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The Effect of Flipped Learning on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Word Recognition from Speech

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K E Y T E R M S

Aural vocabulary

Flipped classrooms

Iranian intermediate EFL learners

Listening skill

Word recognition from speech

A R T I C L E T Y P E

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A B S T R A C T

Flipped learning is a relatively innovative pedagogical concept that can transform traditional classes into more engaging ones. This study examined the effectiveness of flipped classroom instruction in improving Iranian intermediate EFL learners' word recognition from speech (WRS). The research followed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest comparison group design. Sixty homogeneous female intermediate learners, aged 17 to 20, from a private English Institute in Ardestan were selected based on their performance on the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) through convenience sampling and were then randomly assigned into two equal groups: one experimental and one comparison group. Throughout the treatment phase, the experimental group was provided with flipped learning, and the learners were allowed to use smartphones equipped with internet-based educational resources, but the comparison group was taught with routine English language instruction. One pre-test and one post-test were administered to assess the learners' word recognition from speech. The results of the paired samples t-test and one-way ANCOVA revealed the outperformance of the experimental group over the comparison group. The findings can inform teachers and curriculum designers to incorporate flipped classroom techniques with smartphone-based resources, enabling learners to practice listening beyond the classroom and strengthen their word recognition from speech.

1. Introduction

Listening comprehension plays a central role in effective communication and overall language proficiency, as learners must process and understand spoken input in real time. One important factor that predicts success in second language listening comprehension is the ability to recognize words correctly. Word recognition represents a cognitive component of listening comprehension, as it

involves processing the phonological, lexical, and aural characteristics of words (Matthews & Cheng, 2015; Milton et al., 2010). The ability to recognize words from speech, or in other words, the ability to recognize the phonological or aural aspect of vocabulary, contributes to a great extent to the prediction of skilled listening comprehension (Gwilliams et al., 2018). Accordingly, word recognition from speech is the most essential element of listening comprehension and speech processing, especially for EFL learners who must be aware of the phonological aspect of the words (Milton & Masrai, 2021). In other words, a learner's difficulty in perceiving the sound forms of words can limit comprehension even if the words are known in written form. Actually, most EFL learners know the words in the written forms, but they can't recognize them in the aural forms (Milton et al., 2010). One important problem for Iranian intermediate EFL learners is that they also have difficulty in recognizing English words from speech. Therefore, improving word recognition from speech is a crucial goal for EFL listening instruction, which directly links to the cognitive processing of phonological input.

The flipped or inverted classroom is a novel and popular teaching approach in which tasks that would ordinarily be done in the classroom are done at home, and tasks that would usually be done at home are done in the classroom (Fisher et al., 2024; Sohrabi & Iraj, 2016). This pedagogical concept emphasizes student-centered learning and provides learners with opportunities to engage with instructional content independently before class, which can support cognitive processes such as word recognition. According to the literature, the key benefits of flipped classrooms are flexibility to study from video, greater understanding of the topic, an advantage due to prior knowledge of the class, and an incentive to learn. The flipped technique may be more satisfying for students and less expensive than standard education (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). While some research shows that flipped classrooms have many successful learning results, other studies highlight the limits of flipped classes and technical issues, such as the internet, software, and so on, that are among the drawbacks identified by students. Other students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of immediate feedback; they also stated that they prefer fewer and shorter films (Mango, 2021). Furthermore, obstacles may include the need for extra time to adapt the course as a flipped classroom, low self-regulation by some students, and the failure of some students to appropriately arrange their time to absorb the out-of-class learning content (Lai & Hwang, 2016; Sudria et al., 2018). Despite these challenges, the flipped classroom offers a structured opportunity for learners to repeatedly listen to audio or video materials, which may facilitate auditory word recognition and enhance listening comprehension. The flipped classroom concept is being used in many different fields, such as mathematics, sociology, and humanities, as well as at schools and universities all over the world (Hao, 2016).

Two components of a flipped classroom instruction model are explicit instruction via online or offline courses through video lectures and dynamic face-to-face learning (Fisher et al., 2024). In the flipped classroom, the video lecture is frequently seen as a necessary component (Educause, 2012). However, the instructors and the way they combine the films into a strategy are very important, not merely the videos themselves (Johnson & Renner, 2012; Tucker, 2012). These videos might be found on the internet or recorded by the teachers. In any event, students are free to download them whenever they choose (Halili & Zainuddin, 2015). Bergmann and Sams (2012) provided some recommendations for using video lectures in flipped classes. To begin with, they emphasized eliminating long movies, which just increases the amount of effort required of pupils. They offered that using interactive video lectures can be utilized in a flipped classroom. According to Fisher et al. (2024), class time should be spent on activities that encourage students to collaborate and work in groups. Thus, the flipped

classroom can provide targeted support for cognitive aspects of word recognition, as students engage with vocabulary and listening exercises both independently and interactively.

Despite the significance of listening comprehension, many English language schools in various countries, particularly in Iran, still focus solely on reading and writing abilities, while listening skills are being largely ignored (Sarani et al., 2020). There is a low level of spoken word recognition among EFL learners in Iran, and Iranian EFL learners are confronted with a large variety of problems (Nowrouzi et al., 2015). This highlights the essentiality and significance of investigating instructional methods that can enhance word recognition from speech. In an attempt to find a solution to this problem, the study utilized a flipped learning-based model to develop Iranian EFL learners' word recognition from speech. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the present study is the first to demonstrate the potential benefits of flipped learning (FL) on EFL learners' word recognition from speech (WRS). Hence, this study addresses a clear knowledge gap by combining the flipped classroom approach with the cognitive dimension of aural word recognition. The flipped learning method has evolved as a result of the advancement of mobile technology and multimedia, as well as the paradigm shift toward student-centered learning techniques and the need to train students with 21st-century skills. As a result, demand has grown for recorded lectures or films that may be listened to or watched before the classroom to replace deductive teaching. The flipped classroom allows students to participate in active learning while still covering important course information (Mohammadi et al., 2020). In line with the above-mentioned considerations, the study aimed to investigate the following research question:

RQ: Does the flipped learning-based model have any significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' word recognition from speech?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Flipped Learning

Flipped learning is a powerful method to create an interactive learning atmosphere in which students participate actively. It can also aid learners in discovering through their speed. While watching movies at home, for instance, students can stop, replay, or repeat programs to gain a clearer understanding of the topic. Flipped learning generally helps individuals to make greater extensive use of the resources, which can facilitate the growth of communicative ability. Active learning occurs in flipped learning since class time is saved, and the instructor has much more time to concentrate on active learning and utilize different tasks that require students to participate in educational content (Lee & Lai, 2017). The flipped classroom shifts the teacher's responsibility from delivering material throughout classroom time to directing students via a range of active learning projects (Salimi & Karimabadi, 2020). In flipped classes, the instructors do not teach for long hours while students watch the teaching movies and practice at their own pace (Wu & Wang, 2021). Additionally, teachers struggle more vigorously, facilitate learning, and provide more opportunities for students to practice in the classroom, and motivate them to act either personally or in teams (Khanif, 2022).

In typical classes, lectures and or projects are performed within the classrooms; however, in a flipped classroom, students learn at home by watching videos or slides produced by instructors, and

then practice in the classroom (Amiryousefi, 2019; Overmyer, 2014). Flipped Learning Network (FLN), established in 2012, is a community of flipped learning advocates who endeavor to conduct studies and practices to raise awareness about this method of teaching (Flipped Learning Network, 2014). The FNL (Flipped Learning Network) concentrates on the fact that flipped learning is more than just showing video clips out of the context of the classroom. Teachers are required to include all four main pillars of flipped learning (a flexible environment, a learning culture, intentional content, and a professional educator) to provide a flipped learning context (Zhang et al., 2016). An adaptable learning condition would comprise the utilization of various approaches to help students master learning programs, for example, the integration of technology along with different practices in the classroom. This also comprises the educators' duty to carefully observe the exercises and modify if necessary (Zhang et al., 2016). A learning culture supports the social constructivist foundation of this study and features the significance of SCL and moving the teacher to a more facilitative function. It also comprises the significance of scaffolding and feedback through teaching or helping students reach a higher level of comprehension (Kalina & Powell, 2009).

2.2 Flipped Learning and Listening

Theoretically, flipped learning is based on principles of constructivism and the theory of cognitive load. Constructivist theory lays its emphasis on the fact that knowledge is actively constructed by learners based on experience and reflection (Vygotsky, 1978). It flips the classroom for listening purposes by allowing students to prepare individually, leaving class time free for group and interactive activities that consolidate understanding. Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1994) further explains that repeated exposure to listening materials outside class allows learners to encode and consolidate auditory input in long-term memory, improving processing efficiency during in-class activities. By moving instructional content outside of the classroom, learners are able to engage with listening materials at their own pace, which allows them to pause, replay, and review audio or video resources as needed (Ahmad, 2016**;** Lee & Lai, 2017; Namaziandost et al., 2020). This self-paced pre-class engagement reduces cognitive overload during real-time listening tasks and provides students with additional opportunities to process complex auditory input.

2.3 Flipped Learning and Word Recognition from Speech

Word recognition is perceiving words as phonological forms, linking them to their meanings, and incorporating them into comprehension (Gwilliams et al., 2018). Many EFL learners, including Iranian intermediate learners, know words in the written form, but they do not know how to recognize them in the audio form (Milton et al., 2010) and, therefore, would not be able to understand what is being heard. This challenge could be addressed within the pedagogically suitable framework of the flipped classroom. For example, pre-class resources such as videos or audio recordings might allow learners to repeat vocabulary in context and so develop phonological awareness and auditory discrimination. According to input processing theory (VanPatten & Smith, 2022), listening to these words in a repeated fashion aids learners in the efficient mapping of sounds to meanings and the construction of a strong recognition skill. These materials could have the added advantage of allowing students the freedom to work on some difficult aspects of phonemes and word stress or connected speech patterns, which generally fall through the cracks of traditional classes. The provision of direct listening activities and corrective feedback for interactive practice during in-class sessions will provide scaffolding to learning, thus reinforcing the phonological forms introduced in the pre-class activities, which is in

alignment with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which prescribes the necessity for scaffolding, as well as guided interaction, in the development of cognitive skills (Vygotsky, 1978).

2.4 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The present study is designed based on several theoretical frameworks, which guide the implementation of flipped classroom strategies, student-centered activities, and active learning to enhance learners' engagement and understanding. The first foundational pillar is the blended learning method (Abaeian & Samadi, 2016). Flipped instruction moves the traditional lecture from the classroom to online platforms, using face-to-face class time for real application, thereby saving classroom time (Hill, 2012). The second pillar of the flipped classroom is the student-centered approach (Larsari & Abouabdelkader, 2024). This model shifts students from a teacher-directed environment to one where teachers function as planners, advisors, and coordinators (Ishkova et al., 2021). It emphasizes that each student is responsible for coming to class with a foundational understanding of the concepts, which allows them to actively participate in interactive classroom learning (Fisher et al., 2024). Finally, active learning serves as the third theoretical basis for the flipped classroom (Lemmer, 2013). This concept encompasses various pedagogies that highlight student participation and engagement in the learning process.

2.5 Empirical Studies on Flipped Learning in Language Classes

There is a significant amount of research that demonstrates learners' positive attitudes towards flipped classrooms (Muhuro & Kang'ethe, 2025). Perceptions and attitudes are the formation and development of people's ideas, attitudes, sentiments, values, cognitive tendencies, and perspectives toward an object or circumstance as a result of their experiences (Strelan et al., 2020). Moreover, Rapoport (2013) separated perceptions into emotional, behavioral, and cognitive components. Based on the studies on pedagogical approaches, humans' behaviors are influenced by their perspectives, which are the result of their perceptions of a model's efficacy, attractiveness, and accomplishment (Awidi & Paynter, 2019). Some students believed that using lecture videos as pre-class preparation material helped them better comprehend ideas and that the option to pause and repeat portions of the video allowed them to learn at their own pace (Vaezi et al., 2019). In other words, the instructional methods were more pleasant, interesting, and beneficial (Jafarigohar et al., 2019). Furthermore, with a flipped classroom format, the instructor appears to be more available to offer advice on difficult topics (Ihedioha & Osu, 2012; Lin & Chen, 2016; Van Sickle, 2016). Moreover, this strategy has enhanced learners' communicative skills, notably their ability to communicate mathematical concepts (Fisher et al., 2024; Muhuro & Kang'ethe, 2025).

In general, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies have been used to compare flipped learning to traditional learning or to investigate learners' attitudes regarding flipped classrooms. Basal (2012) explored the effect of flipped classrooms on reading and writing in Yildiz Technical University EFL students. He observed that the majority of participants had positive attitudes regarding employing a flipped learning paradigm.

In another study, Jafarigohar et al. (2019) examined the effects of flipped instruction on the perceptions and performance of 60 Iranian EFL students. The results showed that the individuals in the flipped classroom outperformed those in the control group. The questionnaire findings also revealed that the majority of the experimental group's members were happy with their English

learning through this new method of teaching, and they believed that technological advances improved their listening and speaking abilities. Furthermore, they discovered Telegram as an appropriate tool for language acquisition. Besides, Amiryousefi (2019) found that incorporating flipped learning into EFL classes improved learners' speaking, listening, and engagement compared to traditional instruction. Moreover, EFL learners held positive attitudes toward flipped learning, recognizing its multiple benefits (Shahani et al., 2021).

Given the limited research in this field, the present study aims to address the noticeable gap concerning the impact of flipped learning on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' spoken word recognition, thereby contributing to a better understanding of how this instructional model can enhance learners' listening-related skills.

3. Methodology

The study followed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest comparison group design. It comprised both an independent variable (the flipped classroom paradigm) and a dependent variable (WRS). Moreover, the study was undertaken at a private language institute in Ardestan, Iran, in the academic year 2024-2025. The reason for selecting the institute was that one of the researchers taught at this language institute, and thus, the researcher could conduct the study.

3.1 Participants and Setting

The participants of the current research were 60 intermediate EFL learners who were chosen based on convenience sampling from a group of 150 language learners who were studying English as a foreign language at a private English Institute in Ardestan. The participants were between the ages of 17 and 20. The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) results were used to establish their level of English language proficiency. Based on the test direction, 60 language learners who scored within the range of 30 to 44 were selected as the intermediate participants and were randomly assigned into two groups comprising one comparison group (conventional intervention) and one experimental group (flipped learning). Each group consisted of 30 female learners.

3.2 Instrumentation

3.2.1 Language Proficiency Test

First, the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was employed to choose the participants of the study. The OQPT was composed of 60 multiple-choice items. Based on the OQPT table, 60 learners who scored within the range of 30-44 were at the intermediate level of English proficiency and were chosen as the subjects of the study. In the present study, the researchers estimated the reliability of the test at .83 through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

3.2.2 Word Recognition from Speech Test

The researchers focused on the assessment of word recognition from speech with 2 parallel 60-item WRS tests (pretest and Posttest), based on the previous studies by the experts (Cai, 2013; Matthews & Cheng, 2015). Two partial dictation tests, particularly devised for this study, were used to assess the learners' word recognition. By using this kind of partial dictation test, the participants will be engaged in listening to recognize a target spoken word (Matthews et al., 2015). Each item came with a segment of written text, with the target word's location implied by a blank space. Each item was made up of a single sentence containing a single target term. The pre-test and post-test intervention target words were the same, but each word was placed in a new contextual phrase. The scoring followed the rubrics stated by Matthews et al. (2017). Furthermore, the researcher asked two field experts to affirm the content validity of the test to ensure its content validity. They firmly supported the test's validity in terms of subject matter and assessing learners' spoken word recognition. To measure the internal consistency within the items of the tests, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated. They were .81 and .85 for pre-test and post-test, respectively.

3.3 Research Procedure

Initially, based on the experts' views, the researcher used the Oxford Quick Placement Test in a valid way to choose only participants who were at the intermediate proficiency level. According to the test results, the participants were randomly divided into 2 homogeneous groups, including 1 experimental group and 1 comparison group. The study lasted for 14 sessions over a period of six weeks during the fall and winter semesters of the 2024–2025 academic year, including one session for the OQPT, one session for the WRS pre-test, twelve treatment sessions, and finally one session for the WRS post-test. In the first session, the participants took the WRS pre-test for the assessment of their word recognition from speech. After the administration of the pre-test, the researcher performed the treatment on the experimental group. Considering the treatment, the participants in the experimental group were assigned to the flipped classrooms, whereas the participants in the comparison group were placed in the non-flipped classroom. The flipped classroom included digital equipment for teaching, including an internet connection, a computer, and a projector. Moreover, students were permitted to bring their smartphones to class and utilize them while studying audio files that were distributed to students in the flipped classes. Before entering the class, participants were obliged to review each material and debate it with their peers.

In every session, the teacher elicited information from students by posing some questions or administering a quiz. The teacher also instructed them to listen to the material and express the key information. For instance, after listening to an audio passage, students were asked to summarize its main idea, identify specific details, and discuss them in pairs or groups. In some sessions, they prepared short oral reports based on the audio files and shared them with the class. Additionally, students were asked to review the audio materials before class through their smartphones or personal computers and take brief notes on unfamiliar words or expressions. At the beginning of each class, they compared their notes with peers and clarified their questions with the teacher. In several sessions, students worked in small groups to create mind maps or visual outlines of the content, which they then presented to the class. Furthermore, short online quizzes were occasionally provided before class to check their preparation and ensure accountability. During in-class activities, the teacher

facilitated peer feedback and encouraged students to reflect on their learning process, fostering active participation consistent with flipped learning principles.

The participants in the comparison group, on the other hand, were taught based on the routine instruction of the institute. They listened to the audio files for the first time when they attended the class without applying any of the aforementioned advantages. In other words, they were prevented from using their cell phones and other digital equipment before and during the learning process. The teacher evaluated the participants by asking some questions and taking some quizzes immediately after listening to the audio files. Moreover, the students were corrected by the teacher immediately after making any errors. After that, 12 treatment sessions were completed, and both groups were given the posttest. Then, the results of the pretests and posttests were compared for data analysis. Finally, based on the quantitative results, the research question of the study was answered.

4. Data Analysis

To provide the answer to the research question of the study, the researchers initially checked the assumptions of ANCOVA. First, the primary assumptions of ANCOVA were evaluated. The Scatterplot demonstrated that the correlation between the dependent variable and the pretest was linear. The study's design revealed that the groups were chosen at random, and the samples were independent. In terms of the assumption of equality of regression slopes, it was demonstrated that the covariate did not interact with the post-test scores. The normality assumption was also tested using trimmed means and skewness analysis. Table 1 displays the results.

Table 1

Checking Normality Assumption

			Co.	Ex.
Pretest	Mean		158.35	158.30
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	154.80	154.08
		Upper Bound	161.72	162.32
	5% Trimmed Mean		159.04	159.04
	Skewness		-1.40	-1.18
	Kurtosis		1.40	.03
Posttest	Mean		158.51	165.57
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	155.06	161.37
		Upper Bound	161.95	169.77
	5% Trimmed Mean		159.25	166.38
	Skewness		-1.39	-1.05
	Kurtosis		1.36	-.23

As shown in Table 1, based on Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), the data satisfied the normality assumption as the skewness and kurtosis values fell within the range of ±2. Besides, the trimmed means were within the 95% confidence interval bounds for the mean. Thus, the results indicated that the pretest scores were normally distributed. Levene's F test was then used to assess the assumption of equal variances across the groups. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2

Test for Homogeneity of Variances

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		
	F	df	Sig.
Pretest	1.753	1	.191
Post-test	2.526	1	.117

As presented in Table 2, the two independent groups were found to have approximately equal variances ($p > .05$). The homogeneity of regression slopes was also assessed (See Table 3).

Table 3

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
1.075	1	1.075	.756	.388	.013
5859.915	1	5859.915	4118.447	.000	.987
.462	1	.462	.325	.571	.006
79.679	56	1.423			
1582176.000	60				
6887.933	59				

Note. a. R Squared = .988 (Adjusted R Squared = .988), Dependent Variable: Posttest

As depicted in Table 3, the interaction between the covariate and post-test scores was not significant ($p = .571 > .05$), indicating homogeneous regression slopes. After confirming the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances, and homogeneity of regression slopes, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the test results (See Table 4).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for the Pre/Post Tests

	Groups	N	M	SD	SEM
Pretest	Comparison group	30	158.356	9.243	1.687
Posttest	Experimental group	30	158.300	11.005	2.009

As reported in Table 4, in the pretest, the mean difference between the two groups was only 0.056 points, indicating a negligible gap. In the posttest, however, the comparison group's mean score was 7.066 points lower than that of the experimental group, which had received the flipped learning intervention. Besides, a one-way ANCOVA was conducted to examine how flipped learning affected the students' word recognition from speech. The results can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

ANCOVA Test (Post-Test)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Contrast	763.317	1	763.317	536.472	.000	.905
Error	79.679	56	1.423			

The ANCOVA results in Table 5 indicated that, after adjusting for the covariate, there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups on the posttest, $F(1, 56) = 536.472$, $p < .001$, partial Eta Squared = .905, representing a strong effect size according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines. A paired-sample t-test was also used to confirm the performance of both groups from the pretest to the posttest (See Table 6).

Table 6

Paired Samples Statistics

			Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Comparison group	Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-.23	.67	-1.88	29	.070
Experimental group	Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-7.36	1.51	-26.55	29	.000

As presented in Table 6, the results revealed that the mean differences for the posttest and pretest revealed that word recognition from speech emerging from the flipped learning-based model was higher than the conventional intervention. The P value for the experimental group was < .001 whereas for the comparison group it was P= .070. Given the aforementioned (p) values it was concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group, but there is no significant difference between the comparison group's pretest and posttest.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The study found that adopting the flipped instruction model was beneficial in terms of improving the learners' word recognition from speech. The study's findings supported this viewpoint by using a quantitative methodology. For some reason, it might be claimed that watching movies in advance provides the opportunity to improve the participants' word recognition from speech to a great extent. Participants may have been aware of the difficulty of interpreting spoken English after listening to native speakers. This might prompt them to work even harder to improve their listening comprehension abilities through learning how to recognize words from speech. Actually, teaching aural vocabulary through inverted methods was done deliberately with a good amount of timesaving, as suggested by Yekta et al. (2025). Furthermore, nonverbal communication features such as facial expressions and gestures might help participants enhance their ability to recognize and remember words easily from speech. Different positive aspects of movies, such as the possibility of pausing,

analyzing, and replaying the movies and audio files over and over, could well offer opportunities for students to analyze and interpret the words and content better. Considering these features, numerous studies paid enough attention to the positive advantages of using flipped instruction in EFL classes (e.g., Allahveysi & Aliakbari, 2021).

The results of the study match state-of-the-art methods, although they go beyond previous reports, showing that these methods have different effects on short-term and long-term learning. In line with previous studies (Fisher et al., 2024; Jafarigohar et al., 2019; Shahani et al., 2021; Yekta et al., 2025), the findings showed that applying flipped learning in EFL classes was successful in enhancing learners' short-term learning. The findings verified that this new method of teaching improved learners' word recognition and listening skills. The underlying reason was that learners were naturally willing to be involved in the learning process, and the teachers had enough time inside classes to encourage students to practice as much as possible. In addition, the language learners already had a picture in their minds of the words presented by the teacher. Therefore, teachers' explanations and further reinforcing their understanding of the words from speech through mechanical practice helped them recognize the given words easily. Despite that, many learners are not interested in teaching, and the process is not supported by the teachers' clear guidance (Sudria et al., 2018).

Moreover, the findings were contrary to the findings of Johnson and Renner (2012), who concluded that introducing flipped classroom instruction would not help the computer application curriculum. However, Ihedioha and Osu (2012) believed that the suitability of the teaching approach depends on the type of materials being taught. In the present study, since the focus was on teaching before coming to the classes, flipped learning led to deep understanding and positive results, such as achieving higher levels of recognizing words from speech. The point that should also be noted is that the results of the study should be cautiously generalized, for they are limited to the sample and context of the present study. Taken together, the present findings support the effective role of the use of the flipped instruction model in word recognition from speech, and the results provided clear support for creative and integrative teaching in the classroom despite its pros and cons concerning word recognition from speech through the flipped instruction model.

The flipped classroom required participants to watch videos before attending the classes that detailed the subject of each lecture, which might be a contributing factor to the study's findings. The students had to pay close attention to these films to pass the online quiz and develop a basic understanding of the material so that they could participate successfully in classroom discussions. Making students ready before coming to the class could be beneficial to have more productive and active learning classes. In conclusion, the flipped classroom model appears to have a positive impact on EFL learners' word recognition ability, self-directed learning, and engagement in classroom activities. By requiring students to prepare before attending class, this model fosters active participation, critical thinking, and deeper comprehension of the material. The findings of the present study suggest that integrating flipped instruction into language learning can enhance learners' overall listening proficiency while promoting more independent and reflective learning habits.

The present study has relevant implications for language teachers, learners, curriculum designers, and language institutes to enhance EFL learners' listening proficiency, as well as to promote their long-lasting learning through flipped-based instructions. The results have important implications for language teaching and curriculum development. Teachers can incorporate flipped

classroom strategies, using smartphones and internet-based educational resources, to extend listening practice beyond the classroom and reinforce learners' word recognition skills. Curriculum designers may consider integrating flipped learning elements into language programs to promote autonomous learning and enhance learners' critical engagement with listening tasks. Language institutes can also benefit from adopting such instructional models to improve overall learner achievement and motivation.

This study has some limitations that should be considered. First, it was conducted only with female learners at the intermediate proficiency level, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Results may be different with learners at other proficiency levels, with both females and males. Future research could include participants of different proficiency levels, genders, and educational contexts to explore potential variations in outcomes. Second, the study relied primarily on quizzes; incorporating interview sessions could provide deeper insights into learners' difficulties in recognizing words from speech. Moreover, increasing the sample size in future studies would strengthen the reliability of the findings and allow for broader application across diverse learner populations. Additional studies could also examine the long-term effects of flipped learning on listening proficiency and its impact on learner motivation and engagement. As a final note, the researchers accept full accountability for any errors or weaknesses identified in the current research.

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EFL Learners' Preferences and Perceptions of Written Corrective Feedback: A Case Study of Iranian EFL Learners

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A B S T R A C T

This qualitative study investigated EFL learners' perceptions and preferences regarding written corrective feedback (WCF) in academic writing. Twenty intermediate-level university students were purposively selected based on their sustained exposure to teacher feedback over six months. Semi-structured interviews explored learners' experiences with different feedback types and perceptions. Thematic analysis revealed five key findings: (1) Learners distinguished between explicit and implicit feedback, preferring direct corrections for complex grammar but indirect cues for vocabulary; (2) Metalinguistic feedback was valued when accompanied by explanations, though excessive coding caused anxiety; (3) Focused feedback on specific error types was deemed more practical than comprehensive corrections; (4) Digital feedback was praised for clarity, while handwritten notes were perceived as more personal; (5) Reformulations helped learners acquire native-like expressions, but required explicit comparisons to original errors. Results demonstrated WCF's multifaceted role in enhancing grammatical accuracy, lexical sophistication, writing confidence, and self-editing skills. Participants particularly valued feedback that balanced correction with explanation, targeted persistent errors, and provided positive reinforcement. The study highlights the need for differentiated feedback strategies that consider learners' cognitive styles and affective responses. These findings offer practical implications for optimizing WCF practices in second language writing instruction.

1. Introduction

Written corrective feedback (WCF) has become a central focus in second language (L2) writing research due to its potential role in facilitating language acquisition and improving writing accuracy

(Almanea, 2025, Ellis, 2010; Mao et al., 2024; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). Feedback serves as a pedagogical tool to foster students' critical engagement with academic evaluation, with its efficacy contingent upon delivery methods (Niu & You, 2020; Patra et al., 2022). Böttcher (2011) asserted that feedback is instrumental in enhancing writing proficiency, emphasizing its role in reinforcing strengths rather than merely rectifying deficiencies. Scholars such as Brown (2012) and Zou and Lambert (2017) demonstrate that feedback can take different forms, each making a unique contribution to the learning process.

While corrective feedback has historically been associated with a negative perception due to its emphasis on error identification (Ceman & Dubravac, 2019; Chandler, 2003; Truscott, 1996), empirical studies, including those by Ellis (2009), Esmaeeli and Sadeghi (2020), Hattie and Timperley (2007), Kim and Bowles (2020), and Lim and Renandya (2020), and Mao et al. (2024) affirmed the pedagogical advantages of corrective feedback, wherein instructors systematically address errors and supply correct linguistic forms to support learning outcomes. Existing research on teachers' written feedback predominantly examines instructional strategies and the comparative effectiveness of feedback types (e.g., Benson & DeKeyser, 2019; Esmaeeli & Sadeghi, 2020; Kim & Bowles, 2020; Lim & Renandya, 2020). Lee (2014) advocated for a more holistic conceptualization of feedback as a bidirectional interaction, wherein it functions not merely as an evaluative commentary but as an integral component of the learning environment, fostering constructive teacher-student dynamics.

Scholars increasingly advocate for a needs-based approach to WCF that is responsive to specific learner contexts (Chong, 2020; Storch, 2018). Ferris (2011) argued that to maximize the utility of WCF, students' expectations and preferences must be prioritized. A key step toward this goal is understanding learners' perceptions, as identifying learner preferences helps teachers tailor their feedback to be more understandable (Fitriyah et al., 2024; Leow, 2023). While not the sole determinant of effectiveness, aligning WCF practices with learner preferences is crucial, as it increases student engagement and motivation by acknowledging their needs (Fitriyah et al., 2024; Rasool et al., 2024). Accordingly, this study investigates Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of their instructors' written feedback practices. Learners' perceptions constitute a critical variable in determining the efficacy of WCF for two primary reasons. First, discrepancies between instructors' intentions and students' interpretations may undermine learning outcomes (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010). Second, students' generally positive attitudes toward WCF, as documented in prior research, reinforce its pedagogical relevance and inform evidence-based teaching practices (Ferris, 2012; Schulz, 2001). Despite increasing scholarly interest in perception-oriented WCF studies, significant gaps persist in this domain, warranting further exploration. This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of written corrective feedback?

RQ2: What are Iranian EFL learners' preferences for written corrective feedback?

2. Literature Review

Corrective feedback (CF), defined as any explicit attempt to draw learners' attention to linguistic errors (Ellis, 2008; Polio, 2012), has long been a fundamental component of second language pedagogy, particularly in writing instruction. This pedagogical tool encompasses various strategies that teachers

and peers employ to address errors in accuracy, fluency, and appropriateness (Ferris, 2006; Wang, 2009). The literature generally classifies written corrective feedback (WCF) into several distinct types, including direct versus indirect (providing corrections versus indicating errors), focused versus unfocused (targeting specific versus all errors), and local versus global (addressing sentence-level versus text-level issues) (Ellis, 2009). These feedback approaches share the common objective of enhancing learners' writing competence by reducing errors while improving clarity and self-expression (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Recent scholars have emphasized the significant role of WCF in developing L2 writing skills, with numerous studies demonstrating its positive impact on students' academic performance, self-expression, and communication abilities (Alsamadani, 2017; Graham, 2006; Liberty & Conderman, 2018). As L2 learners often require substantial support to improve their writing proficiency (Saragih et al., 2021; Zhang & Cheng, 2021), teachers must provide clear, concise, and accurate feedback (Vattøy & Smith, 2019). The effectiveness of WCF extends across various pedagogical approaches in foreign language teaching, encompassing both written and oral feedback modalities (Al Hilali & McKinley, 2021; Zhang & Cheng, 2021). This extensive body of research consistently highlights WCF's crucial role in L2 writing development (Xu, 2023).

CF has been systematically categorized in observational studies, with Lyster and Ranta's (1997) typology being the most widely recognized framework. Initially, they identified six distinct CF types, which were later consolidated into two broader categories: reformulations and prompts (Ranta & Lyster, 2007). Reformulations, which include recasts and explicit correction, supply learners with the correct form, whereas prompts, comprising clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition, encourage learners to self-repair without direct provision of the correct answer.

Building upon this classification, Sheen and Ellis (2011) proposed a refined taxonomy based on two key dimensions: explicit vs. implicit and input-providing vs. output-pushing feedback. The distinction between explicit and implicit CF is not absolute but rather exists on a continuum, as the degree of explicitness can vary depending on contextual factors (Lyster et al., 2013; Nassaji, 2009). Implicit CF subtly corrects errors without overtly signaling the mistake, whereas explicit CF makes the corrective intent clear, increasing the likelihood of the learners' noticing (Ellis, 2008). Additionally, input-providing CF (e.g., recasts) offers learners the correct form, while output-pushing CF (e.g., elicitation) prompts them to generate corrections independently.

Within the category recasts are the most frequently employed CF type across various instructional settings (Choi & Li, 2012; Ellis et al., 2001; Sheen, 2004). Sheen and Ellis (2011) further distinguished between conversational and didactic recasts. Conversational recasts, typically implicit, occur when teachers reformulate learner utterances to resolve communication breakdowns, often accompanied by confirmation checks (e.g., "Oh, so he was thin, was he?"). In contrast, didactic recasts, which tend to be more explicit, involve reformulations without any apparent communicative disruption, serving primarily as corrective models.

Research has also explored the relationship between CF types and linguistic error categories. For instance, Choi and Li (2012) observed that grammar and pronunciation errors frequently elicited recasts, whereas lexical errors more often triggered negotiation strategies such as prompts. Conversely, Mackey et al. (2000) found that grammar errors in dyadic interactions predominantly

invited recasts, while pronunciation errors led to more negotiation sequences. These findings suggest that both error type and interactional context influence CF selection.

Research on teachers' written feedback (TWF) in EFL settings has yielded mixed findings regarding students' preferences and the effectiveness of different feedback types. These studies can be grouped into several key themes: (1) preferences for feedback focus and directness, (2) affective responses to feedback, (3) the impact of feedback on writing accuracy, and (4) the role of learner proficiency and error type in feedback preferences. Studies examining students' preferences for comprehensive versus focused feedback and direct versus indirect correction have produced varied results. Some studies have indicated a preference for direct, comprehensive feedback that provides explicit corrections (Diab, 2005; Jodaie et al., 2011; Nguyen & Ramnath, 2016; Saeli, 2019). However, Trabelsi's (2019) study with EFL learners from Oman, Sudan, and Egypt found that students favored unfocused, indirect feedback, as it encouraged self-correction and reduced repeated errors.

Similarly, discrepancies emerge regarding whether students prioritize linguistic accuracy or content and organization. While Chen et al. (2016) found that Chinese EFL learners valued content-focused feedback over grammar corrections, Elwood and Bode (2014) reported that Japanese university students preferred feedback on both aspects. These differences suggest that cultural and instructional contexts may shape feedback preferences. Several studies highlight the emotional impact of TWF on learners. Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) and Mahfoodh (2017) found that excessive corrections and harsh comments led to frustration and demotivation among Yemeni university students, whereas praise enhanced confidence. Similarly, Zumbrunn et al. (2016) noted that some students perceived feedback as negative criticism, particularly when it was illegible, ambiguous, or impersonal. Conversely, Ashrafi and Foozunfar (2018) and Rasool et al. (2023) reported generally positive attitudes toward WCF, especially when it was clear and constructive.

Research on the efficacy of direct vs. indirect feedback suggests that both can improve writing accuracy, but learner perceptions vary. Kim et al. (2020) found that collaborative writing tasks enhanced students' ability to utilize WCF effectively, leading to better final drafts. However, some learners prefer explicit corrections (Lee et al., 2013), while others—particularly more proficient students—favor implicit methods such as error highlighting (Brown, 2009; Kaivanpanah et al., 2015). Studies indicate that proficiency level and error type influence feedback preferences. For instance, Yang (2016) found that recasts were perceived as more effective for phonological errors than for lexical or grammatical mistakes. Additionally, advanced learners tend to prefer less intrusive feedback (e.g., indirect cues), whereas beginners benefit more from explicit corrections (Brown, 2009; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). Rasool et al. (2023) and Rasool and Aslam (2024) further demonstrated that metalinguistic explanations and direct WCF were the most preferred strategies across different nationalities, though perceptions varied slightly by cultural background.

3. Methodology

This study followed a qualitative design to investigate EFL learners' preferences and perceptions of WCF in academic writing.

3.1 Participants and Setting

This qualitative study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select 20 EFL learners (10 male and 10 female) at the intermediate level in a private language institute in Bushehr, Iran. The participants were in the age range of 19-24 and they were homogeneous in language proficiency (B1-B2 CEFR levels verified by institutional placement tests). The selection criteria ensured participants had at least six months of consistent exposure to teacher-written feedback on their academic writing assignments. This prerequisite guaranteed that all interviewees could draw from substantial personal experience when discussing feedback reception and utilization. Recruitment was carried out through the integration of random sampling and voluntary registration, and the final sample was adjusted to accommodate the demographic parameters of the research. In order to ensure ethical research practice, all the participants provided informed consent after being adequately informed about the study's purpose, data collection practices, and rights as research participants.

3.2 Instrumentation

This study implemented semi-structured interviews to investigate learners' perceptions regarding WCF and their preferences for different feedback types. The interviews sought to explore the ways in which students preferred to get feedback from teachers, the types of feedback they found most beneficial to their learning, and what they understood about using feedback effectively to develop their writing capacity. This qualitative approach was particularly valuable in tapping into participants' subjective perceptions and experiences- information that cannot be directly observed but is essential for understanding the learning process (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Merriam, 1998). The semi-structured interview approach was particularly chosen to facilitate open-ended responses, allowing participants the freedom to elaborate on their views and experiences unencumbered by the constraints of rigidly structured questions (Cohen et al., 2007; Patton, 2002).

The interview process was carefully designed to encourage detailed responses while remaining flexible to the follow up emerging themes. Participants were given ample opportunity to share their personal experiences with different feedback types, describe how they processed and implemented teacher feedback, and express their preferences regarding feedback delivery methods. This approach not only provided significant insight into students' perceptions of WCF but also revealed valuable information regarding how learners engage with feedback in practice, offering implications for more effective feedback practices in second language writing instruction.

3.3. Research Procedure

The participants were invited through visits to the classrooms, at the end of the semester. The qualitative data from interviews were first sound-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The transcribed notes were read to the students to ensure that their views were correctly recorded. The researchers were engaged in repeated listening and reading to familiarize herself with the content. An inductive thematic analysis approach was employed, allowing themes to emerge organically without predefined categories. Qualitative content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2002) was utilized, specifically conventional analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which is beneficial for under-researched phenomena. This method enabled direct extraction of insights from participants while maintaining

depth and nuance. The analysis followed structured steps: data preparation (transcription, translation from Persian, and organization), data reduction (condensing information, member checking, and manual coding), and thematic categorization (inductive coding, grouping, and inter-rater reliability checks). The coding process involved identifying meaningful segments, merging related codes, and refining categories through iterative review. Subthemes were examined both vertically and horizontally, enabling cross-comparisons and condensation. The vertical analysis identified subthemes within each interview question, while the horizontal analysis involved comparing subthemes across different interviewees for the same questions. To ensure credibility, the researchers collaborated with a co-rater, achieving a 90% inter-rater agreement, which validated the consistency of the coding scheme. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and redundant or irrelevant data were systematically excluded. This rigorous approach facilitated a structured yet flexible analysis, aligning with the study's objectives while preserving the richness of participants' responses.

4. Data Analysis

Through rigorous thematic analysis, five major themes emerged, each revealing nuanced insights into how learners process, value, and utilize WCF in their language learning journey. The findings demonstrate that WCF serves multiple pedagogical functions beyond simple error correction, influencing cognitive, affective, and metacognitive dimensions of learning (See Table 1).

Table 1

Extracted Themes

Extracted Themes	Percentage
WCF enhances grammatical accuracy and linguistic awareness	70 %
WCF enhances vocabulary and lexical sophistication	60 %
WCF enhances writing confidence and motivation	55 %
WCF encourages independent learning and self-editing	55 %

4.1 WCF Enhances Grammatical Accuracy and Linguistic Awareness

Learners consistently emphasized WCF's crucial role in enhancing their grammatical competence. They reported that targeted corrections helped them identify persistent error patterns, particularly in complex grammatical structures such as article usage, verb tenses, and prepositional phrases. Many participants noted that while they could often recognize errors when highlighted, they frequently struggled to self-correct without explicit teacher guidance. The learners particularly valued metalinguistic feedback that included brief explanations, as it helped them understand the linguistic rules underlying their mistakes. Several participants mentioned developing what they called "grammar radar" - an increased sensitivity to potential errors during the writing process. However, some learners expressed frustration when feedback focused too narrowly on surface-level errors without addressing deeper grammatical concepts.

"The red circles on my articles (a, an, the) were annoying at first, but now I automatically check them before submitting. I can feel my grammar improving." (Participant 4, Female)

"When the teacher writes why it's wrong, like 'past perfect needed here because...', it sticks in my mind better than just seeing the correction." (Participant 11, Male)

"I keep making the same preposition mistakes. The corrections help, but I wish we could do more exercises on these tricky ones." (Participant 19, Female)

4.2 WCF Enhances Vocabulary and Lexical Sophistication

Beyond grammar, participants highlighted WCF's significant impact on their lexical development. They appreciated when teachers provided alternative vocabulary choices, particularly for overused words or inappropriate lexical selections. Many reported maintaining personal "upgrade lists" where they recorded teacher-suggested synonyms and more academic expressions. Learners distinguished between two valuable types of lexical feedback: direct substitutions for incorrect words and enhancement suggestions for grammatically correct but basic vocabulary. The latter was particularly valued by learners seeking to develop a more sophisticated writing style.

"My teacher always writes 'simple word' when I use 'good' or 'bad'. Now I have a mental list of better alternatives like 'beneficial' or 'problematic'." (Participant 6, Male)

"The best feedback is when the teacher shows me how native speakers would phrase something. It's not wrong what I wrote, but there's a better way." (Participant 13, Female)

"I've started using the 'comments' feature in Word to build my own academic phrasebook from teacher corrections." (Participant 20, Male)

4.3 WCF Enhances Writing Confidence and Motivation

The affective impact of WCF emerged as a significant theme, with learners describing complex emotional responses to feedback. While initial encounters with heavily corrected papers could be demoralizing, most participants reported developing resilience and viewing corrections as evidence of teacher investment in their progress. The ratio of positive comments to corrections significantly influenced their motivation levels. Learners particularly valued "feedback sandwiches" where corrections were framed between positive remarks about content or effort. Several mentioned that seeing fewer errors in subsequent assignments provided tangible evidence of improvement, which served as powerful motivation. However, some participants from traditional educational backgrounds initially interpreted extensive corrections as personal criticism rather than pedagogical support.

"When the teacher writes 'good argument here' next to corrections, it makes me want to try harder instead of feeling bad." (Participant 1, Female)

"At first, I hated seeing all the red ink, but now I compare my first and latest essays and see how much I've improved. That feels amazing." (Participant 8, Male)

> *"In my school, perfect papers got gold stars. Here, the best papers have the most feedback. It took time to understand this different approach."* (Participant 16, Female)

4.4 WCF Encourages Independent Learning and Self-Editing

A recurring theme was that learners gradually developed the ability to self-correct their writing as a result of the repeated feedback they received. They reported that over time, they began noticing patterns in their mistakes and could apply previous corrections to new writing tasks. Some emphasized the value of maintaining feedback logs or reviewing previous corrections before submitting new assignments.

> *"Now, before submitting, I check my work for mistakes I used to make. Feedback taught me what to look for."* (Participant 2, Female)

> *"I have a notebook where I write down common errors from feedback. When I write, I check this list to avoid repeating them."* (Participant 10, Male)

> *"In the beginning, I depended on my teacher to correct everything. Now, I try to find my own mistakes first."* (Participant 18, Female)

Regarding learners' knowledge of feedback types, analysis revealed five key types of feedback that provide insights into learners' knowledge of feedback types (See Table 2).

Table 2

Feedback Types

Extracted Themes	Percentage
Explicit vs. Implicit Feedback	65%
Metalinguistic Feedback	55%
Focused vs. Comprehensive Feedback	50%
Electronic vs. Traditional Feedback	50%
Reformulation vs. Reformulative Feedback	45%

4.5 Explicit vs. Implicit Feedback

Learners demonstrated a clear conceptual understanding of explicit and implicit feedback types, though their preferences varied based on language proficiency and task type.

> *"When the teacher writes the correct form above my error, I can immediately see the right way, but when she just underlines the errors, I must think harder to find the solution."* (Participant 4, Female)

"For grammar mistakes, I need direct corrections because sometimes I don't know the rule, but for vocabulary, just marking is enough as I can find alternatives." (Participant 11, Male)

"Indirect feedback is frustrating when I can't figure out the answer, but when I do, I remember it better than when it's just given to me." (Participant 17, Female)

4.6 Metalinguistic Feedback

Participants showed varying familiarity with metalinguistic feedback, with learners appreciating its long-term benefits for language acquisition.

"The 'T' symbol for tense errors was confusing at first, but now it helps me quickly identify the mistakes I make most often." (Participant 3, Male)

"Short explanations like 'use present perfect for unfinished time' help me understand why my answer was wrong." (Participant 9, Female)

"Too many error codes make me anxious. I prefer when teachers write full sentences explaining mistakes." (Participant 14, Male)

4.7 Focused vs. Comprehensive Feedback

Learners expressed nuanced views about the scope of feedback, recognizing trade-offs between comprehensive error correction and targeted feedback approaches.

"When the teacher focuses only on article errors in one assignment, I really improve in that area for the next paper." (Participant 5, Female)

"Seeing every single mistake marked makes me feel discouraged, but I also worry about unmarked errors." (Participant 12, Male)

"Maybe teachers should correct major errors completely, but just highlight minor ones for us to notice." (Participant 19, Female)

4.8 Electronic vs. Traditional Feedback

Participants compared digital and handwritten feedback formats, identifying advantages and disadvantages of each modality.

"Online comments are clearer than handwritten ones and I can easily refer back to them later." (Participant 2, Female)

"Handwritten notes feel more personal, showing that the teacher carefully engaged with my work." (Participant 8, Male)

"Track Changes lets me compare my original and corrected versions side-by-side, which is really helpful." (Participant 15, Female)

4.9 Reformulation vs. Direct Correction

Some learners demonstrated awareness of reformulation techniques where teachers rewrite problematic sentences while preserving the original meaning.

"When the teacher rewrites my awkward sentence in a natural way, I learn how native speakers would express the idea." (Participant 7, Female)

"Seeing multiple ways to say the same thing expands my language flexibility." (Participant 13, Male)

"Complete reformulations are helpful, but I also need to understand what was wrong with my original version." (Participant 20, Female)

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study yielded significant empirical insights into Iranian EFL learners' conceptualizations of both the advantages and typological variations of written corrective feedback (WCF). The results illuminate a multifaceted interaction of cognitive, affective, and instructional dimensions that collectively influence learners' processing and utilization of diverse feedback methodologies. A substantial majority of participants acknowledged WCF's instrumental role in linguistic development, with particular emphasis on its efficacy in improving grammatical precision and lexical acquisition. The emergence of self-reported phenomena such as "grammar radar" development and systematic vocabulary enhancement protocols resonates with Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, positing that feedback facilitates deliberate attentional focus on linguistic structures. These observations find corroboration in Bitchener and Knoch's (2010) seminal work, which established that metalinguistic feedback incorporating concise explanations significantly bolsters grammatical accuracy through enhanced cognitive processing depth.

The learners' progression from error repetition to self-correction aligns with Vygotsky's scaffolding theory (1978) , where teacher feedback initially supports performance before learners internalize corrections. This observation is reinforced by Kim et al. (2020), who found that collaborative writing tasks helped students utilize WCF more effectively, suggesting that social interaction enhances feedback uptake. However, while some studies (e.g., Trabelsi, 2019) argue that indirect feedback fosters greater self-correction, our participants preferred direct feedback for complex grammar points—a finding that echoes Almohawes' (2025), Rasool et al's (2024), Zorah and Fatiha's (2022), Reynolds and Zhang's (2023), and Lee's (2013) results that reported learners preferred their writing to be corrected using unfocused, direct feedback but contrasts with Brown's (2009) conclusion that advanced learners favor indirect cues.

The affective benefits reported in this study, particularly the development of writing confidence despite initial discouragement, resonate with Hyland and Hyland's (2006) work on the emotional

dimensions of feedback. The learners' appreciation for "feedback sandwiches" (positive comments framing corrections) supports Ferris's (2014) argument that balanced feedback sustains motivation. This finding aligns with Almohawes (2024), whose participants also reported that metalinguistic feedback was an engaging and memorable learning instrument that enhanced their motivation. It challenges Zumbrunn et al.'s (2016) more pessimistic view that feedback is inherently demotivating, instead suggesting that strategic framing mitigates negative emotions—a perspective shared by Ashrafi and Foozunfar (2018), who found that constructive feedback fosters positive attitudes.

However, the initial discouragement from heavily corrected papers aligns with Mahfoodh and Pandian's (2011) and Mahfoodh's (2017) findings, emphasizing that excessive corrections can induce frustration. Yet, over time, learners in our study developed resilience, particularly when teachers employed encouraging techniques- a result that diverges from Zumbrunn et al.'s (2016) conclusion but supports Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, as learners' motivation increased when they perceived their own progress.

The learners in this study demonstrated nuanced preferences for different feedback types, reinforcing the idea that error type and learner proficiency influence WCF effectiveness (Brown, 2009; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). Their preference for direct feedback on complex grammar but indirect feedback on vocabulary corroborates Lalande's (1982) argument that feedback should be tailored to error categories. Additionally, their positive response to metalinguistic explanations aligns with Bitchener and Knoch's (2010) findings but contrasts with Trabelsi's (2019) observation that some learners prefer unfocused, indirect feedback to encourage autonomy.

The debate over focused vs. comprehensive feedback (Ellis, 2009; Van Beuningen, 2010) was reflected in participants' divided opinions, with some advocating for alternating approaches based on assignment purpose—a pragmatic compromise not extensively discussed in prior literature. Similarly, their mixed reactions to electronic vs. handwritten feedback support Hyland and Hyland's (2006) argument that while digital feedback is efficient, handwritten comments may foster a stronger sense of teacher care, a factor that Zumbrunn et al. (2016) identified as crucial for learner motivation.

Our findings regarding learners' prioritization of linguistic accuracy over content and organization align with Nguyen and Ramnath's (2016) study on Vietnamese learners but contrast with Chen et al.'s (2016) results from China, where content-focused feedback was preferred. This prioritization of form over higher-order concerns contradicts a body of previous research that advocates for comprehensive feedback addressing all aspects of writing, including content, organization, and overall quality (Almanea, 2025; Rasool et al., 2023, 2024). This divergence underscores Rasool et al.'s (2023) and Rasool and Aslam's (2024) conclusion that cultural and instructional contexts shape feedback perceptions. The Iranian learners' emphasis on grammatical precision likely stems from their exam-oriented educational background, reinforcing the need for culturally adaptive feedback strategies rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

This study's examination of Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of written corrective feedback yields several important conclusions with significant implications for language teaching practice. The findings collectively demonstrate that effective WCF implementation requires a nuanced, multidimensional approach that carefully balances cognitive, affective, and contextual factors in

second language writing instruction. The research conclusively establishes that Iranian EFL learners derive substantial benefits from WCF when it is properly implemented. Participants indicated that WCF is significant in developing their grammatical accuracy, lexical knowledge, and writing fluency, confirming WCF's cognitive value in language development. These benefits were particularly evident when feedback incorporated explicit corrections with clear explanations, supporting the importance of direct feedback for complex linguistic structures. However, the study also revealed that feedback effectiveness is mediated by crucial affective factors- while initial encounters with extensive corrections could be discouraging, learners developed resilience and motivation when teachers employed balanced feedback techniques that combined corrections with encouragement and progress tracking.

A key contribution of this study is its demonstration of how cultural and educational contexts shape feedback perceptions. The strong preference for linguistic accuracy over content development among Iranian learners highlights the need for localized rather than universal feedback approaches. This finding suggests that feedback practices must be adapted to align with local educational priorities and assessment systems rather than uncritically adopting Western pedagogical models. The findings of this study offer significant practical implications for EFL writing instruction while pointing to valuable directions for future research. For classroom implementation, teachers should adopt a differentiated approach to feedback that strategically varies methods based on learning objectives, error types, and proficiency levels. This includes employing direct feedback for complex grammatical structures while using indirect methods for vocabulary and stylistic improvements. Equally crucial is the affective dimension of feedback: educators should frame corrections positively through techniques like the feedback sandwich approach, consistently highlighting students' progress to maintain motivation.

A developmental perspective suggests implementing scaffolded feedback practices that gradually transition learners from teacher-dependent correction to autonomous self-editing through sequenced activities, building error detection and correction skills. This process should be supported by explicit feedback literacy instruction, where teachers dedicate time to helping students understand error codes, maintain error logs, and effectively apply corrections to new writing tasks. Given the contextual nature of feedback effectiveness, educators must also develop culturally responsive practices that align with local educational priorities and assessment systems. The study identifies several promising avenues for future investigation. Longitudinal studies could track the retention and transfer of feedback benefits over time, while cross-cultural comparisons might reveal how different educational systems shape feedback effectiveness.

Ultimately, this research reaffirms that thoughtfully implemented written corrective feedback remains an essential component of effective language teaching. By carefully considering the complex interplay of cognitive, affective, and contextual factors revealed in this study, educators can design feedback practices that simultaneously enhance linguistic development and foster positive learning dispositions among EFL students. The findings suggest that when feedback is strategically differentiated, affectively supportive, developmentally sequenced, and culturally attuned, it can maximize both short-term writing improvement and long-term language learning success.

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Revolutionizing EFL Classrooms in Iran: Harnessing AI Tools for Personalized Language Learning

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A B S T R A C T

ChatGPT and other AI technologies employed in Iranian EFL classrooms can enhance individualized learning but are constrained by technical, cultural, and organizational limitations. The current study examines their effects on students' engagement and individualized feedback in terms of a mixed-methods design comprising interviews, classroom observations, and Technology Acceptance Model-based questionnaires administered among 100 instructors and 100 students. Evidence indicates that ChatGPT increases student engagement through instant feedback and student-focused spaces. Teachers were rated lower in their usefulness by students since they highlighted their individualized learning potential. However, limited internet penetration, inadequate teacher training, and organizational reluctance are among the most significant issues hindering adoption. Successful adoption will require specialized training of teachers, infrastructural planning, and regional AI solutions. Overcoming the challenges will derive maximum benefits from the advantages of AI in EFL learning. This study contributes to debates on AI in education in the Iranian context of EFL with both opportunities and limitations.

1. Introduction

The adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies like ChatGPT in schools has revolutionized the way teaching and learning are done around the world. Such technologies open up the chance for unparalleled personalization in learning, whereby teachers can deliver lessons specific to individual students' requirements (Atchley et al., 2024; Jiang, 2022; Nwoko et al., 2023; Wei, 2023). For English

Foreign Language (EFL) learning, when learners are faced with issues like lack of exposure to naturalistic use, varying levels of proficiency, and the lack of immediate feedback, AI technologies can provide adaptive learning pathways, interactive language practice, and immediate feedback (Arfaie et al., 2024; Fan & Zhang, 2024; Shaikh et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023; Wei et al., 2023). Nevertheless, if it is adopted without direction, these tools will serve to increase existing educational inequalities rather than to eliminate them.

Although AI applications in EFL teaching within advanced technological environments like China, the United States, and Europe have been thoroughly researched (Jamshed et al., 2024; Lee, 2024; Yu, 2024; Zhai et al., 2024), their implementation in Iranian EFL classrooms has not been as thoroughly explored. The Iranian education system is founded mainly on the traditional, teacher-centered approaches characterized by rote memorization, grammatical learning, and minimal communication between teachers and students (Bumbach, 2024; Castonguay et al., 2023; Sadeghi et al., 2022; Shamshiri et al., 2023). Traditional approaches typically do not support individualized learning that is built around learner autonomy, adaptive instruction, and individualized feedback. Personalized EFL learning involves the variation of instruction content and activities to suit the unique needs, levels of proficiency, and learning styles of learners, which fosters greater engagement and improved outcomes in language learning (Derakhshan et al., 2021).

This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the potential use of AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, to provide personalized learning in Iranian EFL classrooms. ChatGPT was selected for this study as it has high availability, low price, and the ability to generate real-time, context-sensitive linguistic interaction, rendering it an appropriate AI tool for learning environments with limited resources (Arantes, 2023; Veras et al., 2023; Worthing et al., 2024).

The current research contributes methodologically by implementing a mixed-methods framework that combines semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and a large-scale TAM-based survey. The combination of qualitative findings with statistical validation provides depth in addition to generalizability, enabling a clearer understanding of the ways AI-based tools are perceived and utilized in EFL learning environments.

Theoretically, the study extends the TAM model to the specific context of integrating AI into the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). By situating the model in a resource-poor, non-Western context, it extends existing theoretical discussions on technology uptake, highlighting the influence of contextual variables such as cultural norms and infrastructural limitations on learners' and teachers' adoption of new technologies.

The research also provides a publication-oriented contribution by translating its results into policy-applicable suggestions for Iranian policymakers and pedagogues. These suggestions are not only confined to the technological requirements but also go on to cover the cultural and institutional subtleties of implementing AI-based instruction in Iran. In doing so, the research bridges the research-practice gap so that its implications are conveyed to inform intellectual discourse as well as practical decision-making.

Despite the promise of AI-driven personalized learning, there are numerous challenges to its implementation in Iranian EFL teaching. Constraints identified in the literature range from a shortage of suitable technological infrastructure, inexperienced instructors, and institutional opposition to pedagogical innovation (Kusuma, 2023; Naderi, 2010). Additionally, AI uptake can be culturally resisted owing to the tendency of traditional education systems to prioritize teacher control and standardized curricula over technology-facilitated, student-centered approaches to pedagogy.

This research also recognizes its scope boundaries. The results pertain to Iranian EFL classes, only allowing generalizability to wider educational environments. In addition, the research only used ChatGPT. By investigating the opportunities and challenges of AI-based personalized education in Iranian EFL classrooms, this study will provide direct recommendations to teachers, policymakers, and AI developers. As AI continues to reshape the world of education, its use cases and limitations will be crucial in developing impactful, inclusive, and sustainable AI-based models of learning.

2. Literature Review

The use of AI tools for educational purposes, especially in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), has gained increasing scholarly attention. AI technologies such as ChatGPT provide personalized interactive experiences in learning that have much potential to revolutionize traditional EFL teaching (Shaikh et al., 2023; Qu et al., 2023). Nevertheless, integration within Iranian classrooms has thus far been scant due to technical, pedagogical, and cultural constraints. This section presents literature on AI-based language learning with an examination of its merits alongside challenges within an Iranian context, whilst informing the discussion of theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) Theory.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: TAM and SRL Theory

Although the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is primarily applied in studies to determine how users accept technology in education, less emphasis is given to AI-based learning in the EFL context. TAM posits that two fundamental constructs determine users' adoption intentions of a new technology (Davis, 1989). First is perceived usefulness (PU), which is the extent to which individuals believe that a particular technology will enhance their performance. In EFL contexts, ChatGPT demonstrates its usefulness in providing instant feedback, custom exercises aligned with students' requirements, and practice conversations in virtual interactions. These factors directly increase teaching and learning efficiency, as observed in recent studies (Holmes et al., 2022; Chen, 2024).

The second factor is perceived ease of use (PEOU), which entails the degree to which a technology is perceived as easy and straightforward to use. Recent studies affirm that while students consider ChatGPT relatively easy to use, teachers find it more challenging. This is mainly explained by the limited exposure and training of teachers to AI-based tools, which serves as a disincentive towards effortless integration into teaching-learning contexts (Baharloo & Miyan Baghi, 2024).

Along with such local attitudes, there are also international factors that are decisive for the adoption of AI in education. Institutional and cultural barriers, such as centralized curricula, lack of

digital infrastructure, and pedagogical conservatism, significantly influence the extent to which teaching can be achieved using AI. Such barriers are particularly seen in the Iranian example, where structural and policy limitations continually hinder the adoption of new education technologies (Kusuma, 2023; Naderi, 2010).

2.2 Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) Theory and AI in EFL

The SRL theory presumes that students regulate their learning process utilizing goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-reflection (Zimmerman, 2002). Artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT are highly compatible with the principles of self-regulated learning (SRL) since they give students the capability to control and keep track of their performance. One system that is at the forefront of this is the provision of instant feedback, allowing students to monitor their performance in the here and now and change their learning strategies accordingly. The immediate response cycle supports self-monitoring and allows learners to refine their language task strategies without ongoing teacher assistance.

The other important feature is the way ChatGPT facilitates autonomous learning. It enables students to practice language skills on their own, at their rate, choosing the level of intensity, extent, and specificity of their exercises. By removing fixed temporal and spatial constraints of classroom education, AI systems can facilitate learners to take more control over their learning activities.

Finally, ChatGPT facilitates SRL through learner-informed learning pathways. Adaptive testing and tailored interaction construct learner-informed practice pathways that enhance self-motivation and self-direction. Personalization has been shown not just to enhance engagement but also to solidify learners' agency confidence over the learning process (Qiao & Zhao, 2023; Pedro et al., 2019).

South Korean and Chinese experiments, where AI-adaptive learning environments are extensively practiced, reveal that students who utilize AI-aided EFL tools are more independent and retain more of the language than those in conventional classrooms (Ateş & Gündüzalp, 2025; Ng et al., 2023). These implementations require comprehensive teacher training and institutional support, which remain in short supply in Iran.

2.3 Benefits of AI in EFL Education

ChatGPT and other AI models have been shown to enhance language learning in a variety of ways. Perhaps most significant is the potential to offer personalized feedback. AI-powered software can offer real-time corrections, grammar recommendations, and pronunciation tips, enabling students to advance their language abilities without waiting for a teacher's feedback. This immediacy not only increases the pace of learning but also supports continuous self-regulation and adaptation, as is confirmed by recent research (Holmes et al., 2022; Chen, 2024).

The second prominent characteristic is adaptive learning routes. Through students' skill levels analysis, AI systems can tailor exercises and materials based on the individual's requirements. This flexibility eliminates wastage due to one-size-fits-all learning. Empirical studies have established that such personalization enhances learner interest, persistence, and performance (Pedro et al., 2019).

AI also enables experiential language learning by simulating real-life conversational contexts. Chatbots like ChatGPT can mimic real conversation, which exposes students to context and pragmatic aspects of language use, something that is difficult to replicate in a controlled classroom setting. Virtual immersion by simulation develops communicative competence and prepares students for real-life interaction, bridging the gap between controlled practice and genuine use (Leng, 2024).

Comparative Studies: China, South Korea, and European studies highlight that AI-driven language learning systems increase student motivation and retention rates (Ng et al., 2023; Shaikh et al., 2023). AI-driven adaptive tutoring systems such as Squirrel AI have been integrated into China's public school system, which has seen measurable improvement in reading comprehension and writing skills (Huang, 2023). However, in Iran, where internet restrictions and AI literacy are less, the same findings remain theoretical rather than practical.

2.4 Challenges of AI Integration in Iranian EFL Classrooms

Despite being full of promise, the implementation of AI in Iranian schools is being hindered by a succession of persistent issues. Perhaps the most significant of these issues is the technological and infrastructural impediments. Many schools across the country lack reliable and good connectivity to the internet, which takes away from the reliability of AI-based learning systems (Hemmati & Aziz Malayeri, 2022). Further, the lack of contemporary digital infrastructure, including hardware and software facilities, particularly in underprivileged schools, deprives the masses from gaining access to AI-powered pedagogical instruments (Kusuma, 2023).

There is yet another impediment in teacher education and pedagogic readiness. Most Iranian EFL instructors have not been given chances for professional growth that would enable them to acquire the skills necessary for effective integration of AI instruments into their courses. This is accompanied by resistance to change: learning traditions of memorization remain deeply ingrained in a lot of the learning environment, and teachers sometimes question the pedagogic value of AI. In some cases, anxieties surrounding potential job replacement further contribute to resistance to implementing such technology (Naderi, 2010).

Finally, ethical and cultural concerns provide an added element of complexity. AI use also raises sensitive concerns regarding data privacy since models dig through and store user interactions, subjecting students to surveillance risks in nations where the internet is highly censored (Arango-Ibanez et al., 2024). Algorithmic bias also remains a significant concern. Because the majority of AI systems are primarily trained on Western data, the ensuing cultural allusions and language usage may be incongruous to Iranian learners' language needs or socio-cultural contexts (Xu et al., 2022).

2.5 Addressing the Research Gap: Why This Study Matters

While AI-based EFL learning software has been widely studied in technologically developed countries, its use in Iran is a critical research gap. Most of the studies focus on the pedagogical potential of AI but seldom investigate practical concerns such as infrastructural limitations, teacher readiness, and socio-cultural challenges in the Iranian educational context (Ateş & Gündüzalp, 2025; Ng et al., 2023). This study tries to bridge this gap by:

1. Applying the TAM model to Iranian EFL classrooms to quantify the attitude of teachers and students towards AI adoption.

2. Investigating the potential of AI in enhancing Self-Regulated Learning among Iranian learners.

3. Providing comparative data from other countries to highlight potential policy and infrastructure improvements needed for AI implementation.

Artificial Intelligence-based language learning software like ChatGPT can potentially transform personalized learning in EFL teaching. Whether they will do so will be a function of whether the completion is technologically ready, the amount of training teachers receives, and cultural acceptability. While research in China, South Korea, and Europe demonstrates measurable improvement in EFL learning achievement, Iran has particular infrastructural and pedagogical challenges for localized AI applications, policy support, and professional training schemes.

By synthesizing TAM and SRL theories, the current study provides a better insight into AI adoption in EFL learning. It offers practical recommendations to Iranian teachers and policymakers on how to deal with AI-assisted learning challenges. This research aimed to evaluate the impact of AI-driven personalized learning in Iranian EFL classrooms through the following questions:

RQ1. How can Iranian EFL classrooms be optimally integrated with AI tools like ChatGPT for maximizing personalized learning?

RQ2. What are the perceived benefits and limitations of using AI technologies for personalized learning from the perspectives of Iranian EFL teachers and learners?

3. Methodology

The synergy of artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT in Iranian EFL classrooms for custom learning is explored in this research through a mixed-methods research design. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits, challenges, and practical applications of utilizing AI tools in this context by integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. The approach is made to take into account the particular features of Iranian EFL classrooms as well as to tackle the research questions. The research uses an exploration sequential mixed methods design that comprises two stages. First, interviews and classroom observations are used to obtain thorough insights into teachers' and students' encounters with artificial intelligence tools via qualitative data. In quantifying a perception of ChatGPT's supposed efficiency in improving custom learning results, the second step is a Questionnaire. Utilizing this two-phase approach, the research covers both the subtle viewpoints of subjects and more general patterns across a larger sample.

3.1 Participants and Setting

This study investigated two primary participant groups: EFL teachers and students in Iran, with a specific qualitative focus on Bandar Abbas city, Hormozgan province. A mixed-methods approach was

employed, utilizing purposive sampling for qualitative data collection and simple random sampling for the quantitative phase.

For qualitative research, five students and five EFL instructors were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria ensured that the participants had prior exposure to using AI tools in learning settings or showed a high willingness to use technologies such as ChatGPT for teaching or learning tasks.

The selection was targeted so that the participants were knowledgeable about AI-assisted language learning, thus providing depth of insight into the challenges and benefits it posed. The sample size was based on data saturation, saturation-the point at which no new themes were able to be presented during interviews and observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The overriding importance of this method is improving the trustworthiness of qualitative findings by ensuring thematic completeness without excessive repetition. Additionally, participants were selected from various schools across Bandar Abbas to ensure diverse institutional perspectives, accounting for variations in AI access, school policies, and teaching styles.

For the quantitative stage, 200 participants were recruited, with 100 Iranian teachers of English as a foreign language and 100 EFL students. Simple random sampling was used in an attempt to improve the ability of the findings to be generalizable within the Iranian context. The sample represented the demographic profile of Iranian EFL learners and instructors in general, with instructors having an average of 33 years and students having an average of 16 years, which are the secondary and post-secondary levels where learning English is predominantly most common.

The screening began with an open call for volunteers made through LinkedIn. Potential volunteers were invited to contact the research assistant, and random sampling was then used to get an evenly balanced representation of both groups, unbiased. The procedure helped reduce sampling bias and obtain an evenly balanced set of analysis respondents from the survey. To validate the sample size, Cochran's formula (Cochran, 1977) was applied, ensuring that the selected 200 participants provided sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful differences in AI adoption between teachers and students.

While random selection was employed to minimize bias, the use of LinkedIn as a recruitment platform may introduce sampling bias. LinkedIn users typically have higher digital literacy and technology exposure than the broader Iranian EFL teaching population. This limitation suggests that the participants in this sample may be more open to accepting AI than teachers in rural or underprivileged schools with limited digital access. Thus, the outcomes may lean towards overestimating AI readiness and acceptance against the Iranian EFL teaching population.

In order to address this potential bias, future research would need to widen recruitment by incorporating an assortment of non-LINKEDIN platforms, such as school visits, national education networks, and offline groups of teachers. Additionally, with stratified sampling, researchers would be able to meet both urban and rural perspectives, therefore having a representative and more balanced view of AI implementation across the Iranian EFL environment.

This study acknowledges these sampling limitations but maintains that the qualitative insights from Bandar Abbas and the quantitative findings from a broader Iranian sample provide meaningful and transferable conclusions regarding AI adoption in Iranian EFL classrooms.

By employing a dual-phase sampling strategy, this study balances specific contextual insights (Bandar Abbas) with broader statistical generalizability (national-level Questionnaire data). While LinkedIn-based recruitment poses some biases, these have been acknowledged and will guide future refinements in sampling methodologies.

This study, in order to offer comprehensive views on AI integration in Iranian EFL classrooms, uses a mixed-methods approach involving both qualitative (semi-structured interviews and classroom observations) and quantitative (Questionnaire-based) data collection methods. This triangulation yields both depth and generalizability, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of attitudes, challenges, and the effectiveness of AI tools in personalized learning.

3.2 Instrumentation

The qualitative phase of the research consisted of semi-structured interviews that focused on the Eastern views of EFL teachers and students toward the application of AI. Through these interviews, perceived benefits and challenges, pedagogical and institutional barriers, and recommendations for integrating AI will be examined. The interviewees were five EFL teachers and five students. They were purposively sampled based on previous experience with AI in education or an interest in AI-assisted learning. Such purposive sampling ensured that the participants had enough familiarity with AI tools to allow for deep insights regarding practical challenges and benefits.

Interviews lasted for 30 to 45 minutes and had a semi-structured nature in that they balanced flexibility with a set series of fixed questions. Interview sessions may be conducted in person or online, depending on the availability of the interviewee. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participant and then transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was conducted using MAXQDA software, which involves quantifying each category of response into "technical barriers," "instructional benefits," and student engagement. This approach was anticipated to gain a rich qualitative understanding of AI integration in Iranian EFL classrooms. Complementing interviews, classroom observations investigate live interactions among learners, instructors, and AI tools such as ChatGPT. The key areas of focus included learner motivation, AI integration issues, and the degree to which AI tools achieve personalized learning.

The observations were made in Bandar Abbas EFL classrooms where ChatGPT or any other AI tool was being used. The observer did not take on the role of a researcher and therefore allowed no interference in the formation of classroom dynamics. The data gathering comprised lengthy field notes on student-teacher interaction, a systematic checklist to determine the level of engagement, and a diary of technical and pedagogical obstructions. Observational data were then thematically coded, identifying general trends and common issues in AI-enhanced learning. With first-hand observation of AI integration, classroom observations provided real-world data that corroborated self-reported questionnaire and interview data, supporting the general research findings.

To quantify the trends of AI adoption, a Questionnaire approach was employed, designed within the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) framework. The questionnaire quantified two significant constructs: Perceived Usefulness (PU) (the extent to which ChatGPT enhances EFL learning) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) (the extent to which participants consider the tool easy to use and user-friendly). The questionnaire surveyed 100 EFL teachers and 100 students, who were selected by random sampling to gain a broad representation from across Iran. The questionnaire included Likert-scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) and open-ended questions in which the respondents could explain their experiences in detail.

The reliability of the questionnaire was ensured by high Cronbach's alpha coefficients, with PU ($\alpha = 0.85$) and PEOU ($\alpha = 0.82$), indicating strong internal consistency. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations), independent-sample t-tests (to compare teachers' and students' perceptions), and Pearson correlation analysis (to examine relationships between PU and PEOU).

This quantitative approach ensured empirical validation of AI adoption trends in Iranian EFL classrooms, enabling statistical generalizability of the findings. A blend of qualitative (interviews, classroom observations) and quantitative (Questionnaire) methods was suitable to allow us to look at a holistic evaluation of the role of AI in EFL education. Interviews provided insightful understandings of students' and teachers' perceptions. Classroom observation captured real interaction in real time, and Questionnaire data quantified larger trends in AI adoption.

This triangulated approach is the most suitable for best practices in educational research, rendering findings data-driven as well as contextually relevant. Qualitative data provides depth to the findings, while quantitative analysis validates trends from a larger sample size, thereby ensuring that the study is methodologically robust. By integrating semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and Questionnaire surveys, the research ensures rigorous data triangulation to provide insights into AI-facilitated personalized learning in Iranian EFL classrooms. The methodological design enhances validity, reliability, and usefulness, thus establishing the study as a valuable contribution to AI-based EFL pedagogy.

For the current study, the researchers utilized a mixed-method design with qualitative (semi-structured interviews and classroom observations) and quantitative (Questionnaire-based) data collection. This methodological design could ensure an all-round and in-depth examination of AI integration in Iranian EFL classrooms through the provision of in-depth qualitative insights and generalizable for statistical purposes.

3.3 Research Procedure

This section covered the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the study concerning the use of AI in Iranian EFL classrooms. For qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five EFL teachers and five students conveniently selected from purposive sampling due to their expertise and willingness to utilize AI-supported language learning. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. They were conducted in person or via video and audio-recorded, coded, and thematically analyzed. It allowed for flexible interaction in discussing AI-related benefits, issues, and related means of implementation.

Some classroom observations were conducted to observe AI integration in real-time. Over one month, there were three different observation sessions conducted in each of the five classrooms in Bandar Abbas. Observations included student engagement, teacher facilitation, AI effectiveness, and existing technical or institutional barriers. Data were gathered via field notes, a structured checklist, and logs of technical issues. The data were then thematically coded to identify patterns in AI-enhanced learning experiences.

The quantitative element of this research involved a questionnaire study based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), centered on the Arguably Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) of ChatGPT. 100 EFL teachers and 100 students randomly sampled from widespread Iranian regions were traced through Google Forms to maintain diversity. Likert-scale and open-ended questions captured participants' opinions on AI adoption, barriers, and expectations.

For reliability and validity, we computed Cronbach's alpha, which showed a high internal consistency (PU = .85, PEOU = .82), hence indicating that the questionnaire could measure AI perceptions appropriately in EFL learning. This mixed method helped to narrow down specific patterns so that AI plays a role in Iranian EFL education, with qualitative insights anchoring the exercise in strong statistical attributes.

4. Data Analysis

A report on the study's results is presented in detail in this section. Both qualitative and quantitative findings were considered and integrated through the process of thematic analysis, classroom observations, descriptive and inferential statistics, and correlation analysis.

4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

MAXQDA was utilized in conducting the thematic analysis, and three basic themes were disclosed: engagement and motivation, individualized feedback, and problems of implementation. The themes were derived from systematic coding, and their characteristics are reflected in Figure 1, a thematic map of qualitative findings.

Participants indicated that ChatGPT increased student engagement and participation in EFL classes. The majority of students found the tool dynamic, interactive, and engaging, describing it as "like having a personal tutor always at your fingertips." Particularly in environments where traditional teaching methods dominate, ChatGPT introduced some freshness, breaking classroom monotony and inspiring learning enthusiasm.

By offering instant, personalized feedback, ChatGPT became the most prized website, as students were able to correct their mistakes within a few seconds and were not made to wait for a teacher's evaluation. Teachers also benefited from the program's application, which reduced their marking workload, allowing them to focus on more participative teaching techniques. One student pointed out, "ChatGPT corrects my grammar in real time and offers enhancements, saving me considerable time." This corroborates earlier international research that identifies the use of AI in advancing self-directed learning.

Despite the numerous benefits, several AI adoption challenges stood out from the study. Among the most commonly mentioned challenges was poor internet connectivity, which is prone to interfering with class work and undermining the effectiveness of AI-based tools. Another issue is the lack of teacher training, as most teachers lack the necessary qualifications to utilize ChatGPT's potential effectively. Institutional resistance is also a key factor, where pedagogical issues regarding curriculum integration and the possibility of excessive overdependence on technology have resulted in educational authorities' hesitation. All these factors are the pedagogical and structural hindrances that have to be addressed before AI can be successfully applied to EFL teaching in Iran.

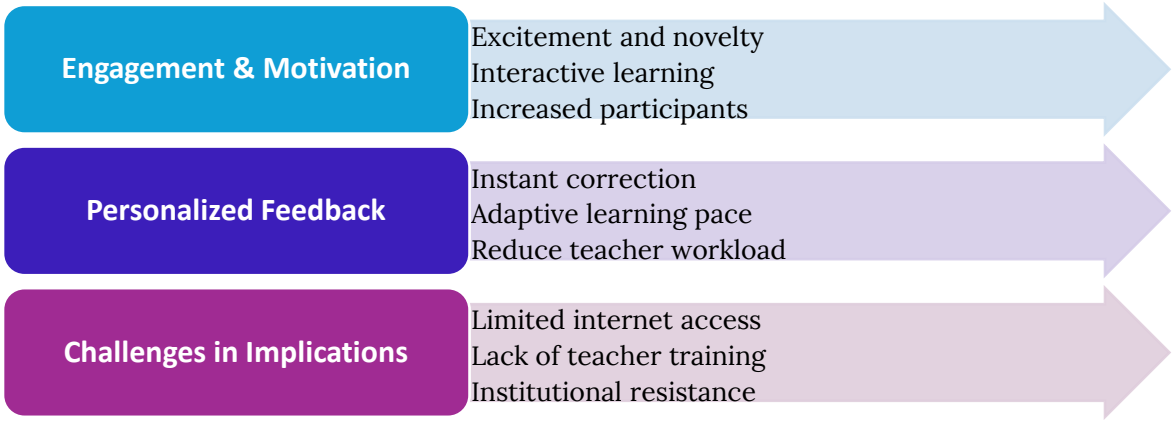
One teacher stated affirmatively, "Whilst ChatGPT is seemingly very promising, most schools are woefully lacking in the technical support to be taught how to implement it successfully." These barriers will have to be addressed before AI can achieve its potential in education.

Classroom observations provided us with first-hand data about how ChatGPT was being implemented inside EFL classrooms. Several positive outcomes were noted. Students were more engaged, cooperating constructively with ChatGPT-supported activities that stimulated interaction, rather than the customary teacher-led routine. Teachers also reported benefits in planning, with the inclusion of AI supporting more diverse and interactive lesson styles. Apart from that, ChatGPT use enabled flexibility in the sense that it allowed customized learning experiences for learners with varying levels of competence, therefore enabling enhanced inclusivity in class.

At the same time, there were some drawbacks. Recurring technical glitches, most of which resulted from unstable internet, hampered the free integration of AI tools in teaching. A second drawback stemmed from compatibility issues between AI-generated responses and already established learning objectives, rendering the use of AI as part of compulsory learning forms impossible. Finally, instructors' lack of experience with AI tools created the pressing need for special training courses to build necessary digital and pedagogical competencies. Presented below is a thematic map of key qualitative findings categorizing responses according to engagement, feedback, and limitation.

Figure 1

Thematic Map of Qualitative Findings



4.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative questionnaire examined participant perceptions of ChatGPT using two primary constructs: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). The findings are summarized in Table 1, which includes effect sizes to indicate the practical significance of differences.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Perceptions of ChatGPT

Construct	*M*	*SD*	Cronbach's Alpha	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	4.21	0.68	0.85	0.72 (large)
Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)	4.05	0.72	0.82	0.65 (moderate)

The results indicate high levels of perceived usefulness (M = 4.21, SD = 0.68), with students and teachers recognizing ChatGPT's role in supporting learning activities. The Perceived Ease of Use score (M = 4.05, SD = 0.72) suggests that users found the tool user-friendly. Effect sizes confirm that both factors had a substantial impact on participants' experiences. To assess variations between students and teachers, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results, including confidence intervals (95%), are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

T-Test Results for Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use

Construct	Group	*M*	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	Students	4.30	2.47	0.015*	[4.18, 4.42]
	Teachers	4.12			[4.02, 4.22]
Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)	Students	4.10	1.38	0.170	[3.98, 4.22]
	Teachers	3.99			[3.87, 4.11]

The results show that students perceived ChatGPT as significantly more helpful than teachers (p = 0.015). However, both groups found the tool equally easy to use (p = 0.170), suggesting familiarity with AI technology was not a significant barrier. A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). The results are summarized in Table 3 and Figure 2, which presents the correlation matrix, including p-values.

Table 3

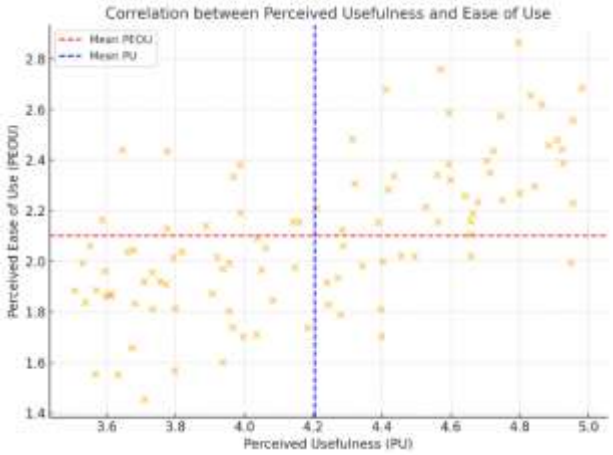
Correlation Analysis Results

Variables	PU	PEOU
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	1.00	0.52**
Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)	0.52**	1.00

Note: $p < 0.01$, indicating a statistically significant correlation.

Figure 2

Correlation Between Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use



A scatterplot with a regression line visually represents the relationship between PU and PEOU. The moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$) suggests that users who found ChatGPT more useful also perceived it as easier to use, reinforcing the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) hypothesis. The findings from both qualitative and quantitative analyses are synthesized in Table 4, summarizing significant insights.

Table 4

Summary of Key Findings

Aspect	Key Findings
Engagement & Motivation	ChatGPT increased student participation and enthusiasm, creating a more interactive learning environment.
Personalized Feedback	The tool provided instant, tailored feedback, reducing teachers' grading workload.
Technical Challenges	Limited internet access and lack of teacher training emerged as significant barriers.
Resistance to Change	Cultural and institutional resistance hindered AI adoption.

The findings of this research indicate that although ChatGPT has the potential to change Iranian EFL students' personalized learning in the classroom, technical constraints, a lack of teacher training, and institutional opposition are serious barriers. Future initiatives must focus on enhancing the infrastructure, implementing targeted professional development, and fostering a culture of transparency around AI pedagogical innovations.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this research offer a comprehensive examination of the application of AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, in Iranian EFL classrooms. They unveil the immense potential for such tools to facilitate individualized learning and point out severe challenges to their application. This section compares the findings with existing research to show comparisons, contrasts, and implications for teaching EFL.

The results indicate that the incorporation of ChatGPT significantly enhances student engagement and motivation, as indicated by comparative studies worldwide. For example, Mohamed (2024) demonstrated that ChatGPT evokes creativity and offers personalized learning opportunities, leading to increased participation and interest in EFL environments. Similarly, Tajik (2025) mentioned that ChatGPT provides interactive feedback, enhancing students' writing and acting as a reliable digital assistant. These findings align with participant descriptions in this study, where ChatGPT was equated with an "available anytime personal tutor," emphasizing its capability to make learning an interactive and dynamic process.

More evidence from overseas studies confirms these findings. Ateş and Gündüzalp (2025) revealed that AI-based platforms like Duolingo heighten the engagement of students considerably by offering adaptive and interactive learning environments. These tools can be particularly advantageous in traditional schooling contexts, such as in Iran, where they help disrupt the dullness of age-old pedagogy. The above advantages do, however, carry some restrictions. Kamali et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of deploying AI tools effectively in Iranian classrooms, which hinges on addressing infrastructure issues and incorporating teacher education programs, which are often lacking in this environment.

While the motivational benefits of AI tools are well-documented, the unique infrastructural and cultural context in Iran presents distinct challenges. Thus, the dependence on traditional instructors and low awareness about AI-powered teaching negates the actual benefits of the tool. Hence, while results conform to international research in greater engagement and motivation, context-specific issues underscore the need for contextual implementation strategies. By surmounting these challenges, AI instruments could be more effectively deployed in Iranian EFL classrooms. ChatGPT's ability to provide immediate, tailored feedback is the research's most significant selling point. This point is supported by past studies suggesting the potential of AI to transform instructional practices.

Holmes et al. (2022) pointed out the way that AI instruments reduce teachers' workloads by performing feedback work while improving learners' outcomes through tailored support. Similarly,

Namaziandost and Rezai (2024) noted that AI tools like ChatGPT cater to the different needs of EFL learners by offering personalized assistance, which is significantly missing in regular instruction. The subjects also confirmed these outcomes. The instructors appreciated the ability of ChatGPT to provide detailed learner-specific feedback, thereby allowing them to embrace more interactive pedagogical strategies. The students commended the assistant's capability to fill individual learning gaps and provide real-time correction, substantiating it as an ideal learning tool. These findings buttress the case that AI instruments can aid learner-centric environments that are more adaptive and personalized.

The study also points out some challenges in integrating AI into underground environments. While respondents appreciated ChatGPT's capability to give comments, technical issues like uneven internet coverage and the likelihood of freezing software became the main hindrances. These challenges are consistent with Kamali et al.'s (2024) observations that infrastructure disparity is among the major deterrents discouraging the utilization of AI in the Iranian environment. In contrast, studies on improved infrastructural facilities, such as Ateş and Gündüzalp (2025), report fewer technical complications and smooth implementation of AI.

This contrast shows the importance of considering environmental factors in the uptake of learning technologies. For it truly to utilize its maximum potential in the provision of individualized feedback, the development of infrastructure and resource sufficiency becomes key to ChatGPT. Future initiatives must be directed towards filling these gaps so that the benefits of AI instruments can be delivered in poor-resource settings like Iran. The study identifies some concerns regarding the use of ChatGPT in Iranian schools.

These encompass limited Internet availability, poor training of teachers, and cultural reluctance to adopt change. These findings corroborate the work of Kusuma (2023), who identified infrastructures and a lack of professional development as two profound obstacles to technology adoption in Iranian schools. Similarly, Naderi (2010) has reported institutional resistance to practical and creative methods of teaching, often due to cultural and systemic constraints. Whereas the earlier studies on such issues have been inclined to describe them in broad terms, the current study provides some examples of their incidence in practice.

The respondents explained how their classes would often be disrupted by extremely slow internet, discouraging the students and teachers from utilizing the web-based tool of ChatGPT effectively. The teachers further stated that they lacked faith in incorporating AI into their curricula due to inadequate training. This highlights the need for sufficient time and resources to be allocated to teachers' professional development courses, which can adequately prepare them to use AI tools in classrooms. However, there was a second principal barrier to change: cultural resistance. Some educators are cynical about the reliability and suitability of AI technologies for the traditional lesson. The skepticism is generally based on a lack of knowledge of what AI can offer or a struggle to meet existing curriculum and pedagogic objectives. Cultural and institutional hindrances in these cases need to be bridged to establish a climate of devotion to innovation and technology infusion.

Therefore, a multidimensional approach has to be constructed to deconstruct the barriers. This framework would challenge the path of technology, train teachers in it, and embrace an open attitude toward innovations. By removing these barriers, the whole potential of AI tools like ChatGPT

would be unleashed to promote learning performance and revolutionize teaching methods in Iranian EFL courses.

The perceptual gap in the usefulness of ChatGPT between teachers and students is significant, with students giving a much higher rating. This is in line with Davis's Technology Acceptance Model of 1989, where perceived usefulness and ease of use are two constructs that most determine the acceptance of technology. Students reacted very sensitively to the immediate academic benefits of ChatGPT: it was interactive, and hence, personalized learning was possible.

The significant positive correlation ($r = 0.52$) that was developed between perceived usefulness and ease of use provides further support for TAM, which indicates the significance of user-friendly tools as significant determinants of technology acceptance. The findings also support Venkatesh and Bala's Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (2008), where friendly technologies serve as strong enablers for technology acceptance by allowing for integration into the practice of the individual and the institutional regime.

However, extrinsic factors, infrastructures, and societal pressures also play a role; they are just as relevant in shaping mindsets towards AI tools. These include diminished training, school-imposed arrangements, and distrust of institutions, which are reflected in teachers' abysmal scores on the usefulness of ChatGPT. Such types of trends have also been addressed by Zheng et al.(2023), who established the existence of high resource availability and social pressure on the use of educational technology in low-resource environments. External factors like these are crucial to be fulfilled to create an enabling environment to ensure that teachers have a more positive view of AI tools. On the other hand, such inherent variables as usability, perceived value, availability of supporting infrastructure, and acceptance by peer educators must be considered to realize the maximum potential of integrating AI tools in education. Schools must foster a favorable climate that encourages educators to address the disparity between students' perceptions of ChatGPT and educators' perceptions.

The findings of the current research have sparked considerable interest in the international community regarding the positive applications of AI in learning, specifically its potential to foster student interaction and implement effective feedback mechanisms. Pedro et al. (2019) and Holmes et al. (2022) also summarized such potential into creating interactive, adaptive learning environments to enhance students' motivation and learning outcomes.

The research indicated that such cultural and infrastructural barriers, as revealed here, do so more compellingly in Iran: this is a strong indication of the need for solutions with roots. Restricted internet use, low quality of teachers, and unwillingness to change are reported to represent important challenges for AI implementation, highlighting the more pronounced necessity of a facilitating environment for technology take-up. Another fascinating result of this study is that, while students found ChatGPT more useful than teachers, the opposite result has been reported in specific Western research in which teachers have historically led technology implementation.

Ateş and Gündüzalp (2025) consider this to be a result of more institutional support and teacher training in educationally rich environments. In the case of Iran, this difference can be understood in terms of intergenerational differences, i.e., how differently successive generations of teachers evolved in terms of using technology and the relative emphasis on teacher professional

development. These findings highlight the importance of context-specific measures to adopt AI. Addressing infrastructural deficits, providing teacher training on using AI tools individually, and sensitizing educators to students' technology use would go a long way in effectively integrating AI tools in Iranian EFL classrooms. Encouraging student-teacher collaboration will further bridge the gaps in perception and provide an integrated and effective learning environment.

With a focus on their capacity for personalized learning and the problems of their implementation, this research explored the incorporation of AI tools such as ChatGPT in Iranian EFL classrooms. The results offer practical information about how teachers and students view artificial intelligence tools and the realistic consequences of their implementation in a resource-limited environment. The research questions, theoretical and practical implications, and recommendations for future research are all thoroughly explained in the very detailed solution presented below.

Implications suggest that ChatGPT could be effectively implemented in Iranian EFL classes to facilitate personalized learning by providing immediate feedback, adapting to individual learning needs, and enhancing student participation. The tool's capability to provide tailored feedback and build interactive learning sessions was cherished by students as well as educators. Effective integration, however, necessitates surmounting daunting obstacles such as limited internet connectivity, poor teacher training, and opposition to change. Teachers can use ChatGPT to the best of their abilities to enhance individualized learning in Iranian EFL classrooms through teachers' training, building technological infrastructure, and creating localized AI solutions.

They identified research that shows students and teachers alike find ChatGPT very helpful for personal teaching, specifically in its capacity to offer immediate feedback, cater to several levels of learning, and stimulate motivation. They also suggested several difficulties, including technical problems, language differences, and dependency on AI. The need for customized programs to guarantee optimal and balanced uses of AI tools in the teaching of EFL is supported by these difficulties. Overcoming these problems will involve an interdisciplinary endeavor on the part of educators, policymakers, and technology developers.

Transposing the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to the Iranian EFL context, this research adds to existing research on artificial intelligence in education. The findings corroborate the model's contention that Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) are key determinants of technology acceptance. The research further highlights the imperatives of forces from outside in the form of social influence and facilitating conditions that play a considerable role in precipitating technology adoption in resource-limited environments. Such theories promote the consolidation of theoretical knowledge about AI assimilation in schooling and place more focus on context-dependent models for consideration of both infrastructural and cultural variables.

The research puts particular stress on the enormous possibilities AI tools such as ChatGPT hold for transforming EFL teaching in Iran and other similar contexts. On top of this, it provides instructors, policymakers, and researchers with realistic information, enabling them to effectively utilize AI while minimizing drawbacks and addressing limitations and ethical concerns.

AI adoption in Iranian EFL teaching requires specific professional development, infrastructure investment, and culturally tailored AI solutions. Professional development schemes should take into account technical as well as pedagogical training for teachers in order to integrate AI without

replacing conventional instruction. Infrastructure upgrades, including robust internet and digital resources, must be adopted to ensure equitable access to AI, particularly in rural areas. Along with that, localized AI tools with support for two languages and local content can make them more powerful. There has to be a balanced equation with AI complementing, not replacing, teacher instruction by enhancing critical thinking and social interaction.

Ethical issues should also be addressed, such as AI bias, data privacy, and AI over-reliance by students. Responses generated by AI should be tracked for cultural correctness, and privacy protection measures should be enforced to ensure the safeguarding of sensitive student information. Future studies should investigate the impact of AI in diverse learning environments while avoiding self-reported biases, differences in technological competency, and regional differences in digital connectivity. Extension of research to more than one province will provide a clearer picture of the place of AI in EFL teaching across Iran.

Subsequent research on Iranian EFL learning with AI can assess the long-term impact on students' proficiency, memorability, and grades after six months or more. Further research in rural locations would create the challenging level of Internet learning required to affect the desired interventions. New models for trainer training will need to be built if the introduction of AI is to be sped up, with a greater focus on pedagogy and technology instruction. Successful implementation requires the localization of AI tools to meet cultural and education-focused expectations, including bilingual demands, as a significant priority. The issue of ethical concerns over data privacy, discriminatory algorithms, and technological reliance also must be discussed to enable the ethical application of AI. Comparative studies among various locales and education systems can also identify the most effective utilization of AI in poor contexts.

The application of AI in Iranian EFL education must take precedence when it comes to pedagogical value and ethics. AI technology, such as ChatGPT, can be leveraged to engage students, personalize learning, and tackle longstanding challenges like inadequate infrastructure and insufficient teacher support. AI will not work, however, if it is not simple, culturally accommodated, and endorsed by the institution's policy. Improved resource coordination and collaboration among educators, researchers, and policymakers are of critical significance to enable ethical and equitable utilization of AI to augment the language ability sets of the students in order to achieve their educational and professional success as the preferred goal.

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Strategies of Using the Sich/Reflexive Verbs in German and Arabic: Implications for Language Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is dedicated to the implications for language teaching and learning of reflexive verbs in German and how they are interpreted in Arabic. Reflexive verbs are very common in German, whereas they are not used in the same way in Arabic. These verbs represent a significant portion of the German language. They include verbs that take direct objects (accusative case) as well as indirect objects (dative case). The list of reflexive verbs comprises more than 40 verbs in total. In this paper, the authors present strategies for dealing with such verbs in Arabic and explain how their meanings are conveyed, despite the absence of equivalent reflexive structures in the Arabic language. Furthermore, the paper offers guidance for teachers, learners, translators, and syllabus designers on how to introduce these verbs effectively in curricula. It also discusses methods to help learners of both languages understand the concept clearly, avoiding any ambiguity.

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1. Introduction

The need for a transfer grammar is indispensable when working with languages where the syntactic constructions used to express a given meaning in one language differ radically from those used to express the same meaning in the other language (Bross, 1962; Fandrych & Tallowitz, 2000). Clear and Concise: Basic Grammar for German as a Foreign Language in 99 Steps. Velcro.). Under such circumstances, if mechanical translation is to be realized, some sort of exhaustive formal list of the constructions in the output language which are equivalent to the constructions in the input language

is needed (Ammon, 2015; Forouzani, 2019). The compilation of such a list will, admittedly, be a laborious and tedious task. Learners of a new language find it easy when there are similarities between their language and the new language (Abdulhadi, et al., 2023). On the other hand, the new language becomes difficult when there are differences and difficulties increase when the difference becomes more paramount (Baker, 2011). One of the features of German language is the extensive use of the dative case. This case is not as common in the Arabic language. Hence, German learners of Arabic and Arab learners of German find challenges when the matter comes to the dative case (Garrett, 2010; Stantcheva, 2018). The present paper is based on analyzing the various grammatical situations in which reflexive verbs are used in German and on rendering these verbs into Arabic.

Reflexive verbs in German are interpreted and dealt with in Arabic in different ways. Reflexive verbs pose an important linguistic issue not only between German and Arabic, but also between German and other languages (Alexiadou & Schäfer, 2014). Hendriks et al (2014) indicate that there are two types of reflexive forms, a weak form (zich in Dutch and sich in German) and a strong form (zichzelf in Dutch and sich selbst in German) in standard Dutch and German (Oya, 2010). The choice between the two reflexive forms in Dutch has been explained by the selectional restrictions of the verb, distinguishing among three verb classes of inherently reflexive verbs, accidentally reflexive verbs, and transitive verbs (Fisher, et al., 1996; Swick, 2008). The same three verb classes can be distinguished in German, suggesting that the factors governing reflexive choice in Dutch and German are similar (Edwards, 2011; Ellis, 2002). However, several studies have pointed out that Dutch 'zich' is more restricted in its use than German 'sich'. Comparing similar sentences across the two languages, an overall preference for the strong reflexive in Dutch but an overall preference for the weak reflexive in German can be observed (Schmitt, 2002). German is distinguished by having the kind of verbs called reflexive verbs (Affum, et al., 2024). Reflexive verbs are verbs with a pronoun that relates to the subject of the sentence (De Alencar, et al., 2005). These reflexive verbs are very common in German (Bobzin, 1980). In comparison with Arabic, such verbs are expressed in different ways (Noun Cases in German: The dative case, 2004); more of these ways within the context and not through using any reflexive verb (Jack, 2014; Tschirner, 2006; Timmermans et al., 2004). For example, when someone wants to be polite in German, and he wants to thank someone else, he would say:

Ich bedanke mich bei Ihnen

In Arabic the translation of this sentence is:

أشكرك شكرا جزيلا (Thank you very much)

This is the normal and natural translation in Arabic, but if we translate the German sentence literally into Arabic, the translation will be:

أنا اتمشكرني لديك (I thank myself for you)

This is a funny and wrong translation because it is never used in Arabic like this. In another example, German distinguishes between the difference between the words "heiraten" and "verheiraten".

"heiraten" ist die aktive Handlung, etwas zu tun, also selbst eine Ehe einzugehen, während "verheiratet sein" der Zustand ist, verheiratet zu sein, und "sich verheiraten" bedeutet, dass eine Person aktiv die Eheschließung veranlasst.

"الزواج" هو الفعل النشط المتمثل في القيام بشيء ما، أي الدخول في زواج، في حين أن "الزواج" هو حالة الزواج، و"الزواج" يعني أن شخصًا بنفسه آخر يرتب بنشاط حدوث الزواج (أي يتزوج أو يزوج نفسه).

("To marry" is the active act of doing something, that is, to enter into marriage, while "to be married" is the state of being married, and "to marry oneself" means that a person actively arranges for the marriage to take place.)

The words “heiraten” and “sich verheiraten” are expressed in Arabic in one word “يتزوج”.

Due to the fact that such reflexive verbs are expressed in different ways in Arabic, a number of difficulties arise for German learners of Arabic and Arab learners of German. Besides, translators and machine translation may make different mistakes in this regard (Dudin, 2022).

2. Methodology

This study adopts the comparison approach in both languages. The examples are translated into Arabic, and the comparison is made to see how Arabic conveys reflexivity in German.

3. Data Analysis

The reflexive word or pronoun in German differs according to the noun in the sentences. For example, the pronoun “Ich أنا” (I) takes “mich” as in the sentence Ich wasche mich (I wash). The noun/pronoun “Er هو ” (he) takes “sich” as in Der Arzt/Er setzt sich (The Dr sat.) ; The noun/pronoun “sie هي” (she) takes also “sich” as in sie erkältet sich (She caught a cold); the pronoun “Es” هو/هى(it) also takes “sich” as in Das Kind duscht sich (The child took a shower). So, the third person singular all take the reflexive pronoun “sich”. The other pronouns take different reflexive words as one can see in the first example where “ich” takes “mich”. The first person pronoun “Wir” نحن (we)takes “uns”نحن (us) as in Wir duschen uns (We took a shower); the second person singular pronoun “Du” انت (singular you) (takes dich as in Du meldest dich zum Deutschkurs an (You registered yourself in the German course) ; the second person plural pronoun “ihr” انتم (plural you) takes the word “euch” انتم (plural you) as in ihr fühlt euch heute nicht gut (You do not feel good today) ; the third person plural pronoun “Sie هم (they) takes the reflexive pronoun “sich” as in the sentence Wir möchten uns über die Universität erkundigen (We want to inform about the university); the last pronoun is the one used for politeness in addressing someone which is “Sie حضرتك ” (The polite form of you) with capital letter as to distinguish it from the third person singular female pronoun “sie” which is written with the small letter. However, the reflexive pronoun which is used here is the same with the female third person pronoun “sich” as in the sentence Sie duschen sich (You take a shower). Hence, the reflexive pronouns with their Arabic equivalents in German can be summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Reflexive Pronouns with their Arabic Equivalents in German

Pronoun	Reflexive pronoun	Arabic
ich	mich	أنا I
du	dich	أنت You
er	sich	هو He
sie	sich	هي She
es	sich	هو/هي لغير العاقل It
wir	uns	نحن We
ihr	euch	أنتم You
Sie	sich	هم They
Sie	sich	حضرتكَ/حضرتكِ/حضرتكم You (Polite)

Here, in Table 2, a list of all reflexive verbs in German and their Arabic counterparts is presented.

Table 2

All Reflexive Verbs in German

Reflexive Verb in German	Arabic Equivalent	English
Sich ausruhen	يرتاح	To rest
Sich bedanken	يشكر	To thank
Sich beeilen	يسرع	To hurry
Sich befinden	يجد نفسه/يشعر	To find oneself
Sich beschweren	يتذمر	To complain
Sich einigen	يتفق	To agree
Sich entschließen	يقرر	To decide
Sich ereignen	يحدث	To happen
Sich erkälten	يصاب بالبرد	To get cold
Sich erkundigen	يستفسر	To inquire
Sich freuen	يسعد بـ	To be happy
Sich irren	يخطئ	To make a mistake
Sich verabreden	يتنازل	To surrender
Sich verlieben	يقع في الحب	To fall in love
Sich wundern	يتساءل	To wonder

sich anmelden	يسجل	To register
Sich anziehen	يلبس	To get dressed
Sich ärgern	يغضب	To be angry
Sich aufregen	ينزعج	To be bothered
Sich beherrschen	يسيطر على نفسه	To control
Sich beruhigen	يهدأ	To relax
Sich beschäftigen	ينشغل	To be busy
Sich bewegen	يتحرك	To move
Sich entschuldigen	يعتذر	To apologize
Sich fürchten	يشعر بالخوف	To be afraid
Sich hinlegen	يستلقي	To lay
Sich langweilen	يشعر بالملل	To feel bored
Sich treffen	يلتقي	To meet
Sich verabschieden	يوَدِّع	To see off
Sich verletzen	يؤذي نفسه	To harm oneself
Sich verstehen	يفهم	To understand
Sich verteidigen	يدافع عن نفسه	To defend
Sich etw. ansehen	ينظر إلى شيء	To look at something
Sich etw. ausdenken	يفكر في شيء	To think of something
Sich etw. merken	يتذكر شيئا	To remember
Sich etw. rasieren	يحلق	To shave
Sich etw. vorstellen	يتخيل شيئا	To imagine
Sich etw. waschen	يغسل شيئا	To wash

* Schmitt, Dreyer Lehr – und Übungsbuch der deutschen Grammatik (2002)

The list above can be divided into three groups of reflexive verbs, which are explained in the following sections.

3.1 The First Group of German Reflexive Verbs

The first group includes the reflexive verbs that are used with a reflexive pronoun in the accusative case and they make one unit of a two-part verb (the verb and the accusative pronoun). It includes the following verbs:

Table 3

The First Group of German Reflexive Verbs

Reflexive Verb in German	Arabic Equivalent	English
Sich ausruhen	يرتاح	To rest
Sich bedanken	يشكر	To thank
Sich beeilen	يسرع	To hurry
Sich befinden	يجد نفسه/يشعر	To find oneself
Sich beschweren	يتذمر	To complain
Sich einigen	يتفق	To agree
Sich entschließen	يقرر	To decide
Sich ereignen	يحدث	To happen
Sich erkälten	يصاب بالبرد	To get cold
Sich erkundigen	يستفسر	To inquire
Sich freuen	يسعد بـ	To be happy
Sich irren	يخطئ	To make a mistake
Sich verabreden	يتنازل	To surrender
Sich verlieben	يقع في الحب	To fall in love
Sich wundern	يتساءل	To wonder

Each reflexive verb will be analyzed and explained how its meaning is conveyed into Arabic. An example will also be given in German, and the example will be translated into the natural Arabic to see how the reflexive meaning is conveyed into Arabic.

The first reflexive verb “Sich ausruhen” means “يرتاح” (to take a rest) in Arabic. It is used in German as in the following sentence: Meine Augen müssen (**sich**) ein wenig **ausruhen**.

The Arabic translation would be: تحتاج عيني أن ترتاح قليلاً (My eyes need to rest)

In this example, the reflexive verb „sich ausruehn“(rest oneself) is translated into Arabic without any reflexive word; in other words, using **Almasder Almuawwal** in Arabic "أن ترتاح" (to take a rest) is the equivalent to convey the meaning. There are definitely other ways in Arabic to express the meaning.

The verb “Sich bedanken“(thank) is mentioned above and the sentence “Ich bedanke mich.” (Thank you) is translated into Arabic as “أنا اشكرك”. One can see here a difference between German and Arabic in the expression of thanks through using different pronouns; in German the reflexive verb uses the reflexive self-pronoun “mich” (me) whereas in Arabic the accusative connected pronoun “ك” (you: to show the accusative object) is used as equivalents.

The German verb “Sich beeilen“means in Arabic: يُسرِع (haste) and it is used in German as in the following sentences:

Sie muß **sich** mit ihrem Einkauf **beeilen**. The translation in Arabic would be:

عليها أن تسرع في التسوق (She should haste in shopping). Thus, here again Almsadar Almuawwal in Arabic is used as an equivalent to the reflexive verb (sich beeilen)

The verb (sich befinden) means in Arabic يجد نفسه (find himslef). It is used in German as in the example below:

Wie **befinden** Sie **sich** heute? Which can be translated into Arabic as:

كيفَ تجدُ نفسك اليوم؟(How do you find yourself today?)

In this example, we find that the word (نفسك) (yourself) is used in Arabic, and it is similar to the German expression because this is a “self” word in Arabic like the word “sich” in German. So, this German verb can be translated into Arabic using the same construction of the German language.

The verb (sich beschweren) means in German sich beklagen (complain) and in Arabic أو يتَذمَّر يشتكي and it is not used in Arabic with any reflexive word like (نفسك). For example, the sentence:

Nichts gegen Frank, aber regelmäßig **beschweren sich** Frauen über derartig taktlose

لا يوجد شيء ضد فرانك، ولكن النساء **يشتكين** بانتظام من هذا التصرف غير اللائق

(There is nothing against Frank, but women complain regularly about this impolite behavior)

The reflexive verb beschweren sich is translated simply into Arabic by the word يشتكين without any other words. If the German learner of Arabic wants to use such a sentence, he might make a common mistake saying:

لا يوجد شيء ضد فرانك، ولكن النساء **يشتكين أنفسهم** بانتظام من هذا التصرف غير اللائق

(There is nothing against Frank, but women complain **'themselves'** regularly about this impolite behavior)

And the meaning will be vague in Arabic or even ambiguous as someone might think that they are complaining about themselves not about Frank's behavior.

The verb (sich einigen) means in Arabic يتفق مع (agree) and here one can see that the preposition مع in Arabic which means (with) is used to compensate for the meaning of the reflexivity in the German verb as in the example below:

Beide Parteien müssen **sich einigen**, um weitere Konflikte zu vermeiden.

يجب على الطرفين **الاتفاق مع** بعضهم البعض لتجنب المزيد من الصراع.

(Both parties should agree to avoid more conflict).

There can be more than one translation for such a sentence, but this is a natural translation in which the preposition is used to compensate for the reflexive verb sich einigen.

The verb (sich entschließen) means in Arabic يقرر (decide) and it is used in German as a reflexive verb as in the following example:

Wir **entschließen uns**, es in der uns empfohlenen Herberge zu versuchen.

In Arabic, the reflexivity disappears whereas its meaning remains in the internal meaning of the Arabic verb and it is in this case similar to the previously explained verb (sich beschweren). The translation of this example in Arabic would be:

قررنا تجربة النزل الذي أوصى به لنا.

(We decided to try this hotel that he recommended).

The verb in Arabic قررنا means we decided, and there is no translation of German reflexive verb (uns) here. The reflexivity in included in the meaning of the Arabic verb.

The reflexive verb "sich ereignen" (to happen) has the Arabic equivalent (يحدث/يقع); it is used as in the following sentence:

Sie müssen doch fürchten, daß **sich** jederzeit eine Katastrophe wie bei dem Brand in der Schweizer Chemiefirma Sandoz 1986 **ereignen** kann. (Adopted form Der Spiegel)

لا بد أنك تخشى أن **تقع** في أي لحظة كارثة مثل الحريق الذي اندلع في شركة ساندوز السويسرية للكيماويات عام ١٩٨٦.

(You are arfraid that a disaster might happen at any time like the fire which happened in the Swiss company for chemicals 1986)

This example shows that the German verb "sich ereignen" has no reflexive equivalent in Arabic. In this case the context or the verb itself conveys the reflexivity in addition to the context itself.

The next verb is (sich erkälten) (to catch a cold) which means in Arabic (يُصاب بالبرد). This verb in Arabic comes usually with the word (يُصاب) (catch). So, here, it is a collocation in Arabic that conveys the meaning of the German verb. The example below shows this equivalency:

Wer nass wird, könnte **sich erkälten**, wer **sich erkältet**, ist weniger leistungsfähig, braucht Pflege und konsumiert weniger (Adopted from Neue Zürcher Zeitung (1994))

أي شخص يتبلل قد يُصاب بنزلة برد، ومن يُصاب بها يكون أقل إنتاجية، ويحتاج إلى رعاية، ويستهلك أقل.

(Any person getting wet might catch a cold and then he will be less productive and need care)

The reflexive verb erkälten is translated into Arabic as يُصابُ بنزلة برد and so here the collocation in Arabic يصاب بالبرد compensates for the meaning of reflexivity.

The verb (sich erkundigen) (to inform about sth) means in Arabic يستفسر عن. The equivalent verb in Arabic is usually accompanied with the preposition عن (about) so the collocation in Arabic which consists of the verb and the preposition is used to compensate for the reflexivity in German. This can be illustrated through the following example:

Ausländer aus der ganzen Stadt, vor allem Afrikaner, kamen zur Brandstätte, um sich nach Freunden und Verwandten zu erkundigen (Adopted from Die Tageszeitung (1996)

تَوافدَ أجانبٌ من جميع أنحاء المدينة، وخاصةً أفارقة، إلى موقع الحريق للاستفسار عن أصدقائهم وأقاربهم.

(Foreigners from all the cities especially Africans came to the place of fire to inquire about their friends and relatives)

The strategy used here in this example is the collocation consisting of the verb and the preposition عن.

The next reflexive verb is (sich freuen) (be happy). The Arabic equivalent is يسعد. This is a common verb in German that is used with the reflexive pronoun as in the following example:

Ich **freue mich** dich kennenzulernen.

يسعدني التعرف عليك(I am happy to know you)

The reflexive pronoun (mich) does not have an exact equivalent in Arabic. Actually, the reflexivity is compensated in Arabic through using the connected accusative pronoun ي in the word يسعدني so we see in this example a new strategy represented by using the connected pronoun.

The next reflexive verb is (Sich irren) (make a mistake) which means in Arabic يُخطأ but it is in Arabic used without the self-pronoun compared to German as in the following example:

Jeder kann **sich** mal **irren**.

كُل إنسانٍ يمكنه أنْ يُخطِئ (Every person can make a mistake)

In this example, the reflexive verb (sich irren) has in Arabic the equivalent which consists of the word أنْ and the equivalent verb يُخطِئ . The strategy used in this example is Almasdar Almuawwal consisting of أنْ and the verb يُخطِئ the word translation of the German sentence would be: كُل إنسانٍ يمكنه نفسه أنْ يُخطِئ

In Arabic, such translation would be considered awkward and not natural or even wrong. It becomes natural and correct when the word نفسه is removed.

The next reflexive verb is (verabreden) (to make an appointment). This verb means in Arabic يحدد موعداً. The example below shows how the reflexivity is compensated in the Arabic equivalent:

Wir haben **verabredet**, dass wir **uns** um 5 Uhr treffen.

اتفقنا على اللقاء في الساعة الخامسة(We made an appointment to meet at 5)

In this example, the reflexive pronoun (uns) is translated into Arabic through the attached pronoun in the word اتفقنا which is (نا) (connected pronoun menaing we) in this word. The verb itself in German is translated into Arabic by using three words اتفقنا على اللقاء. So, the strategy used in Arabic to deal with reflexivity is the attached pronoun and the preposition على.

Similar to the verb (verabreden), the verb (verlieben) in German is considered a basic reflexive verb. The strategy used with (verabreden) is used with this verb. In other words, the attached or implicit pronoun in Arabic along with the preposition make a collocation in Arabic that compensates for the reflexivity meaning as in the following example:

Man lernt jemanden kennen und weiß am Anfang noch nicht, daß es diejenige Person ist, in die man **sich** einmal **verlieben** wird (Adopted from Die Tageszeitung, 1997)

يقابل الانسان شخصًا ما ولا يعرفُ في البداية أنه الشخص الذي **سيقع في حبه**.

(Man sometimes meets a person he did not know before and he does not know that he is the person he will fall in love with).

The verb sich verlieben (fall in love) is in Arabic يقع في حبه and the implicit pronoun in Arabic along with the preposition في (in) convey the meaning of the reflexive verb in German.

The last reflexive verb in this group is the verb (sich wundern) (to wonder). The example below shows the reflexivity:

ich **wunderte mich** über seine schnelle Rückkehr

لقد **فوجئت** بعودته السريعة (I was surprised of his fast return)

The verb sich wundern is in Arabic تفاجأ ب and there is no reflexive word. It is just the word تفاجأ (surprised) with the preposition. In other words, the reflexive verb in German is simply expressed through the verb and the preposition collocation.

3.2 The Second Group of German Reflexive Verbs

The second group of reflexive verbs include those that can be used with or without accusatives. This group includes the following verbs in Table 4.

Table 4

The Second Group of German Reflexive Verbs

Reflexive Verb in German	Arabic Equivalent	English
sich anmelden	يسجل	To register
Sich anziehen	يلبس	To get dressed
Sich ärgern	يغضب	To be angry
Sich aufregen	ينزعج	To be bothered
Sich beherrschen	يسيطر على نفسه	To control
Sich beruhigen	يهدأ	To relax
Sich beschäftigen	ينشغل	To be busy
Sich bewegen	يتحرك	To move
Sich entschuldigen	يعتذر	To apologize
Sich fürchten	يشعر بالخوف	To be afraid
Sich hinlegen	يستلقي	To lay
Sich langweilen	يشعر بالملل	To feel bored
Sich treffen	يلتقي	To meet
Sich verabschieden	يوَدُّع	To see off
Sich verletzen	يؤذي نفسه	To harm oneself
Sich verstehen	يفهم	To understand
Sich verteidigen	يدافع عن نفسه	To defend

The verb sich melden means to register or apply for registration. This verb is not common in Arabic with its German meaning and connotations due to many reasons. The example below shows one of the usages of this verb in German, which is related to the meaning mentioned here.

Sie können sich für 250 Mark pro Tag selber anmelden, werden dann nach Interessengebieten oder Branchen zusammengefaßt und können sich so mit dem Instrument vertraut machen. Die Tageszeitung (1998)	يمكنكم تسجيل أنفسكم مقابل ٢٥٠ مارك الماني في اليوم، وسيتم بعد ذلك تجميعكم وفقًا لمجالات الاهتمام أو الصناعات وبالتالي يمكنكم التعرف على الأدوات	You can register yourself for 250 marks per day, will then be grouped according to areas of interest or industries, and can thus familiarize yourself with the instrument.

The reflexive word sich here in German has an equivalent reflexive word in Arabic which is أنفسكم (yourselves). The next verb in this group is sich anziehen which means get dressed or in Arabic يلبس أو يرتدي ملابسه. It is used in a sentence like this example:

Ich muss mich anziehen	يجب عليَّ أنْ أرتدي ملابسي	I should get dressed.

The other verbs in this group are used in similar ways in Arabic as in the following examples (the sources of the examples are underlined in Table 5).

Table 5

Examples for Group Two of Reflexive Verbs

German	Arabic	English
Sich ärgern Du darfst **dich** darüber nicht so **ärgern**	ينزعج لا ينبغي أن تكون **تُزعجَ نفسك** جدًا بشأن هذا الأمر	You should not bother yourself with this matter.
Sich aufregen Für mich ist das günstig, ich muß **mich** nicht **aufregen**, sie ist nicht allein dort in ihrem Haus; WOHMANN, GABRIELE BITTE NICHT STERBEN	يقلق بالنسبة لي، هذا مريح؛ لا داعي **أن اقلق**؛ فهي ليست وحدها في منزلها.	For me it is convenient, I do not have to get upset, she is not alone there in her house;
Sich beherrschen Sigrid konnte **sich** nicht mehr **beherrschen** und lachte laut los. BREEST, JÜRGEN GROßES FINALE	يتمالك نفسه لم تستطع سيغريد **تمالك نفسها** وانفجرت ضاحكةً.	Sigrid could no longer control herself and burst out laughing.
Sich beruhigen Jetzt liest er laut und kann **sich** gar nicht mehr **beruhigen**. DIE TAGESZEITUNG (1995)	يهدأ الآن يقرأ بصوت عالٍ ولا يستطيع أن **يُهدئَ نفسه**.	Now he reads aloud and can't calm down at all.
Sich beschäftigen Es tut mir leid, ich kann **mich** jetzt nicht damit **beschäftigen**. BREEST, JÜRGEN GROßES FINALE	ينشغل أنا آسف، لا أستطيع أن **أُشغِل نفسي** مع الأمر الآن.	I'm sorry, I can't deal with it right now.
Sich bewegen Das Wohnzimmer des zweistöckigen Einfamilienhauses war so mit Möbeln vollgestopft, daß man **sich** darin nur mit Mühe **bewegen** konnte. BREEST, JÜRGEN GROßES FINALE	يتحرك كانت غرفة المعيشة في المنزل العائلي المكون من طابقين مكتظة بالأثاث لدرجة أنه كان من الصعب على الشخص أن **يُحرِكَ نفسه**.	The living room of the two-story detached house was so crammed with furniture that it was difficult to move around in it.
Sich entschuldigen Eine Beamtin, die **sich** nicht **entschuldigen** kann, gibt kein gutes Bild. DIE TAGESZEITUNG (1997)	يعتذر الموظف الحكومي الذي لا يستطيع **الاعتذار** لا يُقدم صورة جيدة.	An official who cannot apologize does not present a good image.
Sich fürchten Und so, wie vieleJungen sich präsentieren, haben Mädchen oft auch allen Grund dazu, **sich** vor der blinden Gehetztheit der Jungen zu **fürchten**. SCHNACK, DIETER & NEUTZLING, RAINER DIE P	يشعر بالخوف ونظرا للطريقة التي يقدم بها العديد من الأولاد أنفسهم، فإن الفتيات غالبا ما يكون **لديهن** كل الأسباب **للخوف** من الاندفاع الأعمى للفتيان.	And just as many boys present themselves, girls often have every reason to be afraid of the blind rush of boys.
Sich hinlegen Da **legst** du **dich** (**lang**) **hin**!	يستلقي هناك تستلقي/**تريح نفسك** (لفترة طويلة)!	There you lie down (for a long time)!
Sich langweilen Aber wer keine besondere Affinität zur japanischen Kultur besitzt, der wird **sich** in diesem Film erbärmlich **langweilen**. DIE TAGESZEITUNG (1995)	يشعر بالملل لكن أي شخص لا يملك شغفًا خاصًا بالثقافة اليابانية سيجد هذا الفيلم **مملًا** للغاية.	But anyone who doesn't have a particular affinity for Japanese culture will find this film miserably boring.
Sich treffen Wo können wir **uns treffen**?	يلتقي أين يمكننا **أن نلتقي؟**	Where can we meet?
Sich verabschieden Eine Woche noch, dann würden wir **uns** von Laville **verabschieden**. FRANZETTI, DANTE ANDREA DAS FUNKHAUS	يوَدِّع أسبوعٌ آخر، **ونُوَدِّع** مدينة لافيل.	One more week and we would say goodbye to Laville.

Sich verletzen Zünde eine Lampe an, bemerkte er gelassen, du könntest stolpern und **dich verletzen**. AHRENS, JUTTA DER KÖNIG VON ASSUR	يؤذي نفسه قال بهدوء أشعل مصباحًا، فقد تتعثر **وتؤذي نفسك**.	Light a lamp, he remarked calmly, you might trip and hurt yourself.
Sich verstehen wir **verstehen uns** (schon) Sich verteidigen Einen für ihn gestellten Berufungsantrag wies das Oberste Gericht jetzt ab - Hill konnte **sich** beim Prozeß nicht ausreichend **verteidigen**, weil er ohne Rechtsbeistand auftrat. DIE TAGESZEITUNG (1997)	يفهم نحن **نفهم أنفُسَنا** جيدا يدافع عن نفسه رفضت المحكمة العليا الآن استئنافًا قُدِّم نيابةً عنه، إذ لم يتمكن هيل من **الدفاع عن نفسه** بشكل كافٍ في المحاكمة لأنه حضر دون محامٍ.	We understand each other. The Supreme Court has now rejected an appeal filed on his behalf - Hill was unable to adequately defend himself at the trial because he appeared without legal representation

It is noticed that in most of group two of the reflexive verbs in German there is also a reflexive word in Arabic which is نفس.

3.3 The Third Group of German Reflexive Verbs

The third group of reflexive verbs in German includes verbs that do not take an object. These verbs take the dative case of the pronoun, which is common in German but not common in Arabic with the same construction or verb. This list includes the verbs shown in Table 6.

Table 6

The Third Group of German Reflexive Verbs

German	Arabic	English
Sich etw. ansehen	ينظر إلى شيء	To look at something
Sich etw. ausdenken	يفكر في شيئ	To think of something
Sich etw. merken	يتذكر شيئا	To remember
Sich etw. rasieren	يحلق	To shave
Sich etw. vorstellen	يتخيل شيئا	To imagine
Sich etw. waschen	يغسل شيئا	To wash

The verbs are used in context with the dative case, and the following examples show how they are used and how they are interpreted in Arabic regarding the reflexivity.

Table 7

Examples for the Third Group of German Reflexive Verbs

German	Arabic	English
Sich etw. ansehen Hast du **dir** den Film schon **angesehen**?	ينظر إلى شيء هل **شاهدت** الفيلم بعد؟	Have you seen the film recently?
Sich etw. ausdenken Ich **denke mir** eine Geschichte aus.	يفكر في شيء أنا **أفكر في** قصة ما.	I am thinking of a story.
Sich etw. merken Ich habe **mir** ihren Vornamen sofort **gemerkt**.	يتذكر شيئا **تذكرت** اسمها الأول على الفور.	I have remembered her first name fast.
Sich etw. rasieren Als Radprofi muss ich **mir** die Beine **rasieren**.	يحلق كراكب دراجات محترف، يجب عليّ **أن أحلق** ساقي.	As a professional cyclist, I have to shave my legs.
Sich etw. vorstellen Du **stellst dir** die Sache zu einfach vor.	يتخيل شيئا أنت **تتخيَّلُ** الأمور بسيطة للغاية.	You're making things too simple.
Sich etw. waschen Vor dem Essen wasche ich mir noch die Hände.	يغسل شيئا **أغسل** يدي قبل الأكل	Before eating I wash my hands.

In the third group, it is noticed that there is no reflexive word in Arabic at all and the reflexivity is understood in the internal meaning of the verbs.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

There are various strategies of conveying the meaning from German into Arabic (Gast & Haas, 2008; Kühl & Petersen, 2009). Strategies used in conveying reflexivity of the verbs presented above can be summarized into eleven strategies as follows:

1) Using different pronouns as in the verb "Sich bedanken" (Thanking someone)
2) Almasder Almuawwal such as the reflexive verbs Sich ausruehn, Sich beeilen and Sich irren (Taking a rest or being quickly or making a mistake)
3) Using different pronouns such as the verb "Sich bedanken" (Thanking someone)
4) Same construction of German as in the reflexive verb "sich befinden" (how one feels)
5) The equivalent word without any other words or additions such as the verb sich beschwerden (complaining about)
6) Using the preposition to compensate for the reflexive verb such as the verb sich einigen (agreeing with someone)
7) The internal meaning of the Arabic verb compensates for the reflexivity as in sich entschleißen (deciding)
8) The context or the verb itself as in the verb sich ereignen (happening)
9) Using the collocation in Arabic as in sich erkälten (having cold)
10) Using collocations consisting of the verb and the preposition as in sich erkundigen and sich verlieben (announcing something or falling in love)
11) Using the connected pronoun as in sich freuen, sich verabreden and sich wundern (being happy, having an appointment or wondering)

Such analysis of reflexive verbs in German and their interpretations in the Arabic language reveals significant insights with vital implications for language teaching and learning, predominantly for Arab learners of German and German learners of Arabic. Reflexive verbs constitute a substantial grammatical feature in German that does not have a direct equivalent in the Arabic language. This linguistic difference demands tailored pedagogical approaches to ensure learners develop accurate understanding and avoid confusion in both languages.

One of the key implications is the need for explicit instruction of reflexive verb forms and their syntactic roles in German. While reflexive verbs frequently appear with pronouns referring back to the subject (involving cases such as accusative and dative), learners must be channeled to recognize these structures and understand how meaning is encoded through reflexivity.

The present study highlights the importance of the teaching strategies that involve contextualized explanations and comparisons between the two languages. It is undeniable that translating reflexive verbs literally from German to Arabic can cause semantic and grammatical errors. Teachers need to prepare language learners to understand both the formal grammatical pattern and

also the pragmatic and semantic nuances. Furthermore, the eleven strategies that are presented for conveying German reflexive verbs in Arabic can serve as a valuable framework for curriculum designers and language educators. From a syllabus design perspective, attention should be devoted to sequencing the introduction of reflexive verbs by degree of complexity, before moving to more complex verbs where reflexivity is expressed through idiomatic or collocational means. Thus, the incorporation of authentic texts and communicative tasks that can feature reflexive verbs in meaningful contexts can help with the enhancement of learners' acquisition and retention. The implications of this study for language teaching and learning advocate the necessity for explicit grammar instruction, contextualized teaching methods, and strategy-based approaches.

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Metaphors in Language Pedagogy: A Mixed-Methods Study of Iranian EFL Teachers' Conceptualizations and Attitudes toward Conceptual Metaphor Use

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ABSTRACT

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the current research examines Iranian EFL teachers' metaphorical conceptualization of foreign language instruction as well as their view of the pedagogical value of metaphors. It was aimed at uncovering teachers' metaphorical teaching models and examining the degree to which these conceptualizations vary across gender, age, and educational context. A mixed-methods approach was employed. At the qualitative phase, 30 experienced teachers of EFL with a minimum of five years' experience were subjected to verbal metaphor elicitation and focus group interviews. MAXQDA coded data thematically. Three hundred eighty-four teachers completed the Conceptual Metaphor-Based Teaching Questionnaire (CMBTQ) in the quantitative phase. Descriptive statistics, Spearman's rho correlations, and independent samples t-tests were employed for data analysis. Qualitative findings indicated dominant metaphorical themes such as teacher as guide, gardener, engineer, and emotional performer that reflected teacher cognition with multilevel complexity. Quantitative analysis indicated that gender, age, and school type strongly influenced metaphor-based perceptions—female, older, and private school teachers responded with more emotionally and pedagogically relevant metaphors. The findings support metaphors' cognitive and affective contribution to pedagogical philosophy development and suggest metaphor awareness training in teacher education to improve reflective practice and lesson planning.

1. Introduction

Language acquisition is not just a matter of acquiring grammatical rules and lexicon lists, but rather a deeply embodied, cognitively grounded, and culturally embedded human experience. Amongst the

most significant cognitive operations involved in how individuals come to make sense of abstract or complex experience, such as learning or teaching an unfamiliar language, is metaphor. Since Lakoff and Johnson (2020) presented the most celebrated assertion, metaphors are not mere peripherals of language but lie at the center of our thought, action, and speech. Conceptual metaphors enable us to think of one domain of experience (the target) in terms of another domain, which is more familiar and hence graspable (the source), actually channeling both cognitive processing and affective investment (Evans & Green, 2018; Kövecses, 2020).

In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), increasing attention has been given to the application of conceptual metaphors in revealing learners' and teachers' beliefs, strategies, and affective stances toward language learning (Boers, 2018; Hoang, 2014; Oxford et al., 2014). If the learners say "climbing a mountain" or "breaking a code" in their attempts to describe English learning, they are acting unconsciously to express effort, travail, and problem-solving. Just as instructors explain their work as "planting seeds" or "walking a path," the metaphors instantiate embedded pedagogical assumptions, professional selves, and educative ideologies (Shaw & Andrei, 2020; Xu et al., 2022; Yüksel, 2019).

These metaphorical constructs, as recent studies have proved, not only symbolize states of mind—they construct classroom practice, teacher-student relationships, and even learning accomplishment (Adami, 2023; Farjami, 2012; Sullivan, 2018). Importantly, investigations have linked the utilization of metaphors with enhanced knowledge of grammar, increased writing cohesion, and enhanced learner motivation and self-assessed efficacy (Belkhir, 2021; Chen, 2019; Esfandiari et al., 2022; Nahavandi & Golfam, 2022). As multimodal learning environments have emerged, conceptual metaphors are increasingly embodied by not just language but also images, gestures, spatial arrangements, digital media, and bodily motion—all collectively called multimodal conceptual metaphors (Cameron & Maslen, 2010; Forceville, 2017). For instance, educators may use a tree diagram to model syntactic structure or invoke gestures to mediate abstract meaning, such as "rising intonation" or "cohesive links." Such multimodal metaphors enable more embodied, richer ways of teaching and learning by engaging multiple sensory and cognitive channels (Anderson, 2018; Fugate et al., 2019; Golfam & Nahavandi, 2021).

Despite the growing recognition of metaphor as an intellectual and pedagogical device, much of what has been studied remains potentially one-sided in its emphasis on verbal metaphors only, and in ignoring richer multimodal varieties more actually encountered in naturalistic classrooms. More significantly, even while many studies have examined either students' or teachers' metaphors in isolation from one another, few have cited both parties together or examined the dynamic interaction between metaphorical thinking and pedagogical effectiveness in the EFL context. Even fewer have investigated how conceptual metaphors, especially when transmitted through multimodal ones, influence students' textual and grammatical literacy.

To fill these gaps, the present study utilizes a mixed-methods approach in probing how Iranian EFL teachers metaphorically frame foreign language teaching and in which ways and by which means they discover the pedagogical utility of conceptual metaphors for language instruction. By combining qualitative metaphor elicitation techniques with quantitative surveying of teacher attitudes, the study aims to provide a detailed insight into both the cognitive underpinnings and the applied perceptions

of metaphor use in the EFL classroom. Moreover, the study explores Iranian EFL teachers' opinions and perceptions of the pedagogical value of using conceptual metaphors as a part of teaching practice, attempting to reveal the way these metaphors are intentionally identified, evaluated, and potentially used by practitioners in real teaching contexts. Lastly, this research contributes to the growing body of work placing metaphor not as a linguistic fringe, but as a central source of human understanding and pedagogical use. This study is one of the few that offer a detailed, multimodal, and empirically grounded account of metaphor usage in the field of EFL instruction. It also offers useful insights to curriculum planners, teacher trainers, and classroom teachers who wish to use metaphor as a tool to build linguistic competence, affective arousal, and pedagogical imagination.

Some limitations must be recognized about this study so the findings can be appropriately interpreted. First, the study was conducted in a unique pedagogical and cultural context: Iranian EFL education contexts, meaning the findings may not be generalizable beyond contexts with differing pedagogical and cultural contexts. Second, the interpretative nature of metaphor analysis is a challenge. Peer debriefing and inter-coder reliability aside, subject bias may dominate participants' metaphorical language analysis. Third, reliance on self-report data from interviews, metaphor elicitation tasks, and questionnaires may encourage bias. Participants may give socially acceptable responses or fail to remember their experience to the best of their knowledge. Fourth, due to time constraints, the research controls for the short-term effects of metaphor-based instruction. In order to determine long-term gains in students' grammatical and textual competence, a lengthier longitudinal study approach could have been used. Finally, even if no mixed-method design was appropriate, naturalistic classroom observations and multimodal recordings were not collected, which may have added to students' generalizability of metaphor use during actual classroom discourse.

Certain delimitations were set to determine the scope of the research. The research only focused on Iranian EFL learners and instructors, 30 from each group being chosen for sampling purposes. The participants as learners were all on the intermediate level of proficiency, and instructional focus was narrowed to only two components: instruction on grammar, that is, idiomatic expressions, and textual competence in terms of rhetorical organization in academic writing. In addition, the research was concerned with short-term effects within a five-week intervention. Other aspects of language, such as listening, speaking, and pragmatic use, were outside the scope of the present research. Such restrictions were placed to enable depth and workability in the research design. Future research may extend the scope by means of cross-cultural comparisons, larger samples, longitudinal studies, and multimodal data collection to measure metaphor use more comprehensively.

2. Literature Review

The addition of metaphor to second language acquisition (SLA) has moved beyond questions of style and become a powerful cognitive and pedagogical tool. Central to this development is Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (2020), which posits that individuals comprehend abstract domains—like learning or teaching—through metaphorical mappings from more concrete,

bodily-based experience. This model suggests that metaphors are not only linguistic expressions but intrinsic human cognition mechanisms, which regulate the way teachers and students conceive language teaching (Akhtar et al., 2020; Kövecses, 2020; Yunus, 2020).

Conceptual metaphors have a significant function in educational contexts, particularly in EFL contexts, in uncovering the implicit beliefs, professional selves, and pedagogical decisions of teachers. The literature has uncovered that EFL teachers selectively make use of metaphorical schemata such as guiding, planting, building, or sculpting to define their professional role (Abdulaal et al., 2023; Al-Ahdal & Abduh, 2021; Shaw & Andrei, 2020; Xu et al., 2022). These metaphors are not merely personal pedagogical convictions, but they also inform curriculum planning, assessment practices, forms of feedback, and classroom conversation (Amerian, 2023; Shaw & Andrei, 2020; Vadipoor et al., 2023).

In addition, the metaphorical images of teachers are particularly relevant because they are instrumental in the cognitive and affective classroom atmosphere. For example, those with the view of teaching as guiding will foster learner independence and feedback for processes. At the same time, those with a sculpting metaphor would emphasize accuracy and standardization, often aligned with form-focused instruction, favoring accuracy and grammatical structure over fluency and meaning (Amerian, 2023; Boers, 2013; Xu et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2022). This metaphorical placement can either complement or conflict with students' metaphorical ideas about learning—yielding pedagogical tensions or deeper engagement (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Farjami, 2012; Vadipoor et al., 2021).

Empirical studies over the past few years confirm the pedagogical worth of metaphor-based instruction. Afifi (2021) and Vadipoor et al. (2021) confirm that metaphor-abundant teaching contributes to increased students' fluency in writing, rhetorical organization, and grammatical coherence. Abdulaal et al. (2023) also state that multimodal metaphors—expressed by gesture, image, and digital media—help motivate learners and improve recall, reducing cognitive load. This aligns with embodied cognition theory, which posits that learning and thought are sensorimotor-dependent and embodied (Alibali & Nathan, 2018; Borg, 2019; Deignan, 2005; Farrell, 2006; Shapiro & Stolz, 2019). This convergence of metaphor and embodiment shows the sensorimotor grounding of language instruction. In classroom practice, metaphors such as "writing is a journey" or "grammar is a puzzle" become kinesthetic in the form of movement, spatial mapping, or interactive simulation (Farrell,2018; Golfam & Nahavandi, 2021; Kalay & Keçik,2023). The multimodal instruction has been shown to not only increase comprehension but also facilitate metacognitive awareness building and self-efficacy (Esfandiari et al., 2022; Perez-Sobrino et al., 2019; Upadhaya & Sudharshana, 2021; Xu et al., 2022).

Particularly in Iranian EFL environments, where learners struggle to grasp abstract forms of grammar and discourse conventions, metaphor-based instruction has proved particularly effective. Farjami (2012) and Nahavandi and Golfam's (2022) research demonstrate that both learners and teachers perceive learning a language in terms of metaphors based on schooling experience and culture, and that explicit accounts of these metaphors enhance instructional alignment and learner motivation. In total, the literature suggests that the conceptual metaphors of teachers both reflect their pedagogical identity and foreshadow their instructional behavior. When linked to curriculum design—most especially with multimodal, metaphor-laden approaches—these metaphors can facilitate higher levels of student engagement, cognitive resonance, and emotional support. Although

Iranian EFL studies demonstrate the viability of metaphor-inflected instruction, systematic studies on the conceptualizations and attitudes of teachers are scarce. The present study aims to bridge this gap by exploring how Iranian EFL instructors view and value conceptual metaphors in instruction.

According to the above theoretical and empirical grounds, the present research seeks to explore the use of conceptual metaphor in the English language classroom from Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives. Specifically, it focuses on exploring how the teachers metaphorically realize the action of foreign language teaching and how they experience the didactic potential of conceptual metaphors in teaching practice. The following research questions reflect these goals:

RQ1. How do Iranian EFL teachers metaphorically conceptualize foreign language teaching?

RQ2. What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the use of conceptual metaphors in language teaching, and how do these perceptions vary according to demographic variables such as gender, age, and type of educational institution (public vs. private)?

3. Methodology

In this study, the researchers used a sequential mixed methods design. Then, in the first phase, they used qualitative methods, and then continued with the quantitative phase.

3.1 Participants and Setting

The group of participants in this study was Iranian EFL instructors who were already putting conceptual metaphors into practice in their classroom instruction. Due to the specificity of the research—the examination of teachers' perception and classroom teaching impact of metaphorical instruction—the study required participation from teachers who not only possessed formal teaching experience for English but who had also infused conceptual metaphors as a main component of their classroom instruction activities specifically. Because there is no official registry or central database of this kind of teacher in Iran, the researcher needed an instrumental and purposeful approach to access this unique group.

For this challenge, the researcher applied a two-stage sampling plan. Convenience sampling was applied by the researcher in the first stage to generate an available sample of potential subjects. This method was selected because of its effectiveness and pragmatism to reach teachers with some teaching experience that would otherwise be hard to reach. The researcher issued open invitations to participate on a few of the most popular social websites, that is, WhatsApp, Telegram, and LinkedIn, which Iranian teachers use freely to network professionally and communicate. The recruitment message also made it clear that only teachers with prior or current experience in teaching with the help of metaphor-based instruction should reply. Such teachers who met this requirement approached the researcher independently and expressed their willingness to participate.

This first recruitment attracted a diverse pool of prospective teachers from a significant number of provinces across Iran (e.g., Tehran, Ardabil, Gilan, Khurasan, Mazandaran, Fars, Yazd, and

Hormozgan). Social media, which enabled recruitment, allowed the researcher to reach a widely dispersed group of teachers demographically and geographically. Consequently, while participants were recruited non-randomly for the first step, the representativeness of the study was maximized.

For the second step, simple random sampling was used by the researcher on this available population. This was a required step so that the bias that accompanies the first step's convenience sampling method could be countered. With the random selection of participants from the willing and available sample, the researcher attempted to make all eligible teachers equally likely to be represented in the final sample. This strategy raised the internal validity and external generalizability of the quantitative outcomes to the specific target group of metaphor-practicing educators.

The size of the sample was calculated using Cochran's formula, which is widely used in estimating the sample size when the population size is very large or unknown. The formula established that 384 teachers were to be selected to take part in the quantitative component of the study. This was found adequate in the production of statistically significant findings without the need for unreasonably large feasibility in data collection. Demographics indicated that the ages of participants ranged from 24 to 44 years, with a mean of 32, indicating a relatively young to middle-aged sample of teachers. The sample was also gender-diverse, with 199 males and 185 females, contributing to the representativeness as well as diversity of the sample.

Overall, this two-stage sample design, which included preliminary convenience sampling for the sake of access to a hard-to-reach but well-established group and then random sampling for increased representativeness, was chosen particularly to address the requirements of the research. This helped the researcher in creating a valid, salient, and demographically representative sample of Iranian foreign language teachers of English with firsthand experience with instruction grounded in metaphor, thus permitting a sound basis of quantitative analysis in the study.

3.2 Instrumentation

To investigate Iranian EFL teachers' metaphorical conception of language teaching and their experience of metaphor-based teaching, two primary instruments were employed in this study: the semi-structured interview and the Conceptual Metaphor-Based Teaching Questionnaire (CMBTQ). Both tools were developed in alignment with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2020) and on the basis of multimodal pedagogy principles (Cienki & Müller, 2008; Forceville, 2017) for the purposes of both theoretical congruence and practical feasibility.

3.2.1 Semi-Structured Individual and Focus Group Interviews

The qualitative stage used in-depth semi-structured interviews with 30 experienced EFL teachers to obtain the conceptual metaphors through which they comprehended and explained their teaching functions. All interviews were carried out based on a guide of 10 open-ended questions, developed from a wide literature (e.g., Farjami, 2012; Xu et al., 2022) and piloted with two experienced EFL teachers for improvement. The questions prompted the participants to give metaphorical descriptions of their teaching experience, professional beliefs, emotional responses, and classroom practice.

Interviews were conducted in English to allow for natural elicitation of metaphors in the L2 pedagogical setting, though Persian was permitted for clarification or extended expression. To allow for credibility and reliability, several trustworthiness strategies were employed, including member checking, peer debriefing, long-term engagement, and triangulation with focus group data and written metaphor samples. Two focus group interviews (n = 8 each) were also conducted to facilitate interactive dialogue and collective metaphor creation. These 60- to 75-minute sessions permitted dynamic negotiation of meaning and exposure to multimodal representations (e.g., gesture, drawing). Co-facilitators regulated the flow of dialogue, and all sessions were audio-taped and transcribed word for word.

3.2.2 Conceptual Metaphor-Based Teaching Questionnaire (CMBTQ)

To quantitatively assess teachers' attitudes toward metaphor-based teaching, the Conceptual Metaphor-Based Teaching Questionnaire (CMBTQ) was developed. The 33-item questionnaire was constructed directly from the 11 large themes that emerged during the qualitative phase, including: Teacher as a guide or navigator, teaching as nurturing or gardening, teaching grammar as construction or engineering, writing instruction as sculpting or weaving, conceptual metaphors as pedagogical tools, emotional role of teaching (performance or struggle), emotional commitment and fulfillment, institutional and curriculum constraints, pedagogical relationships with students, cultural and social expectations, and use of metaphors as an instructional approach.

There were three Likert-scale items per theme (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to prompt teachers' metaphorical thinking, pedagogical beliefs, and emotional orientations. Both symbolic and embodied aspects of metaphor use were reflected in items. For example, one item for the Teaching Grammar as Construction theme was: Teaching grammar through metaphors is like giving blueprints for constructing language ability. The CMBTQ was content validated through expert review by applied linguistics and educational psychology researchers for clarity, conceptual relevance, and cultural appropriateness. The reliability of the scale was established, and construct validity was confirmed in a pilot study involving 30 Iranian EFL teachers. Findings from item analysis and factor structure refinement specified the final version, which was administered to a nationwide sample of 384 metaphor-practicing EFL teachers.

3.3 Research Procedure

Following the study's sequential mixed-method design, the data of Iranian EFL teachers were collected in two stages: qualitative and quantitative. Whereas the qualitative stage was planned to explore teachers' metaphorical thinking regarding language teaching, the quantitative stage aimed to study their attitudes towards metaphorical instruction.

3.3.1 Qualitative Data Collection

Focus group interviews and verbal metaphor elicitation tasks served to collect the qualitative data. Thirty Iranian EFL teachers with at least five years of teaching experience were interviewed on one occasion and asked to generate as many metaphors as possible for their teaching philosophies, teaching practices, problems, and presuppositions. To guarantee depth and explicitness, the

participants were then asked to elaborate on each metaphor and clarify its meaning and relevance in context. All the interviews took between 30 and 45 minutes and were conducted in English, with incidental code-switching into Persian permitted. With participants' agreement, all the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.

Two focus group interviews (n = 8 for each group) with teachers of EFL were conducted to examine shared metaphorical thinking in an interactive, dialogic context to corroborate and complement the qualitative findings. The interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes and provided space for explanation, contrasting, and co-construction of metaphorical meaning. Warm-up techniques and relaxed conversation techniques were used by the researcher to build an easy, non-threatening environment in which open reflection was promoted. Focus group interviews were also conducted in English and tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Credibility and reliability of qualitative data were ensured through several strategies: Member Checking: The interviewees read the transcripts and confirmed the accuracy of interpretation. Peer Debriefing: A qualitative research consultant reviewed selected transcripts and codes independently. Audit Trail: The researcher maintained detailed records of all decisions, coding processes, and analytical memos. Triangulation: Findings of individual interviews were compared with focus group data and written metaphor samples to validate emerging patterns. Thematic analysis was performed on all qualitative data in order to extract salient metaphorical frames and underlying cognitive-affective patterns in teachers' understandings of language teaching.

3.3.2 Quantitative Data Collection

Following the construction and validation of the Conceptual Metaphor-Based Teaching Questionnaire (CMBTQ), the quantitative phase involved large-scale data collection in order to assess Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the pedagogical use of conceptual metaphors. The 11 metaphor-theme, 33-item questionnaire was administered online to a convenience sample of Iranian EFL teachers from eight provinces. The sampling frame was built through social media solicitation (WhatsApp, Telegram, LinkedIn), and the final pool of participants (N = 384) was determined according to Cochran's formula. In the interest of wide reach and administration uniformity, the questionnaire was hosted on an online platform (Google Forms). The participants were invited electronically with details of the study purpose, their rights, data confidentiality, and the approximate completion time (~30 minutes). The questionnaire included brief definitions and examples of the principal metaphor-related terms to unify the understanding. No personally identifiable information was sought to protect anonymity and encourage honest responding. Data gathering proceeded for three weeks, with reminder messages at intervals to maximize response rates. Completed responses were downloaded as Excel files and prepared for statistical analysis in SPSS. This online method permitted efficient and affordable data gathering over a geographically dispersed sample of metaphor-practicing Iranian EFL teachers.

4. Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures during the research were organized according to the two phases of the sequential mixed-methods design, and various analysis techniques were used for the qualitative and quantitative data gathered from Iranian EFL teachers.

The qualitative data, such as individual interviews, focus group interviews, and written metaphor elicitation responses of 30 experienced teachers, were analyzed using MAXQDA 2020. Three-stage coding, involving open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, was used to identify, categorize, and interpret metaphorical conceptualizations of language teaching.

Open Coding involved line-by-line scrutiny of transcribed data to identify recurring metaphors and accompanying conceptual domains. Initial codes included metaphorical statements such as "teaching is nurturing growth" or "grammar is a puzzle," reflecting underlying pedagogical conceptions and classroom realities. Axial Coding was used to group similar codes under broader thematic categories following conceptual relationships. For instance, progress metaphors, challenge metaphors, and transformation metaphors were grouped under overarching themes like "teaching as journey" or "language learning as personal change." Selective Coding aimed to synthesize and formulate the core categories into wide-ranging theoretical themes that described the dominant metaphorical frames of the teachers, e.g., "teaching as facilitation" or "instruction as emotional labor."

For achieving process reliability, 20% of the data were coded separately by a second researcher, and inter-coder reliability was established to ascertain consistency and avoid potential bias. Data from verbal metaphor elicitation, writing tasks, and focus group discussions were triangulated to enhance the credibility and representativeness of the findings. MAXQDA visualization and reporting functions were utilized to track frequency patterns, co-occurrences, and thematic saturation across the dataset.

The quantitative stage entailed the returns analysis of the Conceptual Metaphor-Based Teaching Questionnaire (CMBTQ) by 384 Iranian EFL practicing teachers. The data were first screened for completeness, and none were missing as the online platform had submission checks embedded. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was conducted on SPSS version 25 to validate the underlying factor structure and determine whether the items merged according to the 11 metaphorical themes identified in the qualitative phase. Items with loadings ≥ .50 were retained.

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) for all questionnaire items and thematic subscales were computed to review the distribution of teacher attitudes. Internal consistency of the CMBTQ was ascertained using Cronbach's alpha, whereby all subscales met or exceeded the $\alpha \geq .70$ criterion for good reliability. In addition, independent samples t-tests and Pearson correlations were performed to see if teacher perceptions differed across demographic variables, including gender, age, and institution type (public or private). The statistical significance was at $p < .05$. This mixed-methods approach enabled the integration of metaphorical themes that emerged from qualitative data with trends identified in statistical results from the quantitative data. Together, the analyses provided a clear indication of Iranian EFL instructors' metaphorical ideas and their sentiments regarding the instructional application of conceptual metaphors.

4.1 Qualitative Results

The qualitative findings of this study revealed a rich metaphorical conceptualization framework by which Iranian EFL teachers enacted their roles and classroom practices. Through 30 interviews and focus group sessions with experienced teachers, six broad metaphorical themes were identified. The

metaphors represent teachers' thinking, feeling, and teaching positions and provide insight into how they conceptualize and undertake language instruction.

Teacher as Guide or Navigator (TGN)

The most common was that of the teacher as a guide, navigator, or beacon, i.e., teachers who guide students down the often-perilous path of language learning. Teachers emphasized both intentional guidance and responsive accommodation:

"*I think of myself as a tour guide. I know where we are headed, but every student has a different route, and I have to walk with them*." (Teacher 5, individual interview)

"*Sometimes we are like mountain guides—supporting their climb, not pulling them up*." (Teacher F1, focus group)

These metaphors underscore a constructivist, student-centered pedagogy in which the teacher provides scaffolding and emotional support without interfering with individual learner trajectories.

Teaching as Nurturing or Gardening (TNG)

Teachers often likened themselves to gardeners or parents, stressing patience, care, and nurturing growth:

"*Each student is a unique type of plant. Some need sunlight, some need shade. My job is to offer the proper climate*." (Teacher 2, individual interview)

"*We said we're emotional gardeners. When we quit, nothing grows*." (Teacher F2, focus group)

This theme aligns with humanist and ecological views of education, wherein growth is incremental and emotion-mediated.

Teaching Grammar as Construction or Engineering (TGCE)

A vocational metaphor closer to the practical arts was discovered concerning teaching grammar, as teachers described themselves as architects, engineers, or mechanics who had to construct linguistic frameworks:

"*Teaching grammar is like being an architect—you need to design the rules carefully, or the whole thing collapses*." (Teacher 16, individual interview)

"*We said grammar is like building a bridge—you must get the foundation right*." (Teacher F5, focus group)

These metaphors reflect a deliberate, structure-based teaching approach to grammar in a context of clarity, accuracy, and planning.

Writing Instruction as Sculpting or Weaving (WISW)

Instruction in writing was viewed as an imaginative and cyclical process of constructing, organizing, and elaborating ideas:

"*Writing is like sculpting. The student brings in the rough idea, and we sculpt it together into something clear and strong*." (Teacher 13, individual interview)

"*It's like creating a tapestry—grammar is the weave, ideas are the design*." (Teacher F4, focus group)

These metaphors highlight the balance between form and imagination in writing instruction, consistent with process-oriented pedagogies.

Conceptual Metaphors as Pedagogical Tools (CMPT)

As well as considering their practice, teachers also explained utilizing metaphors as a deliberate means of enhancing student comprehension, engagement, and retention:

"*I always use bridges when defining conjunctions—students recall that better than rules*." (Teacher 4, individual interview)

"*We said metaphors are like keys—they unlock understanding*." (Teacher F2, focus group)

Teachers stressed that metaphors made abstract content concrete and viewable mental images to facilitate both cognitive and affective engagement.

Emotional Role of Teaching (ERT)

Lastly, teachers described their emotional labor through metaphors like performer, warrior, or flame-carrier, displaying resilience as well as passion:

"*Teaching English is a flame to hold—you must keep it alight, even in the gale force*." (Teacher 29, individual interview)

"*We used to say that to be a teacher is to be on stage—always performing, even if you are tired*." (Teacher F5, focus group)

Such metaphors encapsulate the identity and affective dimensions of teaching, conveying a commitment to maintaining motivation and purpose in the face of challenge.

Emotional Commitment and Fulfillment (ECF)

Metaphors employed by teachers tended to reflect intense emotional engagement with teaching, characterizing teaching as inspiring and exhausting. The majority saw their profession as an identity-shaping endeavor of importance, while others conveyed the feeling of fatigue and repetition of tasks.

"*Sometimes I feel like a flame-carrier—I have to keep the passion alive, even when everything feels heavy*." (Teacher 9, Individual Interview)

"*We all concurred teaching is like being in the theatre—performing each day, but the energy it demands is genuine*." (Teacher F2, Focus Group)

This theme captures the emotional ambivalence of teaching. Some teachers mentioned fulfillment and purpose, yet there were others who mentioned routine and emotional burnout. Teaching was not only presented as a profession but as a context of constant emotional investment.

Institutional and Curriculum Constraints (ICC)

Teachers described their classrooms in metaphors of futility, routine, and restriction in most cases. They lamented restrictive syllabi, exam-centric teaching, and a lack of freedom.

"*It's like being in a cage—I want to fly, but the curriculum locks me in.*" (Teacher 19, Individual Interview)

"*We said it's like running on a treadmill—working hard but going nowhere because of the exam system.*" (Teacher F1, Focus Group)

Teachers' professional creativity and decision-making were seen as constrained by pressures outside. Metaphors expressed a sense of constriction, weariness, and a gap between ideals of teaching and institutional realities.

Pedagogical Relations with Students (PRS)

Teacher metaphors suggested that pedagogical relations with students played a large part in building the experience of teaching. When pupils' cooperation was present, metaphors said care and joint success; when absent, frustration and imbalance.

"*Teaching them is like coaching a team—you win and lose together.*" (Teacher 12, Individual Interview)

"*We said it's like rowing a boat with one oar—if they don't cooperate, you just go in circles.*" (Teacher F6, Focus Group)

The metaphors indicate that the level of student engagement significantly impacts the sense of accomplishment and motivation among teachers. Optimistic student-teacher relationships evoked hope and dedication, while indifference or resistance evoked feelings of uselessness and emotional exhaustion.

Cultural and Social Expectations (CSE)

Teachers often explained how parents' and society's perceptions of English influenced their role. Some perceived themselves as underrated or not being appreciated, seeing themselves as always having to justify the value of their subject.

"*Being an ambassador in a nation that doesn't value your language.*" (Teacher 9, Individual Interview)

"*We said it's like being in the spotlight—everyone sees, but not many stand behind.*" (Teacher F5, Focus Group)

Teachers believed their efforts were emotionally exposed and undervalued. These metaphors exemplified the anxiety of public exposure and institutional lack of appreciation, creating a feeling of isolation and professional vulnerability.

Use of Metaphors as an Instructional Approach (UMIA)

Some teachers clarified using metaphors intentionally as a teaching strategy to clarify dense subject matter, improve retention, and emotionally connect students.

"*When I explained to them that grammar is like Lego blocks, they finally got it.*" (Teacher 18, Individual Interview)

"*We explained to them metaphors are memory helpers—students catch on more than definitions*." (Teacher F2, Focus Group)

Teachers reported that the use of metaphors in teaching helped students learn better and made teaching more engaging. The metaphors were useful tools that bridged abstract concepts with concrete images, improving communication and classroom rapport. Table 1 shows the summary of themes and subheadings and their frequencies.

Table 1

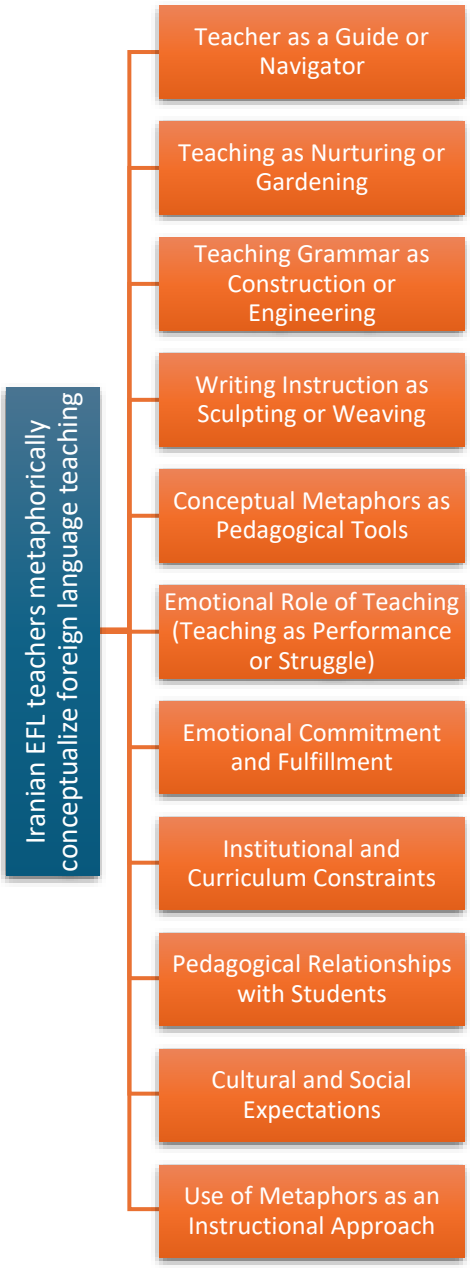
Summary of Themes

	Subtheme	Frequency (n = 30)
Teacher as a Guide or Navigator	Guide	16
	Navigator	9
	Torchbearer	5
Teaching as Nurturing or Gardening	Gardener	10
	Farmer	6
	Parent	4
Teaching Grammar as Construction or Engineering	Engineer	7
	Architect	6
	Mechanic	5
Writing Instruction as Sculpting or Weaving	Sculpting	8
	Weaving	6
	Cooking	4
Metaphor Use in Instruction	Clarifying Concepts	14
	Motivating Learners	10
	Enhancing Retention	7
Emotional Role of Teaching	Performer	6
	Warrior/Fighter	5
	Flame-carrier	4
Emotional Commitment and Fulfilment	Passion	10
	Identity	7
	Exhaustion	6
Institutional and Curriculum Constraints	Rigidity	8
	Time Pressure	7
	Lack of Autonomy	6
Pedagogical Relationships with Students	Empathy	9
	Responsibility	7
	Frustration	6
Cultural and Social Expectations	Status of English	8
	Parental Pressure	6
	Societal Misunderstanding	7
Use of Metaphors as an Instructional Approach	Clarifying Concepts	14
	Motivating Learners	10
	Enhancing Retention	7

The most recent Iranian EFL teacher model figuratively considers foreign language teaching as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Final Model of Iranian EFL Teachers' Metaphorically Conceptualized Foreign Language Teaching



4.2 Quantitative results

4.2.1 Piloting the Questionnaire

To ensure the psychometric value of the teacher questionnaire developed in this study, a pilot study was conducted on 30 Iranian EFL teachers. The goals were to attempt to measure the reliability and construct validity of the tool before the large-scale administration.

Internal consistency was also evaluated with Cronbach's alpha and was 0.782 for raw items and 0.783 for standardized items. The above values present adequate internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003), testifying that the 33 items equally represented the underlying construct of interest.

Descriptive item analysis indicated that item means varied from 1.87 to 2.97, with standard deviations ranging from 0.56 to 1.81, indicating a proper range of responses and preventing ceiling or floor effects. Corrected item-total correlations were well above the traditional cutpoint of .30 for all items, with strong evidence of contributions to overall scale consistency. Moreover, no deletion of an item was identified as having a substantial effect on the reliability of the scale, indicating further evidence of the instrument's robustness.

For testing construct validity, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted based on Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.735 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 518.926$, $p < .001$), indicating sampling adequacy and fit for factor analysis. PCA revealed nine components having eigenvalues larger than 1, which collectively accounted for 81.80% of the total variance, indicating a multidimensional underlying structure of the scale.

Monte Carlo simulation also validated the factor solution's stability and trustworthiness with superb factor loading recovery, negligible bias, and high reliability (estimated $\alpha = 0.96$). Varimax-rotated component matrix produced well-interpretable factors such as affective engagement, cognitive/metacognitive strategies, systematic learning behaviors, self-regulation, and evaluation processes.

Taken overall, the pilot study demonstrated that the instrument possessed strong psychometric qualities, including satisfactory reliability and factorial validity. The outcomes testified to the suitability of the scale for use in the forthcoming large-scale data collection stage among Iranian EFL teachers as the population of interest.

4.2.2 Main Study

4.2.2.1 Gender-Based Differences in Teachers' Perceptions of Conceptual Metaphor Use

An independent samples t-test was conducted to explore the following: whether there were differences in Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards conceptual metaphor-based language teaching by gender along 11 major factors. Overall, the general picture that came across was one of agreement between male and female teachers, whereby there were statistically significant gender variations in only four of the factors.

As Table 2 shows, specifically, female teachers had significantly more positive attitudes than the respective male teachers towards: Writing Instruction as Sculpting or Weaving (WISW): $t(382) = -3.74$, $p < .001$, reflecting greater metaphorical expressiveness in females; Conceptual Metaphor Pedagogical Tools (CMPT): $t(382) = -2.72$, $p = .007$, revealing greater belief regarding the pedagogical efficacy of metaphors in females; Emotional Role of Teaching (ERT): $t(382) = -2.93$, $p = .004$, with greater perceived efficacy of metaphor-supported instruction in promoting teaching reflection; Use

of Metaphors as an Instructional Approach (UMIA): $t(382) = -6.61$, $p < .001$, signifying the significantly higher use of metaphors by women teachers in instructional activities during teaching practice.

For the remaining seven variables—TGN, TNG, TGC, CSE, ICC, PRS, and ECF—statistically significant differences between genders were not found ($p > .05$). This suggests a general compatibility of metaphor-related cognition and instructional perspectives between genders. These findings indicate a gender-based difference in the practical and affective use of metaphor, with greater metaphorical involvement among women teachers. However, the mutual responses to cognitive and attitudinal use indicate an underlying consensus. These results underscore the potential benefit of gender-aware teacher education, especially for in-service courses aimed at building metaphorical capacity in teaching design.

Table 2

Independent Samples t-test Results for Gender Differences in Teachers' Attitudes Toward Conceptual Metaphor Use

Factor	Male Mean	Female Mean	Mean Diff.	t-value	p-value	Sig.
TGN	3.56	3.58	-0.02	-0.27	.786	n.s.
TNG	3.67	3.74	-0.07	-1.00	.316	n.s.
TGC	3.91	3.95	-0.04	-0.73	.467	n.s.
WISW	4.33	4.62	-0.29	-3.74	.000	*
CMPT	4.42	4.63	-0.21	-2.72	.007	*
ERT	4.17	4.45	-0.28	-2.93	.004	*
ECF	2.73	2.78	-0.04	-0.53	.595	n.s.
ICC	3.38	3.42	-0.04	-0.57	.568	n.s.
PRS	2.74	2.75	-0.02	-0.23	.822	n.s.
CSE	2.94	2.95	-0.01	-0.09	.927	n.s.
UMIA	3.36	3.81	-0.44	-6.61	.000	*

Note: n.s. = not significant; * = significant at $p < .05$

4.2.2.2 Age-Based Differences in Teachers' Perceptions of Conceptual Metaphor Use

In order to check if the age of teachers affected their perceptions and attitudes towards conceptual metaphors in language teaching, independent samples t-tests were run on eleven thematic dimensions of the Conceptual Metaphor-Based Teaching Questionnaire (CMBTQ). Two groups based on the age of the teachers were formed: younger teachers (24–34 years old) and older teachers (35–44 years old).

The results indicated that in the majority of fields—namely, TGN, TNG, TGC, ECF, ICC, PRS, and CSE—there were no notable differences between the two age groups ($p > .05$). The findings are indicative of a shared underlying understanding and acceptance of conceptual metaphors by Iranian EFL teachers, regardless of age.

However, statistically significant differences manifested in four of the big five areas. Older teachers exhibited significantly greater engagement with writing instruction as sculpting or weaving (WISW; p = .002), more belief in the conceptual metaphors as pedagogical tools (CMPT; p = .024), more endorsement of emotional role of teaching (ERT; p = .007), and more classroom use of metaphors (UMIA; p < .001) than younger teachers. These findings can be attributed to acquired teaching experience, deeper pedagogical insight, and a greater repertoire of teaching strategies in more experienced teachers.

In total, while the baseline theoretical understanding of metaphors is comparable across age groups, more experienced teachers demonstrate greater practical engagement and pedagogical confidence in metaphor use, indicating the potential role of teaching maturity in metaphor use.

Table 3

Summary of Age-Based Differences in Teachers' Perceptions of Conceptual Metaphor Use

Factor	Mean (24–34)	Mean (35–44)	Mean Difference	Sig. (p)	Significant	Direction
TGN	3.5633	3.5767	-0.0133	.843	No	–
TNG	3.6946	3.7209	-0.0263	.698	No	–
TGC	3.9163	3.9509	-0.0346	.575	No	–
WISW	4.3620	4.6135	-0.2515	.002	Yes	Higher in 35–44
CMPT	4.4502	4.6227	-0.1725	.024	Yes	Higher in 35–44
ERT	4.1968	4.4571	-0.2603	.007	Yes	Higher in 35–44
ECF	2.7398	2.7699	-0.0301	.722	No	–
ICC	3.4050	3.3957	+0.0093	.895	No	–
PRS	2.7285	2.7669	-0.0384	.634	No	–
CSE	2.9321	2.9693	-0.0372	.611	No	–
UMIA	3.4638	3.7331	-0.2693	<.001	Yes	Higher in 35–44

4.2.2.3 School Type and Teachers' Attitudes Toward Conceptual Metaphors

To examine whether the institutional environment influences teachers' classroom application and perceptions of conceptual metaphors, a comparison was made between private and public school EFL teachers. Independent samples t-tests were applied to the eleven facets of the Conceptual Metaphor-Based Teaching Questionnaire (CMBTQ).

It was discovered that in the majority of domains (TGN, TNG, ICC, PRS), there were no statistically significant differences between public and private school educators (p > .05). These results point toward an overall baseline state and knowledge regarding metaphorical pedagogy by institution type. However, significant differences existed in four practice-based, applied areas. Teachers in private schools demonstrated: Greater imagery and conceptual wordings (WISW) (p < .001); Greater positive beliefs in the potency of metaphor-based teaching (CMPT) (p = .002); Greater positive

judgments of employing metaphors as an effective instructional method (ERT) ($p < .001$); Greater frequency of employment of metaphors in actual teaching practice (UMIA) ($p < .001$).

These differences are most likely a result of increased institutional adaptability, pedagogic autonomy, or exposure to training more prevalent in Iran's private schools. Even though conceptions underlying beliefs were the same across contexts, private school contexts appeared to facilitate more robust enactment of metaphor-based pedagogy.

Table 4

Comparison of Public and Private School Teachers' Perceptions of Conceptual Metaphor Use

Dimension	Mean (Public)	Mean (Private)	Mean Diff.	Sig. (p)	Significant	Direction
TGN	3.5634	3.5754	-0.0120	.857	No	–
TNG	3.6854	3.7291	-0.0437	.515	No	–
TGC	3.9195	3.9441	-0.0246	.688	No	–
WISW	4.3195	4.6397	-0.3202	<.001	Yes	Higher in Private Schools
CMPT	4.4122	4.6508	-0.2386	.002	Yes	Higher in Private Schools
ERT	4.1439	4.4944	-0.3505	<.001	Yes	Higher in Private Schools
ECF	2.7220	2.7877	-0.0658	.433	No	–
ICC	3.3854	3.4190	-0.0336	.629	No	–
PRS	2.7293	2.7626	-0.0333	.676	No	–
CSE	2.9366	2.9609	-0.0243	.737	No	–
UMIA	3.3878	3.7961	-0.4083	<.001	Yes	Higher in Private Schools

4.2.2.4 Correlation among Dimensions of Conceptual Metaphor Perception and Use

Spearman's rho correlation matrix provided a glimpse of how various subcomponents of practice and awareness of metaphors were related among Iranian EFL teachers. Findings reveal an integrated conceptual framework surrounding the application of metaphors in instruction.

Key Findings are: Core Instructional Constructs (TGN, TNG, TGC): They were very highly correlated with each other. TGN was very highly correlated with TNG ($r = .489$, $p < .01$) and TGC ($r = .425$, $p < .01$), and TNG with TGC ($r = .542$, $p < .01$), indicating consistency among teachers' noticing, understanding, and confidence when handling metaphors. Pedagogical Involvement (WISW, CMPT, ERT): Extremely high positive correlations were found between WISW and CMPT ($r = .845$, $p < .01$), CMPT and ERT ($r = .896$, $p < .01$), and WISW and ERT ($r = .784$, $p < .01$), meaning that use of metaphor, effectiveness perceived, and teaching approach are highly dependent upon each other in practice. Creativity and Real Use (ICC, UMIA): ICC was strongly correlated with TGN ($r = .473$), CMPT ($r = .143$), ERT ($r = .135$), and above all with UMIA ($r = .421$), revealing the importance of creative confidence

among teachers in real metaphorical practice. Learner-related Constructs (ECF, PRS, CSE): They were highly intercorrelated (e.g., ECF–PRS, r = .778; PRS–CSE, r = .738), which signifies consistency in how teachers perceived metaphorical fit, relevance, and student efficacy. Negative or Weak Associations: TGC was negatively correlated with ECF (r = −.241), PRS (r = −.180), and CSE (r = −.197), which suggests that greater teacher control or abstraction sometimes unlinks from learners' affective or contextual realities. UMIA, a critical behavioral component, was highly correlated with TGN (r = .246), WISW (r = .139), and ICC (r = .421), substantiating that awareness, imagery, and creativity are predictors of authentic classroom implementation of metaphors.

These findings collectively validate conceptual metaphor use in EFL teaching to be a construct with various dimensions that include cognitive understanding, affective and creative engagement, and classroom deployment. The high intercorrelations validate the theoretical underpinning of embodied cognition and metaphor theory, and few negative correlations reflect practical misalignments deserving correction in teacher education.

Table 5

Key Significant Correlations among Metaphor-Related Constructs

Variable Pair	Spearman's ρ	Significance	Interpretation
TGN – TNG	.489	p < .01	Coherent general and instructional awareness
TNG – TGC	.542	p < .01	Noticing and confidence are linked
WISW – CMPT	.845	p < .01	Imagery use is strongly tied to teaching belief
CMPT – ERT	.896	p < .01	Teaching belief drives perceived effectiveness
WISW – ERT	.784	p < .01	Imagery use linked to strategy effectiveness
ICC – UMIA	.421	p < .01	Creativity supports metaphor use
ECF – PRS	.778	p < .01	Fit and perceived relevance aligned
PRS – CSE	.738	p < .01	Relevance predicts learner efficacy
TGC – ECF	–.241	p < .01	Conceptual control may reduce perceived fit
TGC – PRS	–.180	p < .01	Confidence may misalign with relevance
TGC – CSE	–.197	p < .01	Confidence is not always aligned with efficacy

4.3. Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Results

The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings in this study provides an in-depth explanation of how Iranian EFL teachers think about, feel, and employ metaphors during their professional practice. Both avenues of inquiry met on the value of metaphors as thinking and speaking devices as well as teaching and affective devices that build teaching identity, classroom strategies, and learner motivation.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups provided evidence of rich metaphorical reasoning in teachers. Eleven salient metaphorical themes emerged, with teachers described as guides, gardeners, engineers, sculptors, emotional performers, and metaphorical users of teaching methods. The metaphors were used to describe sophisticated images of teaching—emphasizing scaffolding, care, structure, creativity, emotional resilience, and pedagogical intentionality. Metaphors were not used by teachers as mere verbal tools but as essential tools that helped facilitate student understanding, emotional involvement, and instructional clarity.

These qualitative patterns were confirmed and explicated by the quantitative findings. Results of the questionnaire solidified that application and comprehension of metaphors were ubiquitous and multi-determinant, and internal correlations between constructs such as TGN, TNG, TGC, and UMIA were high. More metaphor-sensitive and more confident teachers also used metaphors more frequently and more easily in teaching practice—particularly in themes related to WISW, CMPT, and ERT. Highest inter-correlations (e.g., CMPT–ERT: r = .896, WISW–CMPT: r = .845) capture the qualitative themes of metaphor as reflective and action-guiding tools.

In particular, each strand found considerable demographic differences. Female teachers, older teachers, and private school teachers showed considerably greater metaphor-related activity in both affective and applied contexts (e.g., WISW, CMPT, ERT, UMIA). This is corroborated by qualitative accounts in which more experienced or autonomous teachers accounted for more advanced and situational use of metaphors—frequently sourcing from emotional and imaginative metaphors to enhance class life. A fascinating intersection was the metaphor theme as an instructional tool. Instructors of qualitative data referred to metaphors as "keys," "bridges," or "tapestries," making abstract concepts more real and assisting in memory and understanding. The quantitative results supported this impression with high CMPT and UMIA scores, indicating strong belief in the instructional value of metaphor and extensive metaphor use in teaching.

In contrast, the few modest negative correlations in the quantitative data—i.e., TGC (confidence) inversely correlating with ECF, PRS, and CSE learner-centered constructs—undercut a subtle divergence. While many teachers avowed high personal confidence in using metaphors, this was not always accompanied by perceptions of learner compatibility or achievement. This tension was echoed in qualitative instances where educators acknowledged the cognitive and affective density of metaphor usage and the need to calibrate metaphors to learners' needs and environments.

Overall, qualitative and quantitative findings converge to underscore the salience of metaphors in shaping Iranian EFL teachers' pedagogical mind and classroom practices. Metaphors are not secondary stylistic devices but deeply rooted instruments for conceptualizing teaching, constructing instructional sense, and negotiating affective and cognitive classroom space. Such rich insights contribute to the value of metaphor-sensitive teacher education programs that promote reflective, adaptive, and contextually responsive metaphor use within professional development.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The Iranian EFL teachers' answers were revealed to include a rich array of conceptual metaphors reflecting their beliefs regarding teaching English, professional identity, and roles in the classroom. The metaphors not only reflected teachers' cognitive styles but also their emotional engagements and strategic dispositions, making metaphors worthy of being reflective and generative in composing pedagogical philosophy.

The dominant metaphorical schema was Teacher as Navigator or Guide, where teachers envisioned themselves as guides guiding students through the terrain of language learning. The metaphor underscores Farrell's (2018) view of teachers as adaptive decision-makers and is reaffirmed in Borg's (2019) theoretical formulation of teacher cognition as situational and interactive. It is a pedagogical shift away from didacticism towards student-centered teaching with an emphasis on support, flexibility, and responsiveness.

Another prominent conceptualization was Teaching as Nurturing or Gardening. Here, teachers invoked imagery of cultivation—comparing themselves to gardeners or parents—underscoring the importance of emotional labor, patience, and individualized attention. This mirrors Shaw and Andrei's (2020) findings on the affective dimension of teacher metaphors and supports Yunus's (2020) observation that metaphor reveals teachers' underlying emotional commitments. The gardening metaphor suggests a nonlinear, organic approach to learning, consistent with Golfam and Nahavandi's (2021) work on metaphor in Iranian EFL discourse.

A more technical metaphorical cluster emerged around Teaching Grammar as Construction or Engineering. Teachers positioned themselves as engineers or architects, which emphasizes logic, structural design, and accuracy in grammar instruction. These metaphors highlight the role of the teacher as a problem-solver and planner, reinforcing Afifi's (2021) and Kalay and Keçik's (2023) findings on the spatial and mechanical metaphors teachers often use concerning grammar.

Teachers' writing pedagogy was also framed using the metaphor Writing as Sculpting or Weaving, which framed the practice of writing instruction as structure-based, involving creativity, structure, and revision. Such metaphors support research by Vadipoor et al. (2023) and Chen (2019), which asserted that metaphorical teaching enhanced the stylistic awareness and metacognitive approaches of students. The innovative nature of these metaphors reaffirms the circular and self-directed nature of writing instruction in EFL contexts.

The Theme Conceptual Metaphors as Pedagogical Tools covered precisely how teachers apply metaphors intentionally in pedagogy in the classroom. Teachers defined metaphors as "keys," "recipes," and "bridges" that highlighted their belief in metaphors as cognitive aids that aid in understanding, memorization, and emotional connection. This is adapted from Perez-Sobrino et al. (2019) and Upadhaya and Sudharshana (2021), emphasizing the multimodal and memory-enhancing potential of metaphor in teaching. Lastly, metaphors in the Emotional Role of Teaching category—such as performer, warrior, or flame-carrier—captured the emotional costs and motivational challenges teachers face. These representations convey the personal cost of teaching and passion upon which it feeds, consistent with studies by Al-Ahdal and Abduh (2021) and Akhtar et al. (2020) on

emotional labor in EFL teaching. They also echo Zhu et al.'s (2022) conclusions that metaphor occupies a central role in the construction of teacher identity and in expressing professional resilience.

Collectively, the metaphorical repertoire of Iranian EFL teachers conveys a multidimensional understanding of their work that blends strategy, creativity, affect, and identity. It affirms Adami's (2023) claim that metaphor, as a multimodal and social semiotic resource, offers insight into the layered nature of pedagogical self-perception. Teachers do not merely "teach" language—they build, nurture, navigate, and perform, using metaphor to frame, express, and shape their pedagogical engagement.

The second research question probed whether Iranian EFL instructors' metaphor-based beliefs varied across demographic factors such as gender, age, and school type (public or private). Statistical tests, i.e., independent samples t-tests and Spearman's rho correlations, indicated that female, older, and private school teachers scored higher on four of the most significant metaphorical aspects of WISW (Writing Instruction Strategies with Metaphors), CMPT (Perceived Metaphorical Teaching Effectiveness), ERT (Emotional Resonance of Teaching), and UMIA (Use of Metaphor in Instructional Activities) consistently.

These findings corroborate that while overall metaphorical sensitivity is widespread among educators, everyday enactment and affective-metacognitive deployment of metaphor differ by demographic group. This corroborates Littlemore's (2009) and Cameron's (2003) argument that women teachers employ more relational and emotionally charged metaphors, reflecting a more empathetic pedagogy. Similarly, higher metaphor use among older teachers is consistent with Farrell's (2006) hypothesis that pedagogical expertise facilitates metacognitive awareness of metaphor employment.

In comparing private and public-school teachers, the superiority of private school teachers in larger metaphorical aspects is in line with findings from Pishghadam and Meidani (2012), who found greater flexibility and creativity in private schools. This shows that the availability of training and the culture of institutions can have significant impacts on metaphor-guided pedagogy.

Unexpectedly, some constructs, such as PRS (Perceived Relevance to Students) and ICC (Instructional Creative Competence), did not reveal much difference between groups. Either a frequently uniform understanding of these constructs or limited training for instructors in using them effectively may be a reason, reflecting concerns voiced by Pishghadam and Naji Meidani (2012) regarding poorly developed metaphor awareness within formal teacher training.

Correlation analysis also indicated that metaphorical dimensions are context-dependent but integrated. For instance, TGN, TNG, and TGC (the ability to perceive and create metaphors) were all positively correlated, suggesting cognitive integration of metaphor in pedagogical thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 2020; Cameron, 2003). Emotional and instructional motivation factors such as CMPT, WISW, and ERT were also highly correlated, confirming Kövecses's (2020) embodied teaching theory and Boers's (2013) findings on the motivational impact of metaphor.

Negative correlations between TGC and affective measures like ECF, PRS, and CSE would indicate possible tensions between cognitive demand and student affect, possibly due to the demands of the curriculum or lack of familiarity with metaphoric discourse (Deignan, 2005). These nuances emphasize the necessity for context-sensitive and targeted teacher training in teaching using metaphors.

Generally, the current research assures that institutional and demographic elements make an impact on teachers' use of metaphors, as noted in earlier research (e.g., De Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Littlemore, 2009), and points to some areas where adjustment in teaching is called for. The addition of sensitivity to metaphor to teacher education could assist in bridging gaps in instruction, especially in state schools and among less experienced teachers.

The present study investigated Iranian EFL teachers' metaphorical conceptualizations and orientations towards the application of conceptual metaphors in language pedagogy through a mixed-methods study. Drawing upon Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2020) and socio-cognitive theories, findings showed that Iranian teachers utilize highly contexted metaphors to conceptualize their pedagogical selves, teaching selves, and affective selves. The most evocative metaphorical themes—i.e., teacher as guide, gardener, engineer, and performer—invite a rich interweaving of cognition, emotion, identity, and practice in the classroom. The metaphors are employed not as rhetorical flourishes but as cognitive structures that organize thinking and guide instructional practice (Cameron, 2003; Kövecses, 2020).

The quantitative results also showed that teachers' metaphor-based understanding varied markedly according to gender, age, and school type. Female, older, and private school teachers reported higher usage and perceived utility of affectively engaging and pedagogically sensitive metaphors (e.g., CMPT, ERT, WISW, UMIA), a pattern consistent with previous research (e.g., Littlemore, 2009; Pishghadam & Meidani, 2012). Conversely, some structures, such as PRS and ICC, were non-variable between groups, and this suggests that some of the metaphorical spaces may be acceptable to everyone or underdeveloped due to training limitations or institutional priority.

The findings confirm the theoretical hypothesis that conceptual metaphors play an important part in teacher cognition and classroom practice construction (Boers, 2018; Littlemore & Low, 2006). They also bring into focus the serious function of context in influencing metaphorical consciousness since sociocultural and institutional contexts influence knowledge and habits of mind regarding metaphors. Pedagogically, the study affirms the value of the incorporation of metaphorical methods in teacher education, curriculum planning, and lesson design, simply concerning enhancing grammar instruction, writing proficiency, and affective engagement.

Furthermore, the study reveals that metaphor awareness is a reflective middle ground between practice and philosophy and can facilitate more thoughtful consideration among teachers of their work and coping with challenging education contexts. Thus, targeted professional development—specifically, in public schools and among new teachers—can facilitate more adaptive, empathic, and conception-ful teaching practices.

In sum, conceptual metaphor is not an ornament but a sophisticated interdisciplinary construct that affects teachers' cognition, teaching, and affective bonds with students. Revealing Iranian EFL teachers' pedagogical ideology and classroom practices in terms of metaphorical schemata, this study contributes to a more sophisticated description of teacher cognition and testifies to the potential of metaphor as a diagnostic and generative construct in language pedagogy. Longitudinal designs, bigger demographic samples, and cross-linguistic investigations would be beneficial in future studies to better tap the resilient and dynamic aspects of metaphor in SLA and teacher training.

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

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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.

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 (α = .916), Student Relationships (α = .906), and Personal Coping Strategies (α = .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 (χ^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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