



Contents lists available at [JSLP](#)

Journal of Second Language Pedagogy

Journal homepage: <https://www.sanad.iau.ir/journal/jslp>

Understanding Teacher Immunity in Iranian EFL Classrooms: Institutional and Relational Foundations of Resilience

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KEY TERMS

EFL Teachers
Gender
Hiver's model
Resilience
Teacher Immunity

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to fulfill the growing need to understand how teachers maintain resilience under a challenging educational environment. It discusses key determinants of teacher immunity for Iranian EFL teachers, such as the most and last influential components and gender-based differences. Drawing on Hiver's (2015) dynamic, self-organizing system model of teacher immunity, this research analyzes institutional, emotional, and personal factors on resilience in Iran's centralized educational system. A sample of 384 EFL teachers from 17 cities completed a validated questionnaire which addressed eight dimensions: Supportive Work Environment, Job Satisfaction, Student Relationships, Professional Growth, Communication, Work-Life Balance, Coping Strategies, and Autonomy. Data were estimated using independent-samples t-tests and descriptive statistics. These results show that Supportive Work Environment, Job Satisfaction, and Student Relationships had the greatest influence, while Autonomy and Coping strategies had less influence. No significant gender differences existed, which indicates that systemic and professional challenges relate to a larger extent than gender. These results underscore the need for institutional support, relational dynamics, and targeted policies that enhance teacher well-being. The research suggests inclusive professional development and emotionally supportive school environments. Future research will need to explore longitudinal and intersectional approaches to deepening the understanding of teacher immunity.

ARTICLE TYPE

Original Research Paper

Received:	8 May 2025
Revised:	20 June 2025
Accepted:	25 June 2025
Published Online:	5 October 2025

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1. Introduction

In the turbulent and demanding era of education, teachers are crucial stakeholders in shaping the cognitive, emotional, and social development of students (Hattie, 2008; Richards, 2023). Nevertheless,

teachers—particularly those in culturally and administratively complex systems such as Iran—are likely to face intricate problems that affect their motivation, resilience, and sustained professional engagement (Day & Gu, 2014; O'Connor, 2008). Within the Iranian EFL setting, where centralization and workload correspond with restricted autonomy and organizational sources of stress, it is essential to know how English language teachers adapt and endure (Rahmati et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016).

Teacher immunity has been conceived as a psychological and professional mechanism of self-protection that allows teachers to adjust and survive despite ongoing adversity (Hiver, 2015). Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) refer to teacher immunity as a self-organizing phenomenon arising out of experience and involving dynamic interaction between inner inclinations and external pressures. The theory is particularly relevant in the case of understanding adaptive processes employed by teachers working under high-pressure schooling systems such as Iran's (Desimone, 2009; Tait, 2008).

Despite increased scholarly attention to student motivation and engagement, there have been few investigations into the underlying processes that protect and sustain teachers' emotional and professional well-being (Bashir & Alam, 2024; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). This study tries to fill the gap by investigating Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and coping strategies, identifying the most important and least influential factors leading to their immunity, and exploring whether gender can influence these perceptions (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

Grounded theory is the basis on which the study aims to produce a context-specific model of teacher immunity from the realities of Iranian EFL teachers (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Special emphasis is given to the way teachers respond to stress, burnout, resistance to change, and structural limitations, all of which have been widely documented as the main reasons for teacher loss and decreased performance (Geving, 2007; Hakanen et al., 2006). Moreover, the study takes into consideration the role of technology-induced pressures and their intersection with teacher resilience and adaptability, an issue becoming increasingly pertinent in online learning spaces (McCallum, 2023; Zeng et al., 2019).

Equally essential is the question regarding gendered perspectives. Even though certain studies indicate male and female teachers might experience professional stress differently (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001), emerging studies also argue that core elements of teacher resilience and motivation are construed similarly across genders, particularly when working under consistent institutional limitations (Day & Gu, 2014; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Consequently, this study also aims to investigate whether statistically significant differences between male and female teachers' views on central aspects of teacher immunity exist.

Lastly, this research aims to bridge conceptual gaps in the literature and provide practical recommendations that can guide policy, school leadership, and professional development programs. By knowing which elements of teacher immunity are most valued and most vulnerable to teachers themselves, especially within gender-sensitive contexts, the results will help develop interventions that enable sustainable teaching practice in high-stakes education environments (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Collie et al., 2012; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

2. Literature Review

Teacher immunity is a relatively new concept within educational research, formulated to describe the ability of teachers to handle, adapt to, and thrive despite the many adversities inherent in their profession. The concept, as formulated by Hiver (2015), describes teacher immunity as a self-organizing dynamic system in which teachers draw upon their past experiences to construct new strategies for current adversity, thus assuring resilience and motivation.

Hiver's (2015) model comprises four dynamic stages: triggering, where initial stressors disrupt the teacher's equilibrium; readjustment, where coping responses are activated; stabilization, involving consolidation of new strategies; and finally, immunity, where self-organizing mechanisms become automated and habitual. The self-organizing system emphasizes the complexity and agility required of teachers in adapting to the complicated problems in their profession. Following this, the responses of teachers to stressful situations are not pre-determined but evolve based on previous experiences, thereby forming a continuous process of adaptation and resilience. The significance of teacher immunity lies in its impact on the well-being, job satisfaction, and the eventual outcomes of the students of teachers. Teachers with resilience are better able to establish positive learning environments, which enhance students' engagement and achievement (Day & Gu, 2014). Understanding and establishing teacher immunity can foster more successful professional development programs, support systems, and policy interventions to reduce teacher burnout and enhance teachers' retention levels.

A number of research studies have identified that a series of interconnected determinants form teacher immunity construction and maintenance. These determinants can be broadly categorized into four categories: psychological and personal factors, professional identity, context and institutional factors, and coping strategies. For instance, emotional control and self-efficacy are identified to be influential psychological attributes enabling teachers to manage professional stressors (Geving, 2007; Tait, 2008). Professional identity, such as teachers' values and beliefs regarding their vocation, lies at the center of deciding how they interpret and respond to adversity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2005). Other institutional and socio-cultural forces, such as the level of administrative support or rigid education policy, also play strong roles in fostering or hindering immunity (O'Connor, 2008; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). Finally, the use of adaptive coping mechanisms like reflective practice, collegiality, and social support seeking has significant links with teachers' professional resilience and motivation (Eser Ordem, 2021; Richards, 2023).

Kelchtermans (2005) highlights the impact of teachers' beliefs and identity on their response to adversity. Teachers' professional beliefs in their identity and sense of self-efficacy are crucial factors that shape their adaptability and resilience (Geving, 2007). Moreover, the institutional and socio-cultural context in which teachers work significantly affects their immunity (O'Connor, 2008). In the Iranian setting, education and cultural norms place unique stressors on EFL teachers, necessitating a particular response to Teacher Immunity understanding and establishment. Recent research continues to highlight professional identity and institutional setting in shaping teacher immunity. For instance, Bashir and Alam (2024) highlight how distributive leadership and teacher autonomy align to produce overall school effectiveness, postulating that agency-driven teachers are best positioned to establish strong professional identities. Similarly, Vangrieken et al. (2023) longitudinally tested

Karasek's activation hypothesis and established supportive work environments as a protective factor against teacher stress and emotional exhaustion. The findings supplement earlier assertions by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) and Kelchtermans (2005) with contemporary empirical evidence.

Motivation is also core in teacher immunity formation. From Hiver and Dörnyei (2017), motivation is underlying in the concept of teacher immunity because it encapsulates teachers' perception and response to issues. Boo et al. (2017) further clarify that motivation is driven by dynamic interactions between teachers' objectives, professional selves, and environmental variables. It is imperative to understand these dimensions of motivation in developing measures to enhance teacher immunity. Global discussions on teacher autonomy and stress also lend support to this perspective. Pearson and Moomaw (2005) and, more recently, Bashir and Alam (2024) observed that autonomy not only increases teacher professionalism but also reduces work stress and improves psychological immunity in high-stress school settings.

Effective coping mechanisms and realignment processes are important in maintaining teacher immunity. Eser Ordem (2017) emphasizes that ambiguities and conflicts in the classroom have the potential to demotivate teachers, hence demanding strong coping processes. Effective teachers utilize adaptive coping processes such as seeking social support and reflective practices to deal with stress and maintain their motivation (Richards et al., 2013). Teacher coping remains a central resilience determinant, especially in stressful or resource-constrained environments. McCallum (2023) highlights the well-being link between students, school leaders, and teachers, calling for an integrative approach to assisting teachers. Additionally, there is new evidence by Vangrieken et al. (2023), which offers longitudinal data on the impact of work engagement and perceived control on coping and resilience over the long term. They are concordant with the previous foundation by Kyriacou (2001), but offer new information concerning the across-time within-person variability.

Although interest in teacher immunity is growing, there is a vast knowledge gap concerning teachers' negative experiences and their influence on teaching behavior. The existing literature tends to overlook teachers' sophisticated coping behaviors and redefinition strategies as responses to these issues. There is also insufficient insight into how institutions and organizations influence teacher immunity, particularly in multicultural countries like Iran.

Finally, even though there is already provided literature, which gives a broad background regarding teacher immunity, it is often lacking in detailing the lived experiences of the instructors, particularly in marginalized cultural settings. Moreover, scant attention is paid to research questions investigating how factors such as gender, institutional policy, or technology change affect processes of immunity. These gaps raise the need for a contextually informed and empirically grounded model of teacher immunity, precisely among the Iranian EFL teaching community. Building upon these foundational insights, Hiver (2015) introduced a dynamic systems model of teacher immunity that distinguishes between adaptive and maladaptive outcomes. This model offers a theoretical framework central to the present study and is elaborated in the following section. Nevertheless, despite greater attention to teacher wellbeing and professional resilience, there is still a need for research in existing studies that investigates context-specifically how immunity is developed under various cultural and policy environments (e.g., Bashir & Alam, 2024; Richards, 2023). In particular, what needs to be explored is how institutional empowerment, teacher agency, and cultural expectations interact with one another's impacts on immunity processes in countries such as Iran, where professional constraints and education reform cycles create unique challenges.

Hiver (2015) also describes teacher immunity as a dynamic, self-organizing, and self-protective system that develops as a result of repeated exposure to professional conundrums, institutional demands, and situational stressors in the teaching environment. This construct is based on complexity theory and dynamic systems theory. It explains how teachers develop adaptive or maladaptive psychological mechanisms to sustain their functioning and sense of identity in the face of adversity.

Teacher immunity exists in two forms: Productive (Constructive) Immunity that is marked by a strong intrinsic pedagogical motivation, sound psychological resilience and mental health, and an adaptive professional orientation towards development and pedagogical innovation. Maladaptive (Defensive) Immunity, conversely, is marked by emotional exhaustion and burnout, professional practice and belief inflexibility, disconnection from reflective practice and institutional activity, and increased perception of an overwhelming workload and reduced effectiveness.

A range of ecological and interpersonal determinants, including all items loaded on their respective factors highly, peer collaboration, professional development opportunities, teacher-student relationships, and organizational climate, shapes the trajectory towards positive or defensive immunity. Recognition of the two-faced character of teacher immunity is essential in the explanation of teacher well-being, resilience, and resilient professionalism in difficult learning contexts. Despite rising interest in teacher immunity, few studies have discussed its institutional and interpersonal determinants beyond Western EFL contexts. In Iran, particularly, where socio-cultural and institutional demands on teachers are unique, the relationship between support systems and psychological resilience is little understood. This study bridges this knowledge gap by investigating how institutional, interpersonal, and personal factors cumulatively affect teacher immunity in Iranian EFL instructors. According to these objectives, the research questions of this study are:

RQ1: What are the most and the least influential teacher immunity factors for EFL teachers?

RQ2: Are there any statistically significant differences between males and females regarding the EFL teachers' attitudes toward immunity factors?

3. Methodology

This research utilized a quantitative approach to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' immunity.

3.1. Participants and Setting

A total of 384 Iranian EFL teachers from 17 cities participated in the study. While the cities represented a wide range of geographical and institutional contexts, from large metropolitan hubs (e.g., Tehran, Tabriz, Shiraz) to smaller peripheral cities (e.g., Qeshm, Meibod, Chabahar). They were chosen on the basis of respondent accessibility rather than random or systematic considerations. Convenience sampling was, therefore, appropriate for gathering a large, diverse sample within practical constraints, without seeking statistical representativeness. Three hundred and eighty-four students were part of the study, 148 females and 236 males, and very well-diversified by gender in terms of experience and outlook. All the subjects were between 30 and 45 years of age, a professional milestone period in their career as teachers. Most of them taught English at the secondary school level at public and private schools with students different in terms of proficiency levels and socio-economic background.

3.2 Instrumentation

The primary tool for data collection was a researcher-generated questionnaire, which was developed on the foundation of results emanating from the qualitative part of the larger study. The questionnaire was put through rigorous validation procedures in an effort to establish its face and content validity. In order to ensure psychometric adequacy of the researcher-designed questionnaire, reliability and validity were both thoroughly tested through a pilot study employing an independent sample of EFL teachers. The reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to determine the internal consistency of the individual subscales. Alpha varied between .709 and .916 for the eight subscales, with an overall reliability of .83 for the final 32-item measure. These values indicated good to excellent internal consistency (Pallant, 2020). Specifically, subscales such as Supportive Work Environment ($\alpha = .916$), Student Relationships ($\alpha = .906$), and Personal Coping Strategies ($\alpha = .876$) showed extremely high reliability. One item from the initial 33 was omitted because of low contribution to internal consistency.

Construct validity was established through an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy was .878, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 5866.214$, $df = 305$, $p < .001$), indicating suitability of the data for factor analysis. Six components with eigenvalues > 1 were retained by PCA, which explained a cumulative variance of 67.99%. This factor structure was also supported by Horn's parallel analysis, which revealed that all six remaining retained components contained eigenvalues larger than those from randomly generated data. The last rotated factor matrix revealed that all items loaded on their respective factors highly, as dictated in the theoretical framework and empirical design of the questionnaire. These findings together highly corroborate the instrument's construct validity and internal reliability, making it fit for use during the core stage of the study. Further, reliability testing guaranteed the internal reliability of the items.

The final version of the questionnaire was made up of two sections. The first section elicited demographic details, including the age, gender, and professional standing of participants. The second section consisted of 32 Likert-scale items (Strongly Disagree = 1 to Strongly Agree = 5), employed to assess the six broad categories: Collegial and Administrative Support (Items 1-3); Professional Development (Items 4-7); Work-Life Balance (Items 8-11); Teacher Autonomy (Items 12-15); Communication and Job Satisfaction (Items 16-23); Teacher-Student Relationships and Coping Strategies (Items 24-32). Participants were instructed to respond based on their experience and perception. The instrument was pilot tested for clarity and reliability, and a time of completion of approximately 30 minutes was set. Responses were kept anonymous and utilized only for research purposes of academic study. The whole set of questionnaire items was composed in English to ensure convenience and facilitate conceptual clarity for target-language skilled participants.

3.3 Research Procedure

Web surveying was conducted in the 2020-2021 academic year, between winter and spring semesters. Google Forms, an easy-to-use web survey platform with cutting-edge security protocols, was utilized to develop the questionnaire. Participants were able to participate in the survey anonymously and safely through its link, which was advertised on different professional and educational online forums,

including: Iranian EFL teacher and educational professional WhatsApp and Telegram groups and institutional mailing lists and online teacher forums

Respondents were first presented with a cover page containing information about the study, its purpose, ethical considerations, and instructions for completion before the survey began. Voluntary response, anonymity, and confidentiality were highlighted. The structure of the online form allowed the respondent to fill in the survey at their convenience and in their own time. To determine the usability and clarity of the online version, the form was pretested and finalized before official release. Participants were encouraged to complete the questionnaire at their convenience, which typically took around 30 minutes. Thirty minutes was the time used to permit thoughtful consideration of the items without placing respondents under undue time constraints. The Internet's format flexibility enabled access to a wide and geographically dispersed population.

Following data collection, responses were entered into SPSS (Version 26) for analysis. Descriptive statistics, i.e., means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum scores, were computed to provide an image of participants' perceptions in each of the eight components of teacher immunity. These measures enabled factors to be ranked in terms of perceived importance and also enabled initial comparisons to be made between variables.

4. Data Analysis

To respond to the first question, a thorough statistical analysis was conducted on data collected from 384 Iranian EFL teachers using a validated 32-item questionnaire. Each item measured the perceived importance of some factors contributing to teacher immunity using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Descriptive statistics were used to determine the overall ranking of these factors in terms of their perceived effect on teacher resilience.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Variables of the Study

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Supportive Work Environment (SWE)	384	2.00	5.00	4.9792	.68713
Job Satisfaction (JS)	384	1.00	5.00	4.6732	.89491
Student Relationships (SR)	384	1.00	5.00	4.7005	.97964
Professional Development Opportunities (PDO)	384	1.00	5.00	4.2969	.82338
Effective Communication (EC)	384	1.00	5.00	4.1286	.84521
Work-Life Balance (WLB)	384	1.00	5.00	3.9821	.94582
Personal Coping Strategies (PCS)	384	1.00	5.00	3.7523	.65841
Autonomy and Empowerment (AE)	384	1.00	5.00	3.6258	.78542

According to the table above, the following key findings were noted: Supportive Work Environment (Mean = 4.9792) was the most significant predictor of teacher immunity. Teachers consistently asserted that emotional and professional support from peers, administrators, and institutional policies is crucial in protecting against the negative impacts of stress and burnout. The dimension also had a low standard deviation (0.687), which indicates high agreement among the respondents.

Student Relationships (Mean = 4.7005) was placed as the second most important factor. Teachers emphasized that establishing real and good working relations with students significantly boosts their motivation and professional fulfillment, a source of strong psychological resilience. Job Satisfaction (Mean = 4.6732) was quite close, reflecting as it does the extent to which the workers felt important, professionally recognized, and engaged in quality work. These highly job-satisfied teachers also demonstrated more emotional and psychological resilience to problems in the workplace. Professional Development Opportunities (PDO) and Effective Communication (EC) placed fourth and fifth, respectively. Although both scored high, their marginally lower means (PDO = 4.2969; EC = 4.1286) show that teachers may feel there is scope for enhancement in access to relevant, personalized professional training as well as communication quality in education settings.

Work-Life Balance (Mean = 3.9821) was ranked sixth, indicating moderate agreement about its influence. It is clear that teachers recognize its importance, but they implied that balancing it is still difficult in light of existing systemic constraints (e.g., heavy workload, lack of time). Personal Coping Strategies (PCS) (Mean = 3.7523) and Autonomy and Empowerment (AE) (Mean = 3.6258) were the least impactful of all the factors. This suggests that while teacher autonomy in instructional decision-making and personal coping strategies at the individual teacher level is desirable, they cannot operate in a vacuum without institutional support systems. Teachers will feel that without institutional support systems, personal strategies would not be effective in building long-term resilience to address systemic adversity.

These findings highlight a central point: teacher immunity is not simply an individual trait but is significantly rooted in external, institutional, and relational influences. All of the most highly ranked factors are related to how supported teachers see themselves being—by the setting in which they work, by their students, and by their broader professional context. By comparison, factors traditionally considered internal, like autonomy or individual coping, have a secondary, auxiliary role. This ranking is an expression of systemic reality in the Iranian EFL context, whereby social and structural supports—or not—have profound impacts on teacher well-being, retention, and professional growth. It implies that resilience is best developed in collaborative, respectful, and professionally supportive contexts.

To address the second research question, an independent-sample t-test was applied to determine whether male and female teachers differed significantly from each other in their response to the eight components of teacher immunity identified. The analysis utilized 384 EFL teachers' answers (236 males, 148 females) and was carried out through SPSS version 26. Before the t-tests, Levene's Test of Equality of Variances was used to test the homogeneity of variances for all variables. In all sections, the values of Levene's test of significance were greater than the value 0.05, and hence, the hypothesis of equal variances was satisfied, and interpretation of the first row of the t-test output

could be performed. Across all eight factors—Supportive Work Environment (SWE), Job Satisfaction (JS), Student Relationships (SR), Professional Development Opportunities (PDO), Effective Communication (EC), Work-Life Balance (WLB), Personal Coping Strategies (PCS), and Autonomy and Empowerment (AE)—there were no appreciable differences observed between male and female teachers (all p -values > 0.05). Mean scores for each factor were reasonably comparable in both groups, and the t -values were relatively intermediate in value. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Independent Samples t -Test Results Comparing Male and Female EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Immunity Components

Teacher Immunity Factor	Mean (Male)	Mean (Female)	t -value	p -value
Supportive Work Environment	3.5947	3.8041	2.103	0.536
Job Satisfaction	3.3342	3.2603	0.879	0.380
Student Relationships	3.9658	3.9923	-0.377	0.706
Professional Development Opp.	3.5947	3.7500	-1.704	0.089
Effective Communication	3.5947	3.8041	2.141	0.538
Work-Life Balance	3.3342	3.2603	0.870	0.380
Personal Coping Strategies	3.9658	3.9923	-0.370	0.706
Autonomy and Empowerment	3.5947	3.7500	-1.703	0.088

Note: All values are reported based on equal variances assumed—significance set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

The findings reveal the same trend: there are no statistically significant gender-based differences in Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of teacher immunity dimensions. This can be taken to mean that male and female teachers both experience and evaluate the key dimensions of immunity—i.e., support, relationships, satisfaction, and resilience—through more or less the same lenses. These results are particularly relevant given the cultural and institutional contexts of EFL instruction in Iran, where both female and male instructors may be exposed to the same structural constraints, challenges, and professional pressures. Possibly, shared educational pressures and working conditions minimize the chance of observing noteworthy gender-based contrasts in teachers' perceptions of immunity-related factors.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The first research question sought to identify and rank the most and the least contributory factors of teacher immunity based on Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives. Quantitatively, based on 384 participants' responses, the findings presented eight distinct factors with varying degrees of

perceived contribution to teacher resilience. The top three were Supportive Work Environment (SWE), Student Relationships (SR), and Job Satisfaction (JS), while Autonomy and Empowerment (AE) and Personal Coping Strategies (PCS) ranked the lowest. These results offer a detailed view of the collective and systemic foundations of teacher resilience in the Iranian EFL context.

The most strongly rated element, with a mean of 4.98, was Supportive Work Environment (SWE). This finding strongly corroborates current research that collegial support, caring leadership in schools, and institutionally supported well-being programs are essential for the sustenance of teacher motivation and emotional well-being (Collie et al., 2012; Leithwood et al., 2020). Within Iran's centralized education system, possessing caring school cultures appears to have a stabilizing impact in the sense that it offers the teachers psychological safety and emotional anchorage.

Scoring 4.70, Student Relationships (SR) was the second strongest contributor to teacher immunity. Participants attributed emotional significance to establishing quality interpersonal relationships with their students, naming them as motivational catalysts and sources of professional legitimation. This aligns with findings by Roorda et al. (2011) and Spilt et al. (2011), who both determined teacher-student rapport to be a significant buffer for classroom stressors. Given the emotional demands Iranian EFL teachers experience, such relationships can be not only a pedagogical strength but also a source of personal resilience, reaffirming their sense of purpose and classroom identity.

Job Satisfaction (JS) came next with a mean of 4.67. Teachers associated job satisfaction with professional respect, a sense of purpose, and opportunities for career development. These are parallel to broader findings within teacher psychology research, whereby job satisfaction relates to less burnout and improved retention (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). In contexts like Iran, where teaching professionals may be limited in terms of salary, autonomy, and institutional support, intrinsic job satisfaction becomes a vital compensation mechanism. McCallum (2023) points out that teachers who feel valued by administrators and who believe they are having a positive effect are more likely to remain effectively engaged and professionally invested.

Professional Development Opportunities (PDO) recorded a mean of 4.29, reflecting their acknowledged but moderate role in immunity development. Participants valued relevant, ongoing development sensitive to classroom realities. This finding confirms Desimone (2013) and Opfer & Pedder (2011), who further assert that ongoing, collective, and context-sensitive professional learning strengthens teacher agency. However, the relatively lower score suggests that in Iran, the professional development of teachers may not always be responsive to needs. Local studies (e.g., Rahmati et al., 2019) have criticized PD initiatives that are too theoretical or disconnected from daily teaching issues, reducing their impact on resilience.

Effective Communication (EC) was 4.13, showing its significance but also its potential for growth. Teachers recognized that good communication with and among colleagues and administrators facilitates cooperation, reduces confusion, and increases school cohesion. Brown and Zhang's (2017) and Vangrieken et al.'s (2023) research also pointed out that effective communication is one of the pillars of trust and professional collaboration. In Iran's traditionally top-down school culture, the promotion of open and inclusive communication can be a key strategy in constructing collective resilience, especially during periods of curricular or policy reform.

Work-Life Balance (WLB) had a lower mean score (3.98), reflecting the ways teachers grappled with juggling professional pressures and personal wellness. These findings resonate with international issues of teacher overwork and emotional labor, especially in EFL settings (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Bashir et al., 2024). Participants acknowledged the goal of finding balance, but institutional workload, cultural expectations, and lack of support consistently hindered its attainment. Teachers may feel guilty or pressured when they prioritize self-care over professional tasks—a dilemma requiring systemic solutions.

Personal Coping Strategies (PCS), with a mean of 3.75, were perceived as necessary but insufficient. While participants recognized the value of mindfulness, emotional regulation, and reflective practice, they were skeptical about relying on internal strategies exclusively. This corroborates Zeng et al. (2019) and Alves et al. (2016), who affirm that resilience is not only self-generated but socially and structurally facilitated. Teachers in this study appeared to favor collective over individual coping mechanisms, confirming the need for system and relational support mechanisms.

Finally, Autonomy and Empowerment (AE) was the lowest-rated factor, with a mean of 3.62. While autonomy is very often linked to professional satisfaction (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005), Iranian teachers in this study rated it lower, which can be explained by the centralized, prescriptive nature of Iran's educational system. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) also caution that autonomy, when not paired with support and recognition, will be daunting rather than empowering. In strongly structured organizational environments, emotional safety, collegiality, and administrative responsiveness may be more vital than individual control.

The second research question was whether there were statistically significant gender differences in the attitudes of the determining factors of teacher immunity among Iranian EFL teachers. The results of the independent samples t-tests were that there was no significant difference between male and female participants on all eight determining factors identified. With p-values greater than the 0.05 level for each variable, both genders equally had the same judgments regarding determinants of occupational resilience and well-being.

The lack of gender variation is particularly noteworthy in the Iranian setting, where sociocultural expectations normally tend to impose differentiated roles for men and women. Paradoxically, both male and female teachers in this study reported convergent opinions on all eight teacher immunity dimensions. High Supportive Work Environment (SWE), Job Satisfaction (JS), and Student Relationships (SR) scores were found to be consistent among both genders, as were comparably lower—but valid—ratings for Personal Coping Strategies (PCS) and Autonomy and Empowerment (AE).

This development shows that equivalent systemic pressures, professional conditions, and institutional pasts can overshadow demographic or gender nuance. It also implies that Iranian EFL teachers' structural dilemmas, for instance, the high workload, reduced autonomy, and bureaucratization, are shared in common rather than differently.

Both male and female teachers emphasized the critical role of an enabling work environment, including collegiality, responsiveness of leadership, and institutional policy. This supports the findings of Johnson and Birkeland (2003) and Day and Gu (2013), which emphasize that organizational support

is crucial to teacher resilience and retention, irrespective of gender. In a school system historically dominated by central control and limited teacher autonomy, organizational support appears to serve as a shared buffer against professional burnout.

Job satisfaction was also rated the same by both sexes, with a common reliance on intrinsic motivation, appreciation, and career progression. This is in line with Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016), who also theorize that professional satisfaction is equally important to male and female teachers' commitment and engagement. Given the sameness of organizational constraints in Iranian schools, it makes sense that both sexes comprehend their professional satisfaction in the same manner.

Student relationships were strongly valued by both male and female teachers, each of them confirming the emotional validity of student rapport. Hattie's (2008) meta-analysis supports this finding since the high effect of teacher-student relationships was found to increase engagement and reduce stress, irrespective of the gender of the teacher. In the face of high stress, relational feedback from students can be a potent source of confirmation and meaning for all teachers. Both male and female teachers expressed similar positive values for potential growth and reskilling, in line with Borko (2004) and Desimone (2013). Such parity perhaps derives from access equality or equal unhappiness with current forms of PD, reflecting a mass preference for a more aligned PD program with tangible classroom realities. The findings suggest shared enthusiasm for enhancing overall PD efficacy as opposed to sexing it in some manner.

Both gender groups of instructors also saw effective communication as vital to trust-building, conflict diminishment, and cooperation enhancement. In Iranian classrooms, typically dominated by top-down communication structures, this shared concern reflects the critical necessity for open, two-way communication frameworks. Robinson (2012) further argues that efficient communication systems instill collective efficacy regardless of demographic characteristics.

Both sexes also mentioned difficulty in reconciling work and life. Previous studies (Kyriacou, 2001; Hakanen et al., 2006) have found that teachers globally experience an intrusion of work into family life. This study supports the fact that Iranian EFL teachers—male and female—experience colossal difficulties in achieving balance due mainly to overloading institutions, rigid expectations, and inadequate structural adjustment. There were no gender differences in the use of coping strategies or their efficacy. This is congruent with Montgomery and Rupp (2005), who theorize that coping strategies such as emotional regulation, reflection, and support from staff are not gendered but personally and institutionally conditioned. These findings support the development of inclusive programs for creating resilience that are applicable to all teacher groups.

While autonomy is most often seen as a basis of teaching autonomy and work satisfaction (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005), male and female teachers in this study placed it lower in terms of significance. It may be a sign of the contextual constraint of Iran's centralized education system, in which all teachers have restricted decision-making powers. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) also suggest that autonomy must be underpinned by institutional support for it to be emancipatory—otherwise, it becomes one more cause of anxiety.

The pervasive gender-neutral responses in all subscales present a compelling case for the conclusion that teacher resilience in Iranian EFL settings is unequivocally more an outcome of institutional and relational processes than demographic variation. This pattern is consistent with big-

picture accounts of research elsewhere (e.g., Desimone, 2013; Hattie, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016), and, as such, resiliently framed interventions need to be designed in a universally applicable and holistically positive structure.

This study explored teacher immunity among Iranian English as a Foreign Language teachers to determine the most and least significant factors and to explore whether gender differences were a determining factor in how the factors were viewed. Based on quantitative data from 384 teachers from 17 Iranian cities, the study provided a general picture of how EFL teachers exist and conceive of professional resilience within a context that is characterized by centralized management, bureaucratic pressure, and cultural expectations.

The research identified Supportive Work Environment (SWE), Job Satisfaction (JS), and Student Relationships (SR) as the most salient aspects of teacher immunity. The three areas—the social, emotional, and institutional domains of teaching—comfortably outscored more self-centered aspects such as Personal Coping Strategies (PCS) and Autonomy and Empowerment (AE), the lowest ranked. The results also showed that no significant differences were found for female and male teachers regarding their perception of these eight factors. This would mean that, in the Iranian EFL context, both men and women share the same systemic challenges and support systems that are present, and both men and women teachers derive resilience from the same sources.

Theoretically, they affirm and extend Hiver's (2015) conceptualization of teacher immunity as a dynamic, self-organizing system open to prior experience, institutional context, and adaptive feedback. Rather than imagining teacher resilience in terms of either an individual personality trait or skill set, this research affirms its socially constructed, context-dependent nature. The absence of gender difference supports the view that teacher immunity is more influenced by relational and institutional processes and less by demographic variables. It requires a broader theoretical framework with the capability of incorporating both micro-level (individual) and macro-level (systemic) determinants.

Practically, the findings have several implications for teacher educators, school leaders, and policymakers. High levels of SWE, JS, and SR capture imperatives of caring school cultures that cherish emotional safety, professional valorization, and genuine teacher-student relationships. Collegial collaboration must be fostered by school leaders, who also need to establish open lines of communication and development, and affirmation opportunities. Since autonomy and personal coping resources were relatively less involved, it would be evident that exclusive emphasis on individual-level intervention, i.e., resilience training or self-care packages, would be insufficient. Instead, system modifications based on workload, emotional labor, and recognition need to take precedence to enable sustained teacher well-being.

Although this research is extremely valuable, there are several avenues through which additional research is required. First, research in the future can take an intersectional research path by considering how factors such as years of teaching, school type, locality, or family responsibilities intersect with notions of immunity. Second, longitudinal research would be particularly beneficial in exploring how teacher immunity evolves or following system-reform initiatives. Third, interview, focus group, or classroom observation-based qualitative research would complement quantitative findings and explore Iranian teachers' emotional lives in greater detail. Fourth, international comparisons involving other nations' teachers would reveal the influence of cultural and institutional

differences on resilience. Finally, intervention studies designed to enhance the most influential immunity factors, i.e., institutional support and teacher-student relationships, could provide evidence-based interventions for promoting retention and well-being in EFL contexts.

Typically, this study emphasizes that teacher immunity is neither the product of individual resilience nor psychological inclination. Rather, it arises out of professional relationships, school practices, and educational policies generally. For Iranian EFL teachers, resilience is facilitated less by autonomy or individual coping and more by communal belonging, administrative responsiveness, and emotional bonding with students. It is a gender-sensitive yet at the same time universal approach of backing teachers based on common professional needs rather than assumed demographic differences that will establish resilient and sustainable teaching forces. By centering around common professional needs, education stakeholders can build nurturing environments in which all teachers can succeed.

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JSLP Volume1 , Issue 4

2025