influence on work engagement. This reflects the social essence of the teaching profession and underscores the critical role of higher education teachers in advancing vocational education in China (Gao, 2021; Zhang, 2019; Li, 2022). The findings are consistent with the studies of Hall and Chandler (2005) and Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011), which highlight how the prosocial orientation of career calling helps teachers establish a clear sense of their social identity. In the context of China's rapid development of vocational education, higher vocational teachers perceive their roles as vital for cultivating skilled professionals for the nation and society. This contribution to broader social progress fosters a sense of fulfillment, further enhancing their work engagement.

While purposeful work has a relatively smaller impact on work engagement compared to the other dimensions, its effect remains significant. Career calling enhances intrinsic motivation, positioning a career as a meaningful end in itself rather than a mere means to an end, thereby fostering personal fulfillment and focus at work (Wrzesniewski, 2003; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Conway et al., 2015). However, excessive focus on work can lead to workaholism, potentially resulting in adverse outcomes (Duffy et al., 2016). Additionally, external challenges such as heavy workloads, limited career progression opportunities, and inadequate recognition may hinder teachers' ability to fully engage in their work. These external factors can diminish intrinsic motivation and affect the sustainability of work engagement (Duan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2015).

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for the Chinese government and higher vocational college administrators to enhance the work engagement of higher vocational teachers. Among the dimensions of career calling, prosocial orientation emerged as the most significant factor influencing work engagement. In light of the rapid development of vocational education in China, it is crucial to prioritise measures that protect teachers' welfare and elevate their social and professional status.

At the national level, the government should implement targeted policies to improve teachers' quality of life. These policies could include preferential access to healthcare, cultural and recreational activities, housing support, and living services. Public recognition of teachers' contributions through media campaigns, exemplary role models, and events can further highlight their societal importance and role in national development. By fostering a culture of respect and appreciation for teachers, the government can enhance their sense of professional pride, calling, and engagement.

For higher vocational college administrators, the focus should be on professional development. Initiatives such as regular training programs, academic exchange opportunities, and recognition of outstanding teachers can equip educators with advanced skills and knowledge applicable to teaching, research, and social services. These efforts not only support teachers' personal growth but also contribute to improving the overall quality of vocational education. Creating an environment that supports teachers' professional and social needs will strengthen their work engagement and ensure the sustainable development of higher vocational education in China.

In addition to addressing prosocial orientation, transcendent summons should be reinforced due to its strong influence on work engagement. To cultivate a sense of transcendent summons, the government can encourage teachers to reflect on their original aspirations for entering the teaching profession and inspire them to contribute to the advancement of vocational education. Administrators can organise thematic events, such as speeches or storytelling sessions, where teachers share their sense of mission and professional experiences. These initiatives can foster a collective sense of purpose, instil pride and belonging, and inspire more individuals to pursue careers in vocational education.

Higher vocational teachers face significant challenges, including heavy workloads and work-related pressure, which have been exacerbated by the demands of the "double-high" program and the pursuit of high-quality development. These pressures have strained

teachers' focus and commitment, reducing their perception of the value and significance of their work. To address these challenges, it is essential for the government and vocational colleges to adopt a holistic approach that fosters a supportive and motivating environment. By alleviating workload pressures and providing necessary institutional support, teachers' engagement and commitment can be strengthened, enabling them to contribute effectively to the sustainable development of China's higher vocational education system.

Whilst this study provides valuable insights, further in-depth research could be undertaken in the following areas. Firstly, future studies could examine additional factors influencing higher vocational teachers' work engagement, such as school leadership styles, organisational support, and institutional culture, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of work engagement in this professional context. Secondly, further exploration of the underlying mechanisms through which career calling impacts work engagement is needed. Future research could investigate mediating and moderating mechanisms, incorporating variables such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and perceived organisational support. Such studies could clarify whether these factors mediate or moderate the relationship between career calling and work engagement, offering deeper theoretical and practical insights. Thirdly, conducting cross-cultural comparative studies would be valuable to explore the relationship between career calling and work engagement in diverse cultural and educational settings. This would help identify the universal aspects of career calling while also recognising its cultural specificity, thereby broadening the generalisability and applicability of the findings.

This study contributes to the understanding of how career calling influences work engagement among higher vocational teachers in China. Theoretically, it extends the application of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model by demonstrating that career calling, as an intrinsic personal resource, plays a significant role in shaping teachers' engagement. It fills a gap in the literature by focusing on a population—higher vocational teachers—that has received limited attention. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of fostering a strong sense of career calling to enhance teacher motivation and engagement particularly in the context of China's vocational education reform. The study offers valuable insights for policymakers and institutional leaders seeking to improve teacher engagement and build a more stable, professional teaching workforce.

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