

The Relationship Between Iranian EFL Teachers' Reflective Thinking and Burnout Level in Universities and Schools

Ibrahim Safari*

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language, Imam Hossein Comprehensive University, Tehran, Iran

DOI: [10.30495/LCT.2022.1969403.1069](https://doi.org/10.30495/LCT.2022.1969403.1069)

Received: 14/09/2022

Revised: 19/11/2022

Accepted: 23/11/2022

Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the relationship between English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' reflective thinking and burnout levels in the universities and schools of Iran. As the main data collection instruments, the Reflective Thinking questionnaire and Maslach Burnout Inventory were employed, which has also been validated for the Iranian population. Questionnaires were given to 178 EFL teachers who serve at Tehran and Ardabil universities and schools. The results showed a negative correlation between reflective thinking and burnout; teachers experienced relatively low burnout levels; their reflective thinking level was high. The results also revealed that university teachers experienced higher reflective thinking and lower burnout than school teachers. According to teachers' workplace, the type of workplace affected reflective thinking in relation to the factor "ability to self-assess". In the end, it was shown that when teachers' reflective thinking increases, their burnout level decreases. The pedagogical implications of the results have been discussed.

Keywords: Burnout; English as a Foreign Language; Reflective Thinking; School Teachers; University Teachers

1. Introduction

Teachers have an important role in all aspects of the education system. They affect not only students' success and achievement (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004) but also the future of generations. According to Nguyen (2017), teachers should carry out the many responsibilities of teaching successfully while managing different life

* Corresponding Author's E-mail address: safariibrahim1@gmail.com



tensions which might affect their job. English as foreign language (EFL) teachers are even relatively more pressured as they have to also keep their knowledge of a foreign language updated, a language which is not their own and with which they are minimally in contact. Teachers, who are often underpaid and overworked, may increasingly become unconcerned and, in the long run, leave their job in pursuit of higher-paying and less emotionally demanding occupations. Teachers have gradually become the center of attention in the education system, since they have a main role in the field of teaching. Performing a study on different factors related to English language teachers can be one of the best ways to improve their success. Among the most important factors are burnout and reflective thinking.

As mentioned before, teachers should be considered key figures, having the potential to impact the success/failure of students, and the system as a whole (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Derakhshan et al., 2020). This claim is captured well in Hattie's (2003) words that "teachers make a difference" (p. 1). When EFL teachers hold negative beliefs toward themselves, their job, or the organization, they (un)intentionally, reduce their level of effective teaching and work engagement. Among such undesirable but influential beliefs are how much EFL teachers perceive themselves to be in a state of "burnout". According to Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), burnout has three dimensions: (a) emotional exhaustion, which related to feelings of being depleted of one's emotional and physical resources, as a result of intense physical, affective and cognitive stress, i.e. as a long-term consequence of prolonged exposure to certain job demands. (b) depersonalization, is a state of detachment from students, parents, and other teachers that disturbs a teacher's personal and professional life, and (c) a reduced sense of personal accomplishment which refers to a person's negative self-evaluation regarding his or her job performance. Few studies have ever been investigated to examine the correlation between teachers' reflective thinking and burnout (e.g., Mahmoodi & Ghaslani, 2014; Shirazizadeh & Karimpour, 2019). It is pointed out by Shirazizadeh and Karimpour (2019) that reflective teachers are likely to be less depressed, are better decision-makers, and are more competent in overcoming educational problems in the classroom. Accordingly, they are less afflicted by feelings of burnout.

Reflective thinking "empowers teachers and places them on equal footing with their academic counterparts" (Akbari, 2007, p. 3). He argued that reflective thinking can increase teachers' job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and their interpersonal relationship. Reflective thinking initiates

teachers to think, to notice and analyze their teaching in order to relate theory and practice (Qing, 2009). In a study, Kang (2004) pointed out that teachers can control their teaching action if they reflect on their teaching. Moreover, Kang represented that reflective thinking assisted teachers to change their teaching practice. Reflective thinking is widely recommended as a solution to decrease teachers' burnout, help them make better pedagogical decisions and encourage them to overcome pedagogical problems. As Moradkhani and Shirazizadeh (2017) stated, despite the theoretical arguments in praise of reflective thinking, not enough empirical studies have however investigated its effectiveness.

According to Khani and Mirzaee (2014), taking into account that teachers work under stressful conditions which may cause burnout, and that empirical evidence as to the positive impacts of reflective thinking on various aspects of teaching in general and on burnout in particular is inadequate. The present research set out to study if greater engagement in reflective thinking lowers the probability of burnout. The main hypothesis of this study is that if reflective thinking results in lower possibility of burnout, one may infer that teachers' reflective thinking will have a positive impact on their teaching. On the other hand, because the promotion of reflective thinking certainly necessitates removing barriers in its way and that each teaching context has its own features, the research moved one step forward to also examine the issues which prevent Iranian EFL teachers' engagement in reflective thinking. Keeping the two mentioned variables into consideration, changes in the possible relations between these variables are quite likely to influence the outcome of an educational program and therefore need to be broadly studied.

2. The Review of Related Literature

2.1. Burnout

Johnson et al. (2005) stated that compared to many other professions, teaching is a stressful job. It has been noted (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, 2001, p. 416) that chronic job stress results in burnout which is defined as "erosion of engagement that what started out as important, meaningful, and challenging work becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling, and meaningless". Maslach and Jackson (1981) conceptualized burnout consisting of emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DEP) and lack of personal accomplishment (LPA). Further, Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) pointed out that EE is a central dimension of burnout which is featured as a state of being overwhelmed and emotionally drained by job demands. DEP is an interpersonal dimension which refers to detached,

impersonal and uncaring feelings teachers have about their colleagues and students. LPA is a kind of negative attitude toward one's effectiveness and productivity at work. The term of burnout has been investigated in different contexts in accordance with many individual, contextual and transactional factors (Chang, 2009). Introversion, student misbehavior, work overload, neuroticism (Fernet, et al., 2012), improper working conditions, ineffective relationship with colleagues (Betoret, 2006), time pressure and low self-efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) are some of the factors related to the teachers' burnout level.

According to Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2016), the term of burnout has also been widely studied within the context of English language teaching (ELT) as such a context may induce not only the stress of teaching but also the pressures associated with mastery over content which is usually not teachers' first language. Cano-García, Padilla-Muñoz, and Carrasco-Ortiz (2005) stated that both personal and contextual factors were reported to induce burnout among EFL teachers. EFL teachers' burnout was also reported to be inversely correlated with self-regulatory strategies (Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014), emotion regulation and emotional labor strategies (Ghanizadeh & Royaei, 2015). In a study related to Iranian EFL teachers, Khajavy, Ghonsooly, and Fatemi (2017) examined the statistical association between burnout and a host of affective motivational factors. The results represented that while enjoyment, pride, and the three types of motivation namely altruistic, intrinsic and extrinsic were negatively correlated with all three dimensions of burnout, anger, anxiety, shame and boredom were positively related to the different dimensions of this symptom.

In a related study, Mahmoodi and Ghaslani (2014) conducted research to find the association between teachers' reflective thinking and burnout level. The teachers participated in the study were a sample of 125 Iranian EFL teachers from several Iranian language institutes. Additionally, differences in the teachers' reflective thinking and burnout level were explored in terms of their teaching experiences. The results showed that reflective thinking was negatively correlated with burnout level, and reflective thinking was a significant predictor of the degree of burnout. The results also revealed that teachers' experience did not significantly influence the relationship between teachers' reflective thinking and burnout level. In another research, Košir, et al. (2015) studied the significance of teachers' reflective thinking and rumination in relation with the classroom stress and as a factor mediating the associations between classroom stress and teacher burnout. For this purpose, 439

elementary school practitioners from Slovenia participated in the investigation. The results of data analysis showed that reflective thinking was not a direct predictor of stress and burnout.

Fathi, Greenier and Derakhshan (2021) conducted research to test a structural model of Iranian EFL teachers' reflective thinking, self-efficacy, and burnout. Collecting data from a sample of 238 Iranian EFL teachers, a structural equation modeling was embarked on to test the hypothesized relationships. As revealed by the results, reflective thinking of EFL teachers may lead to the mitigation of the probability of experiencing burnout and hence its ensuing negative impacts such as poor job performance, psychological distress, and attrition. Therefore, EFL teacher preparation programs should consider more practical strategies to enhance reflectivity for EFL teachers. By so doing, they can help teachers to better overcome anxiety-provoking situations and contribute to mitigating the possibility of instructor attrition and burnout.

It is worth mentioning that burnout was a serious challenge in all educational settings not only because teachers left their profession; but, more critically, because unmotivated and uninterested teachers continued their ineffective practice doing more harm to the educational system than the ones who left. As a consequence of this significance, doing an investigation on various effective factors of teacher dissatisfaction and burnout was abundant (Khani & Mirzaee, 2014; Yaghubinejad, Zarrinabadi & Nejadansari, 2016). Some investigations have focused on the role of demographic characteristics in experiencing burnout.

As an example, Lau, Yuen, and Chan (2005) stated that men scored higher on depersonalization while women were higher in emotional exhaustion and reduced sense of accomplishment. Then, younger teachers were reported to be more burned out than their older colleagues. Other individual qualities such as, introversion and neuroticism (Mills & Huebner, 1998), anxiety and negative perfectionism (Mahmoodi-Shahreababaki, 2016), and low self-efficacy (Khani & Mirzaee, 2014) had also been reported to be related to the teachers' burnout level in different contexts. In another study, Weiqi (2007) also pointed out that students' quality, leadership and administration, salary, and working conditions were some significant sources of teachers' job dissatisfaction and burnout level.

2.2. Reflective Thinking

The existing literature on reflective thinking makes it difficult to offer a clear definition of the concept as it covers a broad range of interpretation.

In its simplest sense, reflection “means thinking about something” while for some “it is a well-defined and crafted practice that carries very specific meaning and associated action” (Loughran, 2002, p. 33). It has been noted (Dewey, 1933, p. 9) that reflective thinking is defined as the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends”. In simple terms, reflective teachers are those who perform their duties seriously, make informed pedagogical decisions, look at teaching as a never-ending learning process, learn from their mistakes, and regularly improve their teaching. According to Farrell (2008), reflective thinking can be realized in keeping teaching journals, writing and revising lesson plans, doing classroom observations, holding group discussions, and all activities one can do to evaluate one’s practice and learn more about teaching.

Even though the concept of reflective thinking has been studied in the literature for decades, practical studies on if and how it influences, and is influenced by, the various aspects of teachers and teaching are relatively recent. Reviewing the results of this stream of studies shows that reflective thinking is associated with various positive factors in teaching. As an example, Abednia, et al. (2013) examined the perceptions of six EFL teachers as to the benefits of journal writing as a form of critical reflective thinking. Writing journals was found to increase the teachers’ self-awareness, understanding of teaching issues, reasoning skills, and improved their dialog with other teachers. Moreover, group reflective thinking was also informed to help novice teachers gain a better understanding of the problems they may face in the early years of teaching and become better prepared to overcome them (Farrell, 2016). Motallebzadeh, Ahmadi, and Hosseinnia (2018) stated that reflective thinking is positively related to teaching effectiveness among EFL teachers. In another study, Kheirzadeh and Sistani (2018) also pointed out that EFL teachers’ reflectivity is positively related to their students’ achievements. Reflective thinking has also been stated to be negatively associated with burnout (Mahmoodi & Ghaslani, 2014; Shirazizadeh & Moradkhani, 2018) and positively associated with self-efficacy (Moradkhani, Raygan, & Moein, 2017).

Javadi and Khatib (2014) investigated the relationship between 170 Iranian EFL teachers’ feelings of dissatisfaction and burnout with reflective thinking. Correlation analysis indicated that teachers’ reflection was significantly and inversely related to their feeling of burnout. The Step-Wise Multiple Regression also showed that the components of

burnout i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment can considerably predict teachers' reflection. A significant negative relationship found out between teachers' reflection and their feeling of burnout. The higher the degree of teachers' reflection, the less the degree of burnout teachers feel. In other words, the more the teachers have reflection and concern for developing their teaching skills, the less they have feelings of helplessness, disillusion, and emotional exhaustion.

Shirazizadeh and Moradkhani (2018) carried out a mixed-method study to investigate EFL teachers' engagement in reflective thinking in relation to their burnout. In that respect, 223 Iranian EFL teachers filled out reflective thinking and burnout questionnaires. The results showed that reflective thinking was negatively associated with burnout, suggesting that engagement in reflective thinking was associated with less burnout. In the qualitative part of the study, a series of interviews were implemented to uncover factors which hinder the teachers' reflective thinking. The results revealed that problems of reflective thinking can be grouped into the four categories of teacher-related, job-related, curriculum-related, and student-related factors.

Regarding the relationship between reflective thinking and burnout, fewer empirical investigations have been carried out. For instance, Shirazizadeh and Karimpour (2019) examined the relationships between Iranian EFL teachers' reflective thinking and burnout. For this purpose, a number of 156 Iranian EFL teachers completed the self-report questionnaires, including the Maslach (1986) Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey and English Language Teaching Reflective Thinking Inventory. The findings obtained from the data analysis through correlation, multiple regression, and path analysis represented that teachers' reflective thinking was a significant predictor of their burnout, suggesting that less reflective teachers had more burnout level. The findings of path analyses revealed further multilateral correlations between reflective thinking and burnout level. In general, the results concluded that teachers' reflective thinking had a negative effect on teachers' burnout level.

The recent changes which can be evidenced in the language teaching perspectives highlight the great role teachers play on the learners' success and require teachers to get aware of the importance of their attitudes, beliefs and their being critical of their teaching experiences. This is regarded as reflective thinking through which teachers can develop changes in attitude and awareness. This reflectivity can benefit not only

their professional growth as teachers but also the by-product of their teaching regarding their students. Moreover, emotions and feelings can have a paramount effect on teachers' professional life. Teachers being highly emotional can bring enormous breakthroughs in their profession.

Therefore, the best should be done to carry out studies which aim at improving this facet and recognizing the effects of elements which can result in decreasing this emotionality; and burnout is one of such elements.

2.3. Purpose of the Study

Considering the aforementioned factors, it is quite wise to assume that having effective teachers in order to achieve the objectives of an educational program is undeniable. This study was an attempt to examine the statistical relation and interaction between two determining factors of EFL teachers' behavior, namely their reflective thinking and burnout. The main purposes of the empirical section of this study were:

1. To find out the degree of reflective thinking among Iranian EFL teachers of universities and schools.
2. To explore the degree of burnout among Iranian EFL teachers of universities and schools.
3. To examine the association between teachers' reflective thinking and burnout.

3. Method

3.1. Context and Participants

The participants of this research were 178 EFL teachers (102 males and 76 females) working in various universities and schools from Tehran and Ardabil provinces. It is important to mention that two questionnaires were distributed among the original pool of the participants via email, social networks (mainly WhatsApp), and in paper. As noted before, 178 EFL teachers filled out the questionnaires completely without any problems, which formed the main data for the research. These participants were divided into two groups of novice and experienced teachers with their active working years ranging from 5 to 35. They ranged in age from 25 to 65 with most teachers aging between 26 to 35. At the time of distributing the questionnaires, all teachers were introduced to the purposes and importance of completing the questionnaires. The confidentiality of the findings was also announced to the teachers so that they participated more confidently.

Table 1. represents the demographic characteristics of the teachers. According to Table 1., more than half of the participants (57.303 %) were

male teachers. Majority of the participants aged between 26 and 45 years (78.615 %), indicating that most of the teachers were young, whereas only 6.918 percent of the teachers were between 56 and 65 years.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of the Participants of the Study*

Variables		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Gender	Male	102	57.303	57.303
	Female	76	42.696	42.696
Age Group (Year)	26-35	76	47.798	47.798
	36-45	49	30.817	30.817
	46-55	23	14.465	14.465
	56-65	11	6.918	6.918
	6-15	82	51.572	51.572
Year of Teaching	16-25	67	42.138	42.138
	26-35	10	6.289	6.289
	University	81	45.505	45.505
Place of Teaching	School	97	54.494	54.494
	Total	178	100.0	100.0

It is worth mentioning that the current study was examined only teachers whose experience of teaching has ranged between 6 and 35 years. Taking into account the fact that the dominant age group was 26-45, it is quite logical that the majority of the participants had a lower teaching experience. According to Table 1, the highest teaching experience was between 6 to 15 years and 16 to 25 years, whereas only 6.289 percent of the participants had teaching experience between 26 and 35 years.

For the reason that some of the EFL teachers work in other educational settings in addition to their fixed work place, they were divided into two groups (universities and schools). According to Table 1, the higher percentage belonged to those teachers who worked in the schools (54.494 %), and the lower percentage related to those teachers who worked in universities (45.505 %).

3.2. Instrumentation

For data collection, two questionnaires were employed, namely, Reflective Thinking Questionnaire and Maslach Burnout Inventory. The researcher took the advice of a number of professional colleagues

concerning the validity of the questionnaires in order to make sure that they are suitable for the intended purposes. They confirmed the construct and content validity of the questionnaires. The reliability of the test was also calculated through Cronbach Alpha, which is mentioned below.

3.2.1. Reflective Thinking Questionnaire

Teachers' reflective thinking questionnaire by Choy and Oo (2012), includes four sub-scales of reflective thinking: *Ability to self-express* (12 Items), *awareness of how one learns* (9 Items), *developing lifelong learning skills* (9 Items), and *belief about self and self-efficacy* (3 Items). This questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Cronbach alpha was applied to calculate the reliability of the test and indicated a reasonable internal consistency among the items ($\alpha=.91$).

3.2.2. Maslach Burnout Inventory

To measure the burnout level of Iranian EFL teachers, Maslach Burnout Inventory- Educators' Survey (MBI-ES) by Kokkinos (2006) was employed. This 22-item measurement scale consists of three sub-scales, namely *Emotional Exhaustion (EE)*, *Depersonalization (DP)* and *Personal Accomplishment (PA)*. The frequency scale ranged from zero (never) to six (every day). High scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low scores on personal accomplishment are indicators of burnout. The scoring is as follows: emotional exhaustion: Nine items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13, 14, 16, 20, which represent feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by job, depersonalization: Five items 5, 10, 11, 15, 22, which identify a doubtful attitude and impersonal response between oneself and service recipients, and personal accomplishment: Eight items: 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, 21, which show feelings of efficacy and achievement in employee's work with individuals. The Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for the entire of the questionnaire was estimated as .897. The coefficients for sub-scales were also measured. The coefficient for Exhaustion was .895; .754 for Depersonalization and .815 for Personal accomplishment.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Employing a paper and pencil approach, the questionnaire was administered in person to ensure that the questionnaire would reach a sufficient number of respondents. Once the questionnaires were piloted with a group of 26 colleagues, minor modifications were made in the

wordings of some items in order to improve the intelligibility. Furthermore, the scores obtained from these participants were fed into SPSS and Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the scales to make sure the scales were sufficiently reliable.

It is necessary to mention that a group of colleagues in Tehran and Ardabil provinces were contacted and asked to distribute the questionnaires among their own colleagues and asked for their cooperation. Because some teachers were from different parts of the country and were unable to visit, a number of questionnaires were sent to them via the internet (e-mail and social networks) and they were returned after completion. The approximate time to complete the questionnaires was between 20 and 30 minutes after the questionnaires were sent by teachers, thanked to their efforts to complete the questionnaires.

The questionnaires were delivered to 120 teachers in person and 136 copies were sent via email or social networks (mainly Telegram and WhatsApp). Totally, out of 256 teachers contacted, 178 teachers answered the questionnaires completely and returned them. These questionnaires were scored and the obtained data were fed into SPSS. This step was followed by screening and cleaning of data to make sure there are no errors. It is worth mentioning that the negatively worded items were reverse-coded and the necessary preliminary computations were run to prepare the data for the AMOS and test the hypothesized model afterwards.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

All data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 24) through calculation of means, frequencies, correlation analysis. In this research, descriptive statistics were applied to show demographic characteristics, dependent and independent variables. This research had four demographic characteristics: teachers' gender, age, year of teaching, and place of teaching. Furthermore, seven factors were used: four from the RTQ and three from the MBI questionnaire. To calculate the reliability of sub-scales, Cronbach's alpha was used. Additionally, Pearson Product Moment Correlations were used to show the direction and strength of the relationships between the main variables of the study. An alpha level of .05 was set a priori. MANOVA and ANOVA were applied to explore possible differences between the sub-scales of independent variables. It is necessary to mention that ANOVA is applied to find the statistical significance of bilateral relationships among different variables. Significance level was set to 0.05.

4. Results

As pointed out above, a number of statistical procedures were used to answer the research questions. Two questionnaires were employed to find the relationships between EFL teachers’ reflective thinking and burnout level. To evaluate the statistical significance of Pearson’s correlation coefficient, it was necessary to have bivariate normality, but this assumption was difficult to be estimated. To estimate the normality of data in this research, Shapiro-Wilk test was employed. In accordance with the normality test in Table 2, it can be concluded that teachers’ reflective thinking and burnout scores were normally distributed ($p > .05$).

Table 2. *Test of Normality*

Shapiro-Wilk	Statistics	Df	p-value
Reflective Thinking	0.956	177	0.456
Burnout	0.978	177	0.512

In Table 3., the Pearson Correlation Matrix, mean values, Standard Deviation and Cronbach’s alpha rates, regarding reflective thinking and burnout of EFL teachers, are presented. The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis that the two concepts would be correlated, considering that all the sub-scales of reflective thinking were negatively correlated with the main aspect of burnout, being *emotional exhaustion*. It means that when emotional exhaustion for school teacher’s increases, their perceived reflective thinking decreases (and vice versa).

Table 3. *Correlation Matrix, Descriptive Statistics Factors and Cronbach’s Alpha of the RTQ and MBI Subscales*

Sub-scales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Ability to self-assess	1						
2. Awareness of how one learns	0.051	1					
3. Developing lifelong learning skills	0.038	0.206**	1				
4. Reflective thinking on self-efficacy	0.268**	0.094	0.089	1			
5. Emotional exhaustion	0.268**	0.094	0.089	0.424**	1		
6. Personal accomplishment	0.355**	0.066	0.088	0.290**	0.545**	1	
7. Depersonalization	-0.166**	-0.093	-0.103*	-0.365**	-0.204**	-0.153**	1

**p <0.01 level; *p <0.05 level

In Table 4., the means, the Standard Deviation, as well as the p level of the RTQ and MBI sub-scales for the workplace (university/school) are presented.

Table 4. Means of the RTQ and MBI Sub-scales for Workplace

	University Teachers N(81)		School Teachers N(97)		SD
	M	SD	M	SD	p
Reflective Thinking Factors					
Ability to self-assess	3.46*	0.773	3.73*	0.671	0.000
Awareness of how one learns	2.09	0.851	2.22	0.901	0.111
Developing lifelong learning skills	2.50	0.837	2.59	0.620	0.182
Reflective thinking on self-efficacy	4.25	0.538	4.27	0.590	0.625
Burnout Factors					
Emotional exhaustion	20.21	10.746	20.96	10.606	0.466
Personal accomplishment	39.61	6.622	40.15	6.171	0.380
Depersonalization	3.23	4.111	3.15	3.716	0.839

Note: * = statistically different, $p < 0.05$

In relation to reflective thinking, the results represented statistically significant differences for workplace, $F(6,433) = 3.30$, $p < 0.01$. In the separate analysis of variance (ANOVA's) that followed, statistically significant differences were found for the 'ability to self-assess' $F(1,438) = 15.42$, $p < 0.00$. No significant differences were shown for the variables 'awareness of how one learns', 'developing lifelong learning skills' and 'reflective thinking on self-efficacy'. The factor 'workplace' seems to be related to the 'ability to self-assess', as teachers working in schools seemed to use less reflective thinking than teachers working in universities.

5. Discussion

Teachers have always been one of the most important pillars of any education system. The method they use to teach, their characteristics, their behavior towards their colleagues and students, and their performance in the classroom are among the many important related subjects in educational studies. As mentioned before, the main purpose of the current study was to explore whether there was a relationship between reflective thinking and burnout level among Iranian EFL teachers. In order to achieve this goal, two different questionnaires were used, while each focused on one aspect of the teachers, that is, teacher reflective thinking

and burnout. It is worth mentioning that, the reliability and validity of all questionnaires were checked, prior to their administration.

The results of the present research from the Pearson Correlation pointed out that EFL teachers' reflective thinking was negatively correlated with their feeling of burnout. These results are in line with some of the studies (El Helou, Nabhani, & Bahous, 2016; Fathi, Greenier & Derakhshan, 2021; Javadi & Khatib 2014; Mahmoodi & Ghaslani, 2014; Moradkhani, Raygan, & Moein, 2017; Shirazizadeh & Karimpour, 2019; Shirazizadeh & Moradkhani, 2018), who arrived at the conclusion that there was a significant negative relationship between teachers' reflective thinking and their burnout level. On other hand, the results of correlational analyses showed that teachers' reflective thinking was inversely correlated with burnout level, inferring that reflective teachers are less likely to become burnout. The results of the present research were also in parallel with the results of Shirazizadeh and Moradkhani (2018) who represented that although EFL teachers were involved with numerous demotivating problems in their reflective thinking; reflective teachers were more successful in surviving the daily stressors of their teaching activities.

It is necessary to note, since reflective teachers are actively engaged in thinking about their learners and try to find solutions for their problems, they are usually more committed and emotionally tied to their job. Thus, such teachers are less likely to become emotionally exhausted, feel depersonalization, and perceive a lack of personal accomplishment. According to Shirazizadeh and Karimpour (2019), these teachers also consider the challenges of the classroom as instigators for further learning and refinement of their teaching practice and hence are less likely to feel burnout. Consequently, it may be stated that stronger degrees of reflective thinking can safeguard teachers against stressors and burnout because high reflective teachers may have higher professional identity, emotional attachment, and self-efficacy, all of which protect teachers against burnout causes (El Helou, Nabhani, & Bahous, 2016; Moradkhani, Raygan, & Moein, 2017).

In this research, the three dimensions of reflective thinking were negatively correlated with burnout level, except for the dimension of '*awareness of how one learns*'. The results represented that when the rates of '*emotional exhaustion*' increase, the rates of reflective thinking decrease. In addition, the dimensions of burnout related to the '*developing lifelong learning skills*' and the '*reflective thinking on self-efficacy*' are negatively correlated with the main aspects of burnout, which are

emotional exhaustion and *depersonalization*. Conversely, they are positively related to the aspect of *lack of personal accomplishment*. It means that teachers with low levels of personal achievements presented high rates of reflective thinking. It is also worth mentioning that the results revealed a significant relationship between reflective thinking and its components with burnout and its components. Therefore, the low rates of burnout are related to the high levels of reflective thinking. It was shown that reflective thinking is correlated with two aspects of burnout; *emotional exhaustion* and *lack of personal accomplishment*. University teachers had higher rates in all the sub-scales of the RT questionnaire concerning reflective thinking, with the exception of '*awareness of how one learns*'. One of the main results of this study is that university teachers experienced lower levels of burnout than school teachers. Moreover, no significant differences were found in the dimension of *depersonalization*.

In accordance with the aspect of '*awareness of how one learns*', the results of this study are in line with the results of Antoniou, et al. (2007), which found that university teachers were more reflective than school teachers. It is also stressed that the subject of university is not considered as of high importance, resulting in the production of lowered expectations (Smith & Leng, 2003). Furthermore, university is a subject that, by its nature, depends on proper equipment and facilities. Given that, university teachers exhibit high rates of independence and low levels of burnout (Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2016).

It can be mentioned that since reflective teachers feel more committed to and passionate about their job, they are constantly in search of solutions for their problems rather than letting the challenges get worse by ignoring them. This interest in finding solutions through reflective thinking would help to improve their conditions, hence preventing feelings of burnout. The negative relation between reflective thinking and burnout level can also be interpreted in light of the mediating role of self-efficacy. As reported by Moradkhani, Raygan, and Moein, (2017), reflective thinking is positively related to teachers' self-efficacy with metacognitive reflective thinking as its best predictor. On the other side, Khani and Mirzaee (2014) stated that self-efficacy has been found to not only decrease burnout directly but also reduce the negative influences of contextual factors and stressors on burnout level.

The fact that university teachers are more reflective than school teachers is also related to the subject itself; university is a subject which, by its nature, is not stressful. Another factor is the classroom atmosphere, which, in accordance with other similar studies, is correlated with

teacher's professional development and with student's psychological and sociological development (Voulgaris & Matsaggouras, 2004; Travers & Cooper, 1996). Moreover, there are significant correlations among factors related to reflective thinking. Regarding the results, developing lifelong learning skills are correlated with the reflective thinking on self-efficacy. In line with the results of current study, Fathi, Greenier and Derakhshan (2021) stated that reflective thinking of EFL teachers may lead to the mitigation of the probability of experiencing burnout and hence its ensuing negative impacts such as poor job performance, psychological distress, and attrition. Therefore, EFL teacher preparation programs should consider more practical strategies to enhance reflectivity for EFL teachers. By so doing, they can help teachers to better overcome anxiety-provoking situations and contribute to mitigating the possibility of teacher burnout.

It is necessary to mention that the result of current study is partially discrepant with the findings of Javadi and Khatib (2014), who found teacher reflection has a direct impact on burnout. It might be argued that teachers with higher levels of reflection are continuously thinking about their teaching practice and are deeply concerned with improving their quality of teaching. These teachers enjoy their career and are more emotionally attached to what they do. As a result, they are better at controlling and directing their positive as well as negative emotions, and, by implication, they can cope with stressors more effectively, thereby feeling less reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion. More simply, instructors' reflection can help them regulate their emotions more effectively and feel more empowered against burnout. Instructors are not usually cognizant of the importance of emotions in instruction (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). According to Gibbs and Powell (2012), teachers can enhance their teaching competencies if they succeed in exerting further control over their beliefs and emotions.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Effective teachers play a crucial role in the success and performance of the education systems and different psychological and sociological factors can affect their success and failure. For this purpose, the current study aimed to examine two important factors affecting the performance of EFL teachers. More precisely, it intended to study the interaction and relationship between two determining factors of EFL teachers' behavior, namely reflective thinking and burnout level. The findings of this research suggested the significance of conducting different courses for EFL

teachers to increase their reflective thinking. EFL teachers are recommended to acquire skills related to controlling the stressors for the purpose of managing their burnout level. In the same vein, education managers and administrators also play a crucial role in providing the necessary requirements for these teachers. In this respect, colleagues and chancellors can help and support stressed-teachers.

Any language teaching investors or stakeholders, such as educational policy-makers, teachers, and researchers might benefit from the results of this study. Additionally, this research can help educators and administrators to better understand the psychological and sociological aspects of EFL teachers and take measures to remove the weakness in this regard and foster the strength of educational objectives. Because of the teacher's multifaceted role, the education policy for EFL teachers should focus on developing skills for different aspects of the educational process. It has been suggested that teachers should achieve their potential skills and develop the proficiency which are crucial to manage the classroom. EFL teachers are recommended to be trained on how to deal with conditions and challenges related to the social environment of Iran. In accordance with the current research, it is suggested to assist the EFL teachers by giving feedback to decrease their job burnout and increase reflective thinking.

Referring to the implications of this research, teacher education programs should pay more serious attention to teacher reflective thinking as they proved to have a main role in decreasing teacher burnout. From this point of view, EFL teacher educators are recommended to adopt a practical course of actions to foster both teacher reflective thinking and to help both pre-service and in-service teachers to deal with stressful situations in a more effective way. To this purpose, teacher education programs should concentrate on teachers' professional identity which is closely related to teacher reflective thinking (Olsen, 2012). Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) stated that the development of teacher identity needed interpretation and reinterpretation of who the teacher was and who he/she aspired to be. Along this process of identity reconstruction, ELT teachers can become more reflective, therefore becoming more emotionally attached to their jobs (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). If the Iranian ELT community gets closer to professionalism by reconstructing identities of ELT practitioners more effectively, enhanced teachers' reflectivity would decrease their burnout level (Canrinus, et al., 2012; Khani & Mirzaee, 2015).

The current research has different limitations which should be considered in order to interpret the results. In the first place, it is worth mentioning that, as the sample included EFL teachers from specific areas, that makes it impossible to generalize the results to other teachers. As a second limitation, this research did not consider the differences among cultures, educational autonomy, and their religious beliefs. Investigating the previously mentioned aspects of EFL teachers are suggested to get more precise conclusions. Despite the limitations, the results have provided new insights that deserve additional studies.

Due to the fact that teachers studied in this research were English language teachers working at universities and schools, further research can be investigated in the field of teachers of other disciplines and elsewhere. Further research could be aimed to investigate deeply into other factors related to reflective thinking and burnout level like job satisfaction, self-efficacy, commitment, professional development, leadership, and engagement. Developing and extending this study may involve a greater sample size, involving various types of educational workplaces and demographic examples.

Funding: This research received no external funding from any agency.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Abednia, A., Hovassapian, A., Teimournezhad, S., & Ghanbari, N. (2013). Reflective journal writing: Exploring in-service EFL teachers' perceptions. *System, 41*(3), 503–514.
- Akbari, R. (2007). Reflections on reflective teaching: A critical appraisal of reflective practices in L2 teacher education. *System, 35*, 192- 207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2006.12.008>.
- Antoniou X, Kourtessis T, Koustelios A, Papaioannou A. (2007). Job satisfaction among Physical Education Teachers compared to teachers of other specialties. *Sport Soc. 45*,76-82.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 20*(2), 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001>.
- Betoret, F. D. (2006). Stressors, Self-Efficacy, Coping Resources, and Burnout among Secondary School Teachers in Spain. *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology, 26*, 519-539. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01443410500342492>.

- Cano-García, F., Padilla-Muñoz, E.M., & Carrasco-Ortiz, M.A. (2005). Personality and contextual variables in teacher burnout. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 38(4), 929-940.
- Canrinus, E. T., Helms-Lorenz, M., Beijaard, D., Buitink, J., & Hofman, W. H. A. (2011). Profiling teachers' sense of professional identity. *Educational Studies*, 37(5), 593-608. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2010.539857>.
- Chang, M. (2009). An appraisal perspective of teacher burnout: Examining the emotional work of teachers. *Educational Psychology Review*, 21, 193-218.
- Choy S. Ch. and Oo P. C. (2012). Reflective thinking and teaching practices: a precursor for incorporating critical thinking into the classroom? *International Journal of Instruction*. 5(1). 167-182.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 97-140.
- Derakhshan, A., Coombe, C., Zhaleh, K., & Tabatabaeian, M. (2020). Examining the roles of continuing professional development needs and views of research in English language teachers' success. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language (TESL-EJ)*, 24(3). <http://www.tesl-ej.org/pdf/ej95/a2.pdf>
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. New York D.C: Heath and company.
- El Helou, M., Nabhani, M., & Bahous, R. (2016). Teachers' views on causes leading to their burnout. *School Leadership & Management*, 36(5), 551-567.
- Farrell, T.S.C. (2008). *Reflective language teaching: from research to practice*. London: Continuum Press.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2016). Surviving the transition shock in the first year of teaching through reflective practice. *System*, 61, 12-19.
- Fathi, J., Greenier, V., & Derakhshan, A. (2021). Self-efficacy, Reflection, and Burnout among Iranian EFL Teachers: The Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 9(2), 13-37
- Fernet, C., Guay, F., Senécal, C., & Austin, S. (2012). Predicting intra-individual changes in teacher burnout: The role of perceived school environment and motivational factors. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28, 514-525.

- Ghanizadeh, A., & Ghonsooly, B. (2014). A tripartite model of EFL teacher attributions, burnout, and self-regulation: Toward the prospects of effective teaching. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 13, 145–166. doi:10.1007/s10671-013-9155-3.
- Ghanizadeh, A., & Royaei, N. (2015). Emotional facet of language teaching: Emotion regulation and emotional labor strategies as predictors of teacher burnout. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, 10(2), 139–150. doi: 10.1080 /220405 52.2015 .11138 47.
- Ghanizadeh, A., & Jahedizadeh, S. (2016). EFL teachers' teaching style, creativity, and burnout: A path analysis approach. *Cogent Education*, 3(1), 1–17.
- Gibbs, S., & Powell, B. (2012). Teacher efficacy and pupil behavior: The structure of teachers' individual and collective beliefs and their relationship with numbers of pupils excluded from school. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82(4), 564-584.
- Hattie, J. A. C. (2003). *Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?* Paper presented at the Building Teacher Quality: What does the research tell us ACER Research Conference, Melbourne, Australia.
- Holland, D., & Lachicotte, W. (2007). Vygotsky, Mead and the new sociocultural studies of identity. In H. Daniels, M. Cole, & J. Wertsch (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Javadi, F., & Khatib, M. (2014). On the relationship between reflective teaching and teachers' burnout. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 3(4), 85-96.
- Johnson, S., Cooper, C., Cartwright, S., Donald, I., Taylor, P., & Millet, C. (2005). The experience of work-related stress across occupations. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 20, 178–187.
- Kang, S. (2004). Using visual organizers to enhance EFL instruction. *JALT Journal*, 58, 58-67.
- Khajavy, G. H., Ghonsooly, B., & Hosseini Fatemi, A. (2017). Testing a burnout model based on affective-motivational factors among EFL teachers. *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues*, 36(2), 339–349. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-016-9423-5>.
- Khani, R. & Mirzaee, A. (2014). How do self-efficacy, contextual variables and stressors affect teacher burnout in an EFL context? *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental*

- Educational Psychology*, 35, 1–17. doi: 10.1080/00207179.2014.981510.
- Khani, R., & Mirzaee, A. (2015). How do self-efficacy, contextual variables and stressors affect teacher burnout in an EFL context? *Educational Psychology*, 35(1), 93-109.
- Kheirzadeh, S., & Sistani, N. (2018). The Effect of Reflective Teaching on Iranian EFL Students' Achievement: The Case of Teaching Experience and Level of Education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v43n2.8>.
- Kokkinos CM. (2006). Factor structure and psychometric properties of the Maslach Burnout Inventory- Educators Survey among elementary and secondary school teachers in Cyprus. *Stress Health*. 22(1):25-33. doi: 10.1002/smi.1079.
- Košir, K.; Tement, S.; Licardo, M.; Habe, K. (2015). Two sides of the same coin? The role of rumination and reflection in elementary school teachers' classroom stress and burnout. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 47, 131–141.
- Koustelios A, Tsigilis N. (2016). The relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among physical education teachers: a multivariate approach. *Europ Physic Edu Rev*. 11(2),189-203. doi: 10.1177/1356336x05052896.
- Lau, P., Yuen, M., & Chan, R. (2005). Do demographic characteristics make a difference to burnout among Hong Kong secondary school teachers? *Social Indicators Research*, 77,491-516.
- Loughran, J. J. (2002). Effective reflective practice: In search of meaning in learning about teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(1), 33–43.
- Mahmoodi, M., & Ghaslani, R. (2014). Relationship among Iranian EFL Teachers' Emotional Intelligence, Reflectivity and Burnout. *Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 6, 89-116.
- Mahmoodi-Shahreabaki, M. (2017). The effect of perfectionism on burnout among English language teachers: The mediating role of anxiety. *Teachers and Teaching*, 23(1), 91-105.
- Maslach, C. (1986). *Stress, burnout, and workaholism*. In R. R. Kilburg, P. E. Nathan, & R. W. Thoreson (Eds.), *Professionals in distress: Issues, syndromes, and solutions in psychology* (p. 53–75). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10056-004>.
- Maslach C, Jackson SE. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *J Organ Behav*. 2(2), 99-113. doi: 10.1002/job.4030020205.

- Maslach C, Schaufeli WB, Leiter MP. (2001). Job burnout. *Annu Rev Psychol.* 52:397-422. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397 pmid: 11148311.
- Mills, L. B., & Huebner, E. S. (1998). A Prospective Study of Personality Characteristics, Occupational Stressors, and Burnout among School Psychology Practitioners. *Journal of School Psychology, 36*(1), 103-120.
- Moradkhani, S., & Shirazizadeh, M. (2017). Context-based variations in EFL teachers' reflection: the case of public schools versus private institutes in Iran. *Reflective Practice, 18*(2), 206-218.
- Moradkhani, S., Raygan, A., & Moein, M. S. (2017). Iranian EFL teachers' reflective practices and self-efficacy: Exploring possible relationships. *System, 65*, 1-14.
- Motallebzadeh, K., Ahmadi, F., & Hosseinnia, M. (2018). Relationship between 21st century skills, speaking and writing skills: A structural equation modeling approach. *International Journal of Instruction, 11*(3), 265-276. <https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2018.11319a>.
- Nguyen, C. D. (2017). Beyond the school setting: language teachers and tensions of everyday life. *Teachers and Teaching, 1-15*.
- Nye, B., Konstantopoulos, S., & Hedges, L. V. (2004). How Large Are Teacher Effects? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 26*(3), 237-257. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737026003237>.
- Olsen, B. (2012). *Identity theory, teacher education, and diversity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication. doi:10 .4135/9781452218533.
- Qing, X. (2009). Reflective Teaching- an effective path for EFL teacher's professional development. *Canadian Social Science, 5*(2), 35-40.
- Shirazizadeh, M., & Karimpour, M. (2019). An investigation of the relationships among EFL teachers' perfectionism, reflection and burnout. *Cogent Education, 6*(1), 1-13.
- Shirazizadeh, M., & Moradkhani, S., (2018). Minimizing Burnout through Reflection: The Rocky Road ahead of EFL Teachers. *Teaching English Language, 12*(1), 135-154.
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2010). Teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout: a study of relations. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*, 1059-1069. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.11.001>.
- Smith D, Leng GW. (2003). Prevalence and Sources of Burnout in Singapore Secondary School Physical Education Teachers. *J Teach Physic Edu.* 22(2),203-218. doi: 10.1123/jtpe.22.2.203.

- Sutton, R. E., & Wheatley, K. F. (2003). Teachers' emotions and teaching: A review of the literature and direction for future research. *Educational Psychology Review*, 15, 327–358.
- Travers CJ, Cooper CL. (1996). *Teachers Under Pressure: Stress in the Teaching Profession*. London: Routledge.
- Voulgaris, S., Matsaggouras, E. (2004). The psychological climate of the primary school classroom. 5th Panhellenic conference; Athens: Education and Teaching in the society of knowledge.
- Weiqi, C. (2007). The structure of secondary school teacher job satisfaction and its relationship with attrition and work enthusiasm. *Chinese Education & Society*, 40(5), 17-31.
- Yaghobinejad, H., Zarrinabadi, N., & Nejadansari, D. (2016). Culture-specificity of teacher demotivation: Iranian junior high school teachers caught in the newly-introduced CLT trap. Teachers and teaching, *Theory and Practice*, 23(2), 127-140.