Original Article

A Phenomenological Study of EFL Teachers' Job Burnout:
The Case of Private Language Institutes in Iran

Elham Mohammadi[1,] , Mansooreh Amiri[2]*

[1] English Language Department, University of Zanjan, Iran

[2] English Language Department, Lorestan University, Iran

Abstract

Qualified human resources are valuable capital for the growth and development of organizations. Among the factors influencing the quality of human resources (e.g. teachers) is Job Burnout. This study aimed at probing the underlying layers of job burnout of the teachers practicing in Iranian private language institutes. To do so, a two-phase design was applied including quantitative and phenomenological qualitative methods. The data were collected through the Maslach Burnout Inventory questionnaire and one-by-one semi-structured interviews. The results of the first stage demonstrated that the participants were moderately burned out. Next, 20 (10 males & 10 females) EFL teachers with at least five years of experience were invited to take part in the interview. After confirming the saturation of data, the researcher analyzed the transcriptions and four main themes, and 16 sub-themes emerged. The results encompassed the definition of burnout, its sources, instances and consequences, and possible strategies to cope with the phenomenon. Private language institute administrators and managers can benefit from the implications of this study by taking due measures like social and emotional support and forming peer support groups to reduce burnout among their employees.

Keywords: EFL Teachers, Job Burnout, Phenomenology, Private Language Institutes, Peer Support Groups

Corresponding Author's E- mail: e_mohammadi@znu.ac.ir

1. Introduction

Over the past century, a considerable portion of progress in developed countries was ascribed to changes in human resources (Farber, 1991). This has led researchers of the field to realize that qualified and skilled human resources are valuable capital for the growth and development of organizations and countries. The experience of successful organizations about their workforce indicates the importance of working human capital (Bianchi et al., 2015). They acknowledge that the magnitude and significance of their organizations are equal to those working for them. In other words, all the creativity, ability, and achievements of the organizations are attributable to their human resource, and providing suitable context and conditions contributes to the actualization of their staff's talents (Vaezi & Fallah, 2011). Thriving organizations have credited their success to the degree of loyalty and competence of their human resources; i.e. if an organization lacks the necessary competence to maintain loyal human resources and experts, it would slowly fade out (Farber, 1991).

One of the most vital jobs in a society that is of high importance and has a significant impact on the current and future status of a society is teaching. Like all the others, a teacher's job includes threatening and improving factors affecting the quality of life. Many studies in different countries, as a global effort, have been devoted to improving the quality of life of teachers (Kulavuz-Onal & Tatar, 2017; Takahashi, 2016).

Since continuous stress at work is a threat to teachers' performance, here, we try to identify the problems of EFL teachers' burnout according to their personal experiences at private language institutes in Iran. This is especially because most of the previous research was done on high school teachers rather than those working in the private sector and not much is known about their burnout. Emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physical symptoms of job burnout have been tremendously covered in quantitative research attempts and many studies have been done regarding EFL teachers' burnout (Nayernia & Babayan, 2019; Pishghadam et al, 2014; Zhaleh et al., 2018); however, based on Creswell and Poth (2017), for gaining an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, qualitative case studies are the most appropriate ones.

Therefore, using a method that enables researchers to explore the lived experiences of the insiders, as they are, is necessary to understand and know the phenomenon under investigation. The main purpose of this method is to study the internal experiences of people from a phenomenological perspective and to gain an insight into their professional life. More specifically, this study is concerned with the experiences of EFL teachers working at private

institutes in Iran about the phenomenon of burnout. The ultimate purpose is to pave the way for developing healing strategies of job burnout for these teachers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Job Burnout

Job burnout is a term used to describe negative changes in attitude, mood, and behavior of people in dealing with occupational stress (Mede, 2009). The most common definition of burnout is based on the work of Maslach et al. (1986) stating that job burnout is an emotional state which leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Another widely accepted view on job burnout is proposed by Ghazalbash and Afghari (2015) who describe it as a means to cope with difficult working conditions. The axial sign of burnout is emotional exhaustion, which is a general or common reaction to stress and is felt in the form of emotional pressure and the drainage of emotional resources (Khani & Mirzaee, 2015). This dimension of burnout is common in jobs that are related to human services. A decrease in personal accomplishment and a loss of competence as well as unsuccessful performance usually associated with a negative evaluation of oneself among those who suffer from job burnout (Khajavy et al., 2017). In other words, burnout is a general and pervasive phenomenon that arises from the interaction of individuals with their workplace and the result is loss of motivation, energy and high-quality performance in their lives (Amini Faskhodi & Siyyari, 2018; Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014).

Metamorphosis as one of the consequences of job burnout is also a symptom which is realized as a gap between the working people and the recipients of their services and is formed through overlooking the features and services of the employed person (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012). In non-human services, the burned-out staff uses cognitive strategies to create a distance from work. They show exhaustion and despair by creating a neutral attitude toward their work and other people. In case there is chronic pressure, this may be accompanied by fatigue or suspicion. It is also determined that the lack of self-efficacy leads to inefficiency, translated into feeling incompetent to progress, tired, and indifferent to helping others; these emotions arise as simultaneously as the two aspects (exhaustion and despair) of job burnout, not after them. It seems that lack of efficiency is mainly due to a lack of occupational support and resources, while fatigue and mistrust emanate from work pressure, social conflict, and high job expectations. Individuals

are burnt out if they attempt to fulfill unrealistic expectations imposed by themselves, their employers, or social values (Bianchi et al., 2015; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012).

2.2. Sources of Burnout

Using a latent intraindividual change approach, Fernet et al. (2012) developed and tested a motivational model of teacher burnout. The research found evidence in support of the model which led to the conclusion that changes in burnout are predicted by changes in teachers' perceptions of the school environment and motivational factors over the school year. More precisely, teachers' perceptions of interpersonal factors (students' behavior and the principal's leadership behaviors) played a key role in the burnout process. In another attempt to identify the origins of burnout, Gürbüz and Dede (2018) employed structural equation modeling and observed that the school climate negatively affected emotional exhaustion, a dimension of burnout. Earlier to their research, the outcome of a study by Grayson and Alvarez (2008) also demonstrated that different aspects of school atmosphere related to each of the three primary burnout components. For instance, emotional exhaustion was closely associated with parent/community relations and student–peer relations. Perrone et al. (2019) researched administrative climate and its relation to burnout in early career teachers (having less than 4 years of teaching experience). It was found that administrator-teacher relations did significantly predict teacher burnout. In other words, the nature of the relationship with the principal can alleviate the burden of high job demands. Along the same line of inquiry, Javadi (2014), in a local context, explored the predictability of burnout based on teacher autonomy and the findings suggested that teachers who reported to have more feelings of autonomy in their teaching practice, regardless of the amount of their teaching experience or formal training, had less sense of burnout throughout their teaching career. Soodmand Afshar and Doosti (2015), in the same context, examined the factors affecting job dissatisfaction in Iranian secondary school English teachers and referred to the demotivating factors as (a) insufficient salary, (b) principals' disregard of teachers, (c) not being encouraged to seek professional development, (d) students' lack of motivation, and (e) low social status. However, Nadeem et al. (2011) mentioned political interference and discrimination in addition to poor salary and socio-economic status of teachers as having a negative impact on their performance. Ghenghesh (2013) probed a similar area and ranked the job dissatisfaction factors as pay/salary, policy and administration, lack of positive

feedback, and lack of time for family and home respectively. Very recently and against the backdrop of the pandemic, Pressley (2021) attempted to shed light on the factors contributing to teacher burnout. Covid-19-related anxiety, current teaching anxiety, anxiety communicating with parents, and administrative support were found to be the significant predictors of teacher burnout.

2.3. Signs and Outcomes of Job Burnout

The symptoms of burnout are lack of adequate energy, patience going down, domination of suspicion and pessimism plus, a cold and non-emotional approach to the job (Ahola & Hakanen, 2007). These signs depict it as a physical-psychological syndrome associated with a job that occurs due to long-term occupational stress and arises from emotional unresponsiveness, and lack of compliance with the job (Khani & Mirzaee, 2015; Takahashi, 2016). On a broader scale, burnout may lead to family and marital problems (Farshi & Omranzadeh, 2014).

Organizational outcomes of job burnout include reduced productivity, increasing health costs, absenteeism and long breaks during working hours, reduced quantity and quality of products provided by the organization as well (Amini Faskhodi & Siyyari, 2018; Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly 2014). It should be noted that burnout syndrome is not essentially a mental disorder; however, it is slowly developed over time and may become a disorder. This phenomenon is also seen in jobs that the individual spends many hours in close contact with other people (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012). Such an individual gradually feels under pressure and their emotional resources being drained by those who are in the position of receiving the service (the clients). He would, thus, turn into an indifferent employee with negative feelings toward the clients (Khajavy et al., 2017). The costs of job burnout are very high (Kulavuz-Onal & Tatar, 2017). Therefore, managing psychological and mental pressures and controlling this destructive phenomenon has a fundamental role in the success of an organization.

2.4. Mitigating Strategies for Teacher Burnout

In terms of burnout prevention strategies, numerous studies have attempted to come up with some suggestions. A few of them are reviewed in the subsequent lines.

Larrivee (2012) argued that teachers nowadays need to be equipped with an array of strategies to mitigate the potentially destructive impacts of stress and burnout. Maintaining a work-life balance and developing practices to sustain resilience and optimism are among these strategies. Likewise, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) put forward a number of tips to optimize the climate of schools and suggested *culture-busting* strategies to help teachers adopt positive attitudes and behaviors that reduce burnout.

The target of Aloe et al. (2014) investigated the role of classroom management self-efficacy (CMSE) in relation to the three components of burnout. The results revealed that teachers with higher levels of CMSE have a lower chance of experiencing burnout. Drawing on a mixed-method design, Atmaca (2017) brought to light a number of solutions for burnout from teachers' perspectives. These remedies were supportive administrative attitudes, regular staff meetings, getting technological assistance, involvement in decision-making, developing realistic perspectives about the profession, and teachers' intrinsic motivation. Chen's (2010) results further substantiate the significance of community in the future career plan of teachers. Teachers practicing in Chinese middle schools seemed to expect support and acknowledgment from their communities in addition to opportunities for advancement to enhance their job satisfaction. On the other hand, Salehi and Taghavi (2015) observed how maintaining a friendly relation with students is an effective factor in developing positive attitudes in teachers towards their profession and increasing their job satisfaction. Gholami (2015) scrutinized the link between EFL teachers' self-efficacy and burnout and found a reverse relationship. It was reported that the higher the teachers' self-efficacy, the less likely they are to experience burnout. The observation is justifiable through the concept of self-efficacy, which enables a person to cope with stressful situations more competently. Based on the study of Ratcliff et al. (2010) strong teachers employ a number of preventive measures continuously to manage the misbehavior of students in a classroom. These are itemized as "*being alert and redirecting off-task behaviors*", "*avoiding retreating*", "*using appropriate praise and rewards*", and "*being aware of pacing and keeping children engaged*" (p. 313).

Reviewing the studies on job burnout highlighted the significant repercussions this phenomenon has for organizations and the labor force. It is considered a key factor in determining the turnover of employees in the workplace (Chong & Monroe, 2015; Salvagioni et al., 2017). It can decrease job performance and interaction with others, increase absenteeism from work, raise job dissatisfaction (Raciala et al., 2021), and reduce job

commitment (Maslach et al., 1986). Today, due to the tremendous changes in the quality of personal life, family, and profession of people, serious consideration has been made regarding managing staff burnout (Roohani & Dayeri, 2019). People with burnout suffer from physical and mental uneasiness; they feel that they have reached the end of the line and do not feel good about their work and lack motivation and energy to pursue it. Research indicates that job burnout threatens organizations by turning off innovation and weakening staff performance (Motallebzadeh et al., 2014).

Given the importance of efficiency/productivity attached to any service-based profession, including teaching, the present research tries to bring to light the hidden dimensions of burnout from teachers' perspectives. To this aim, EFL teachers working in the private sector were chosen and the following research questions are formulated:

1. To what extent are EFL teachers in the private sector burned out?
2. According to the lived experience of EFL teachers practicing in Iranian private language institutes, what are the underlying layers of job burnout? and how do they perceive this phenomenon?

3. Methodology

The design of the study, participants, instruments, and data collection and analysis procedures are explained in this section.

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

A two-phase mixed-method explanatory design was employed in this study. It starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, subsequently followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. As for the quantitative phase, a survey design was adopted to collect the data and for the qualitative part, the phenomenological method was employed. It is also essential to provide some background information about the context of private language institutes within which the present research is conducted. These institutes do not receive any form of funding from the government and survive on the financial resources provided by learners. This, in turn, differentiates them from government-funded institutes. Private language centers tend to be more concerned with the expectations of the learners and their parents compared to public institutes.

3.2. Participants

The population of this research was the EFL teachers at the private language institutes in Tehran in the academic year of 2019-2020. A purposive sampling method was used in this research since a particular characteristic of the target population of EFL teachers, i.e. working in the private sector, was the focus of this study. In the phenomenological method, the number of samples is between 5 to 25 people. In this study, the data were saturated after interviewing 10 male teachers and 10 female teachers. The sample, thus, included 20 experienced EFL teachers. The main criteria for entering the research were to have at least five years of experience of formal instruction in private language institutes and not practicing in public schools.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Teachers

		No. of teachers in the qualitative phase	No. of teachers in quantitative phase
gender	male	10	25
	female	10	37
Age range	25-30	7	10
	31-35	6	7
	36- beyond	7	45
Years of teaching experience (5 to 10 years)		13	17
Years of teaching experience (10 years and more)		7	45

3.3. Instruments

Because the present study sought to shed more light on the burnout phenomenon, a mix of quantitative and qualitative instruments for data collection was utilized.

3.3.1. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

For the quantitative phase, the MBI questionnaire was administered. It is the most widely used instrument developed and validated by Maslach and Jackson (1981) to measure individuals' level of burnout (See Appendix B). It is comprised of 22 items measuring three subscales of emotional exhaustion (items # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, & 7), Depersonalization (items #

8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, & 14), and reduced personal accomplishment (items # 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, & 22). The items are scored on a 7-point frequency scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). Each teacher's total score can range from 0 to 154. Higher scores on this scale equal a higher level of burnout. In terms of reliability, Cronbach's alpha was reported as .83 in Maslach and Jackson (1981), while in the present study it was estimated as .85.

3.3.2. Interview

The data collection tool for the qualitative phase was a one-by-one semi-structured interview. The number of the interviewees was determined based on data saturation which was ensured after the twentieth teacher participated in the interview. The questions were formulated to elicit information regarding the symptoms and causes of burnout from teachers and also to identify their coping strategies for this phenomenon (See Appendix A).

3.3.3. Data Collection Procedure

As the first step, 82 EFL teachers working in private language institutes were chosen and invited to take part in this research. Next, an equal number of male and female teachers were interviewed and the data were transcribed for further analysis. Next, to complement the data gathered through interviews, the MBI questionnaire was distributed among other EFL teachers (n=62) who were asked to fill it out after having been convinced that the collected data are going to be used for this study only.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

In this study, to respect the ethics of research, participants were promised about their privacy and the elimination of the data after the end of the study.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. As for the qualitative phase, there is a precaution that needs to be taken. In a qualitative study, the researcher himself is responsible for gathering and interpreting the data. Hence, the reliability of such research depends on his ability and effort to save the findings from his bias and prior experience. Given this, in the present research, the utmost attempt was made

to prevent the contamination of data gathered from the interviewees by the pre-assumptions and prior knowledge of the researcher.

To analyze the data in this phase, a phenomenological model was used which includes: metadata generation, analysis of cases, and merging emerged items (Moustakas, 1994). Accordingly, after recording the interviews concerning ethical issues and obtained permission from interviewees, the interviews were transcribed and the researcher read and reread the text of each interview several times. Then the main themes and sub-themes were identified and labeled. At first two main themes and 92 sub-themes were obtained. Then, by comparing and contrasting the differences and similarities of sub-themes, the researcher extracted more general themes. For each interview, a summary table was developed and finally, after reviewing the 20 interviews, a complete list of themes and sub-themes was extracted. To achieve the validity of the general and primary questions of the interview, the experts' comments were used. During the interview, minor questions were asked to elicit more detailed information.

To ensure the intra-coder reliability and dependability of the research data, repeated study, data comparison, summarization, and data classification techniques were employed without changing the data. Comparisons were made against the findings of the previous studies in addition to the continuous monitoring of the research from the beginning to the end, using sufficient participants, and the continuation of interviews until reaching the saturation point. Moreover, for the inter-coder reliability of the results, data coding was done by another researcher and his final report was compared with the researcher's analyses. Finally, by sharing the results with the interviewees and obtaining their final opinion, the researcher confirmed the dependability of the results.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Phase

The data gathered at this stage through the questionnaire were analyzed by the latest version of SPSS and the results are presented below. Figure 1 shows the observed mean scores for each theme.
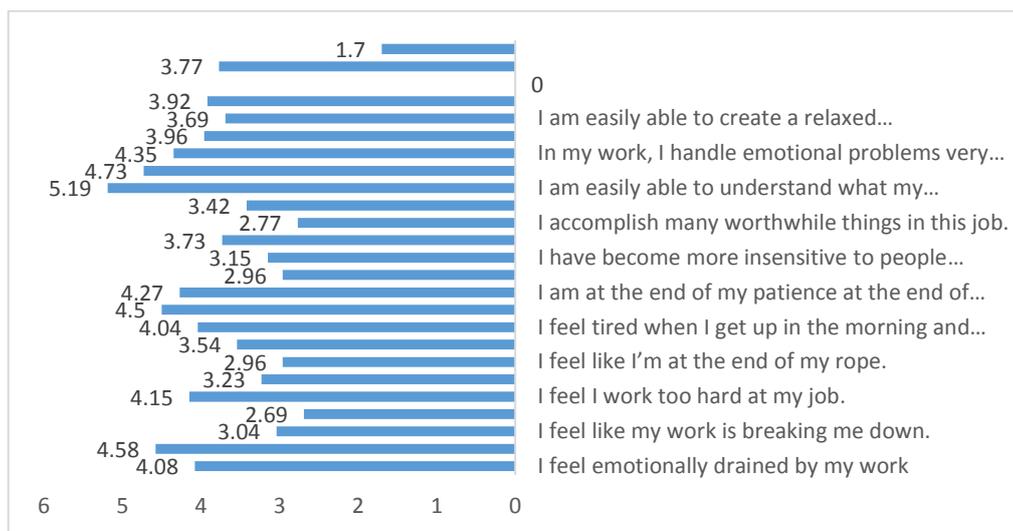
Figure 1. The observed mean scores for each item

The following table displays the results of descriptive analysis of the questionnaire including the mean and standard deviation of each item:

According to the overall observed mean of the data from the questionnaire (M= 3.63), it can be argued that the teachers who participated in this study were not burned out because the observed mean was near to the theoretical mean (3.50). This means that the participants were moderately burned out. A more detailed evaluation of the means of the items shows that the major sources of their burnout are unwillingness to attend their workplace, having friction with other people at their workplace, and students who assume their teachers (the participants) are responsible for their achievements. This implies that the expectations at the workplace may be a source of pressure and job burnout for the participants.

However, a closer look at the second section of the questionnaire implies that teachers are to some extent optimistic and motivated to get to work. Although the observed mean (4.00) was close to the theoretical mean (3.50), it was concluded that the participants were also moderately motivated. In other words, it can be argued that considering the learners' burnout and motivation to work, the participants are at the threshold of getting burned out and that they are entering its initial stages.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of the Questionnaire Items

	M	SD
Part One		
I feel emotionally drained by my work	4.08	1.94
Working with people all day long requires a great deal of effort.	4.58	2.12
I feel like my work is breaking me down.	3.04	1.08
I feel frustrated by my work	2.69	1.49
I feel I work too hard at my job.	4.15	2.05
It stresses me too much to work in direct contact with people.	3.23	1.88
I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.	2.96	2.12
I feel I look after certain patients/clients impersonally as if they are objects.	3.54	2.42
I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day at work.	4.04	2.07
I have the impression that my students make me responsible for some of their problems.	4.50	1.75
I am at the end of my patience at the end of my workday.	4.27	2.29
I don't care about what happens to some of my students.	2.96	2.14
I have become more insensitive to people since I've been working.	3.15	2.41
I'm afraid that this job is making me uncaring.	3.73	2.44
	3.63	2.06
Part Two		
I accomplish many worthwhile things in this job.	3.42	2.08
I feel full of energy.	5.15	1.65
I am easily able to understand what my students feel.	4.73	1.2
I look after my students' problems very effectively.	4.35	1.61
In my work, I handle emotional problems very calmly.	4.35	1.72
Through my work, I feel that I have a positive influence on people.	3.96	1.75
I am easily able to create a relaxed atmosphere with my students.	3.69	1.85
I feel refreshed when I have been close to my students at work.	3.92	1.90
	4.00	1.72
Total	3.77	1.70

4.2. Qualitative Phase

After analyzing the data gathered through the interview, four main themes and 16 sub-themes were extracted which could represent the lived experiences of teachers regarding job burnout. Table 3 shows each of these themes and sub-themes.

Table 3.

Main Themes and Sub-themes Emerged from the Data

Main Themes	Sub-themes
Definition of job burnout	Emotional pressure
	Fatigue
	Environmental Stress
Instances of burnout	Physical affliction
	Psychological uneasiness
Sources of burnout	Characteristics of the work environment
	Economic problems
	Managers
	Colleagues
	Parents
	Students
Solutions for removing job burnout	Managerial support
	Organizational and social support
	Emotional Support
	Family acceptance
	Reward

4.2.1. Definition of Job Burnout

The first identified key theme was *the definition of job burnout*, which was identified with its three sub-themes of *emotional pressure*, *fatigue*, and *environmental stress*.

4.2.1.1. Emotional Pressure

The analysis of the lived experiences of a large number of interviewees showed that occupational exhaustion, in general, is the result of the stress-induced by their job and is accompanied by neural pressure. "Most teachers get nervous as if they are trapped in this job" (Interviewee 7).

4.2.1.2. Fatigue

The analysis of the interviews revealed that the teachers suffered from fatigue, especially, in the form of physical exhaustion, because of occupational pressure, which is a factor in the creation of job burnout. "Due to these pressures, we feel very tired, and if we do not rest, we would soon give up (Interviewee 11).

4.2.1.3. Environmental Stress

One of the sub-themes extracted in the definition of job burnout was intentional environmental pressure. An interviewee stated that "the pressure exerted by the school environment such as the manager, students or parents' expectations, imposes pressure on teachers at the institutes" (Interviewee 5).

4.2.2. Instances of Burnout

The second main theme, the typical examples of job burnout, included two sub-themes, namely, adverse effects of physical affliction and psychological uneasiness.

4.2.2.1. Physical Affliction

The participants introduced the harmful effects of physical affliction as threatening and concrete instances of job burnout. "Psychological pressure has a very bad effect on the human body. I had suffered from this disorder in the previous year so that I had ulcers, and I had a malignant headache" (Interviewee 12).

4.2.2.2. Psychological Uneasiness

Almost all participants in the study identified the effects of psychological uneasiness among the obvious examples of job burnout. "When you get stressed, your body is psychologically damaged so that it suffers from insomnia and anorexia. The teacher always feels in haste and causes him to lose his efficiency" (Interviewee 17).

4.2.3. Sources of Burnout

The third main theme refers to the sources of job burnout that included six sub-themes including characteristics of the work environment, economic problems, school managers, colleagues, students' parents, and students (clients) themselves.

4.2.3.1. Characteristics of the Work Environment

Participating teachers believed that the work environment is the first and most important source of burnout. "Work environment is effective and has to be in coordination with their desires in terms of minimal required facilities. If the environment does not have suitable light, heating, cooling, and humidity, it would be painful" (Interviewee 6).

4.2.3.2. Economic Problems

In the study of sources of job burnout, the participating teachers pointed out economic problems that affect all their lives. "In the past few years, due to the low salary and other welfare components, … and more importantly, when they are compared with what individuals have in other workplaces… teachers have undergone a lot of pressure" (Interviewee 16).

4.2.3.3. Managers

As far as the participating teachers are concerned, institute managers have a set of attributes that contradict the spirit of being a leader, resulting in the aggravation of occupational stress and job burnout. "Some managers 'pollute' the workplace atmosphere by their behaviors and sometimes their tantrums since they have a sense of superiority over teachers and higher management status" (Interviewee, 9).

4.2.3.4. Colleagues

Based on their living experiences, teachers identified the behavior and conducts of their colleagues as a factor of job burnout. Two kinds of colleagues make the institute's environment difficult to tolerate; some colleagues whose jobs are really in conflict with their abilities and those who are too proud of their special abilities and complain about the workplace.

4.2.3.5. Parents

The participants believed that the parents of their learners could also be a factor of job burnout. "I often try to treat the parents well, but there are some parents, especially at the elementary levels, who claim to know about teaching craft and try to interfere in every aspect of instruction. Advising them not to do so is not helpful so that they turn into teachers' peeves over time" (Interviewee 13).

4.2.3.6. Students

From the teachers' perspectives, students with low motivation add to the pressures resulting from the workplace. "Some learners have no interest in lessons at all, and no incentive to do homework, and the teacher is sick of having them in the class" (Interviewee 2).

4.2.4. Solutions for Removing Job Burnout

The last item extracted from the data was related to the strategies for removing job burnout. It involved five sub-themes, namely, managers, organizational and social support, emotional support, family acceptance, and reward.

4.2.4.1. Managerial Support

All of the participants in the interview mentioned managers as one of the most important contributors to preventing job burnout. "I think the main element for stopping work burnout is institute administrators who, with appropriate morality and open hugs, can solve the teachers' problems and minimize the stress induced by the job" (Interviewee 7).

4.2.4.2. Organizational and Social Support

All of the participants in the study have expressed social and organizational support for blocking the factors of burnout. "What's going on in the institute causes mental relaxation can improve teachers' mental security. Those who thank teachers, for example, can improve their psychological conditions" (Interviewee 20).

4.2.4.3. Emotional Support

The interviewees found emotional support, along with other ways, as an influential remedy for job burnout. "The emotional support from the manager or the parents makes the burdens easier to tolerate, and this support will be more effective if it comes from the institute, but it is a pity that this support will never exist" (Interviewee 4).

4.2.4.4. Family Acceptance

The participants in the study considered their own families' unconditional acceptance as one of the best ways to reduce work stress and burnout. "If I join, after a dull day, my family while they are welcoming me, I feel like a newborn, and that all the pressures of the environment go away" (Interviewee 15).

4.2.4.5. Reward

The last extracted item from the data regarding preventing job burnout was related to the financial rewards. "Money and rewards can also relieve stress and psychological

pressures. Although we are teachers and have humane goals, we need money so that we can afford welfare, health care and comfort, which are pre-requisite to mental peace" (Interviewee 8).

5. Discussion

The primary purpose of the current study was to understand and dissect the phenomenon of burnout among a group of language teachers. The results reported in the earlier section demonstrated the main themes in teachers' accounts as definition, instances, sources, and solutions of job burnout. We will discuss each one in detail in the subsequent lines.

As for the first main theme, teachers defined the phenomenon as occupational exhaustion, fatigue, and stress induced by the working environment which would lead to physical exhaustion and psychological stress and cause stomach ulcers, headaches, insomnia, and disturbed sleep hours. This is in line with Maslach et al. (1986) that assume three related constructs lie at the heart of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment. Teachers may feel *emotional pressure* in the face of job stress (Khani & Mirzaee, 2015) induced by the contact with their students and their parents. *Fatigue* and burnout are closely intertwined in the literature. Feeling exhausted is frequently named as the prime predictor of teacher burnout and is directly attributed to negative exchanges with students and teachers' personal experiences and characteristics (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015). Fatigue and mistrust stem from work pressure, social conflict, and high job demands (Bianchi et al., 2015; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Rostami et al., 2015). The third sub-theme in job burnout is environmental stress that is recurrently enumerated in several studies as an influential factor in burnout (e.g. Ghazalbash & Afghari, 2015; Pressley, 2021). Burnout is a negative affective response to chronic work stress (Mede, 2009) which is found in teachers' narratives of the present study. Teachers seem to have symptoms such as physical problems, lack of satisfaction with physical appearance and low self-confidence, undesirable social relationships, and poor financial conditions, etc. due to occupational stress. Since the job is a decisive factor in the quality of life, the pressures at the workplace affect teachers' physical and emotional well-being in general (Farshi & Omranzadeh, 2014).

Concerning the sources of job burnout, the participating teachers mentioned six sub-themes including characteristics of the workplace, economic issues, school managers, colleagues, students, and their parents. In a similar vein, Fernet et al. (2012), Gürbüz and Dede (2018), Perrone et al. (2019) referred to the school climate and the overall atmosphere of the organization as predictors of teacher burnout. The EFL teachers' traits also interact with workplace conditions to the extent that sometimes the job-related pressures and expectations are more intense than one can cope with (Javadi, 2014; Khani, & Mirzaee, 2015). Hence, when teachers are not sufficiently satisfied with their working conditions, including its financial aspect, their professional stress will increase and the quality of their lives will decrease.

According to the teachers' account, students' motivation plays a pivotal role in their job satisfaction. Teachers stated that when students do not act properly in the classroom and are not interested in following their lessons, they have to deal with these challenges to increase the productivity of the classroom. Such pressure for controlling the students' behaviors and encouraging them to get involved in their lessons can be among the burnout factors. This observation is in line with the finding of Soodmand Afshar and Doosti (2015), referring to demotivated students as one of the sources of teachers' dissatisfaction. In their study, students' disposition towards the classroom lessons was reported as an influencing factor in teachers' job satisfaction, which is confirmed in the current study. By the same token, Ghenghesh (2013) who conducted a study on the extrinsic and extrinsic reasons for English language teachers' job satisfaction concluded that teachers are motivated and satisfied if students show interest in the course they are taking. Students' lack of interest would result in teachers feeling a lack of personal achievement and frustration as they are burning themselves out. Having a good relationship with their colleagues and school managers is listed as another source of job burnout. This is already discussed under the title of school climate. The amount of support and care received from their peers and managers may reduce burnout in teachers.

As far as the strategies for removing job burnout is concerned, five sub-themes were extracted from the data: managers, organizational and social support, emotional support, family acceptance, and reward. EFL teachers working in private language institutes believed that work and life balance, an organized working environment, a healthy classroom environment, and a vital and growing working climate are channels that can ward off

burnout. This finding is consistent with the outcome of studies by Chen (2010), Nadeem et al. (2011), Atmaca (2017) in the global context, and Salehi and Taghavi (2015) in the local context that acknowledge the significance of working conditions. Teachers' perceptions of their role, and the priority they assign to their workplace compared to their personal lives are also among burnout-reducing factors (Ghanizadeh, & Jahedizadeh, 2016; Gholami, 2015; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Striking a balance between work and other aspects of life can thwart burnout or at least may lower its impact which is in congruence with the results from Nadeem et al. (2011) who have referred to the responsibilities at home as one of the problems teachers have to cope with.

A healthy classroom environment was reported as a source of burnout prevention, which is again related to the working environment. In this category, teachers pointed to the challenges of dealing with students' learning and control. Previous literature has also highlighted the role of classroom challenges in teachers' burnout. Ratcliff et al. (2010) have attributed the anxiety and burnout of teachers to students' misbehavior while Aloe et al. (2014) reported that teachers have to deal with discipline-related issues to foster students' learning.

On the whole, it seems that sources of burnout prevention as perceived by Iranian teachers are in close association with working environment conditions. In all the aspects of burnout prevention, the trace of work influences such as the effects of students, colleagues, workplace, and income is evident. It can be inferred that Iranian teachers thought of the working environment as the main burnout factor and accordingly, they sought burnout prevention in the manipulation of the working environment. Larrivee (2012) and Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) have also indicated that negative attitudes toward colleagues and work, in general, contribute to burnout. The latter offered a number of suggestions to optimize and transform the climate of schools. The recommendations such as "*praising risk-taking in teachers*", "*having fun in meetings that aren't supposed to be fun*", "*try new teaching methods*", "*push the boundaries of culturally acceptable behaviors*", "*ask educators who will keep them from improving*" were made for instilling positive attitudes and outlooks in teachers and busting the culture of schools.

6. Conclusion

According to the results of this study, it is recommended that private language institute administrators and managers pay more attention to the reasons and factors that bring about

job burnout in EFL teachers and overcome these factors by social and emotional support and reward. They can also help teachers with forming peer support groups. By encouraging teachers to attend these sessions they can feel heard, understood, and supported. Another suggestion for increasing job satisfaction among EFL teachers is to impose stress reduction policies and cultivate a healthy workplace which contributes to improved work performance and staff motivation.

This research has a few limitations as well. One of the problems of this research was the lack of qualitative research background in Iran on EFL teacher burnout. In addition, the limited number of institutes and teachers negatively impacts the comprehensiveness of the data and the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, considering the above-mentioned cases and the results, more studies in the field of burnout of EFL teachers and the ways to tackle it are necessary for Iran.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions for Teachers

- Have you ever experienced burnout?

- Have you seen anyone experiencing burnout?

- What happens to a teacher who experiences burnout?

- What are the causes of burnout?

- How can burnout be prevented?

Appendix B: Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

Part One	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I feel emotionally drained by my work

Working with people all day long requires a great deal of effort.

I feel like my work is breaking me down.

I feel frustrated by my work

I feel I work too hard at my job.

It stresses me too much to work in direct contact with people.

I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.

I feel I look after certain patients/clients impersonally as if they are objects.

I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day at work.

I have the impression that my students make me responsible for some of their problems.

I am at the end of my patience at the end of my workday.

I don't care about what happens to some of my students.

I have become more insensitive to people since I've been working.

I'm afraid that this job is making me uncaring.

Part Two

I accomplish many worthwhile things in this job.

I feel full of energy.

I am easily able to understand what my students feel.

I look after my students' problems very effectively.

In my work, I handle emotional problems very calmly.

Through my work, I feel that I have a positive influence on people.

I am easily able to create a relaxed atmosphere with my students.

I feel refreshed when I have been close to my students at work.