

Exploring the Burnout Levels of Iranian EFL Teachers and Their Coping Strategies

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Abstract: This study had two objectives. First, it sought to compare the levels of burnout among male and female Iranian EFL teachers. Second, it aimed to explore the factors contributing to EFL teachers' burnout and their coping strategies. The participants were 104 EFL teachers teaching various age groups - children, young adults, and adults - at Iran Language Institute (ILI). A mixed-methods design was employed, with a quantitative phase in which 104 EFL teachers completed a Persian version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), followed by a qualitative phase of semi-structured interviews with 12 EFL teachers. The results of the quantitative phase did not indicate a significant difference in burnout levels between male and female teachers. Moreover, the age group of the students that these instructors teach does not affect their burnout. It was also revealed that in addition to financial concerns and low wages, which were the most salient contributors to burnout, a perceived lack of appreciation from managers toward teachers' efforts, the repetitive nature of teaching resulting from rigid curriculum, heavy workloads, a lack of teacher autonomy and high expectations from parents and students were causing burnout. The coping strategies most frequently employed by the teachers were spending time with family, avoiding thinking about the workplace when the work was finished and resting. The implications of the results for administration and policymakers are discussed.

Keywords: coping strategies, EFL teachers, Iran language institute, teacher burnout

INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession is among the jobs in which instructors are in direct contact with people and this can sometimes be problematic as these teachers have to listen to others and deal with their problems. These people with whom they should be in contact are mainly students who are

always curious and want to know more. In this case, teachers must repeatedly teach a subject matter and answer students' questions following each topic. All this repeated work will probably lead to some problems, including burnout.

Over the years, abundant definitions have been presented for the term "burnout," and all of them have focused on a single notion. Burnout refers to a kind of job stress prevalently observed in those who are in regular contact with others, leading to depression and reduced interest in their jobs after a few years (Jamshidirad et al., 2012). This concept consists of three components: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (D), and Personal Accomplishment (PA) (Cherniss et al., 1993).

Emotional Exhaustion occurs when an individual deals with high levels of stress as a routine part of his career to the point that he is mentally tired of his job and thinks about withdrawing from his occupation (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Depersonalization, as another component of burnout, refers to a circumstance when someone has a negative perspective toward his job, performance, and clients. If we try to relate this notion to the teaching profession, it concerns having these impressions regarding students and the effectiveness of teaching (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022). As far as the last component of burnout is concerned, Personal Accomplishment (PA), according to Maslach and Jackson (1981), refers to an individual's temptation not to have a favorable opinion about his fulfillment and achievements. Besides being aware of these definitions, we must try to understand burnout levels in teachers so that they would be equipped with coping strategies to deal with the issue of burnout and improve their performance in teaching (Shamsafrouz & Haghverdi, 2015).

In a quantitative study conducted by Jamshidirad et al. (2012) in the Malaysian context, the results indicated that gender did not have any effect on the levels of burnout measured in the participants, as no noteworthy disagreement was observed in both male and female teachers' scores in the three components of burnout. However, in the study conducted by Roohani and Iravani (2020), male EFL teachers achieved a considerably higher score for EE, while female EFL teachers received a notable high score on PA. As a result of their study, Roohani and Iravani (2020), ultimately pointed out that, to a degree, differences among genders can be studied as a variable in describing the levels of burnout experienced among EFL teachers.

While these studies have directly emphasized the comparison of the levels of burnout components among male and female teachers, several studies have been conducted to investigate burnout, specifically among female teachers, and have analyzed the coping strategies that they commonly use to cope with burnout. For instance, in a study by Tikhonova et al. (2018) on female teachers from four different countries, including Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, emotional burnout and the strategies these women used to cope with it were deeply investigated. According to them, although the previous studies conducted before theirs confirmed that female teachers were more likely to experience emotional exhaustion, based on their findings, depersonalization was the dominant component that influenced the burnout experienced by those teachers who had shown high levels of burnout.

Additionally, there was a distinction in the use of coping strategies by female teachers with high and low levels of emotional burnout (Tikhonova et al. 2018). Those who were moderate in terms of experiencing burnout used to stick to strategies like being in social contact with others and exploring social backing (Tikhonova et al. 2018). This finding supported what

Addison and Yankyera (2015) mentioned regarding the coping strategies employed by female teachers in Ghana. Besides, as Tikhonova et al. (2018) put it, those frequently facing burnout were observed to do hostile and antisocial activities. Moreover, a case study conducted on female teachers by Drake and Herbert (2002), concluded that those two participants employed some strategies to avoid burnout that can be classified into three categories: 1) personal releases, which meant doing some sort of actions like separating themselves mentally and physically from work, listening to music and spending time with family, 2) being familiar with organizational skills and 3) being regularly in contact with coaches and mentors.

Generally, as stated by Akabari and Eghtesadi (2017), coping strategies can be classified into two types: Problem-focused and Emotion-focused. In a study conducted by Mohammadi et al. (2009), there was considerable dissimilarity among male and female Iranian high school teachers in employing problem-focused coping strategies contrasting to emotion-focused coping strategies. This finding contrasts with the findings by Ramaiah and Ramchandram (2022), who stated that male and female teachers were significantly different regarding the emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies they employed.

Furthermore, in another study conducted by Nazari and Ataei (2022) on male and female English for academic purposes (EAP) teachers, the analysis of the Friedman test revealed that males and females were different in the frequency of strategies they employed to cope with burnout. As they maintained, clarifying expectations with pleasanace was the most common strategy used by both male and female participants. In addition, planning and organizing teaching and learning, and talking about job-related dilemmas with co-workers, were the most common strategies used specifically by female EAP teachers (Nazari & Atai, 2022). Their finding is, greatly in line with Akbari and Eghtesadi's (2016), who mentioned that neglecting problems and negotiating with colleagues and principals were among the most prevalent burnout coping strategies among Iranian EFL teachers.

Despite numerous studies that have been done to investigate female teachers' coping strategies, there is a minimal study of coping strategies in males. According to Greenglass et al. (1990), while it has been concluded that women generally stick to being socially supported, men may not only avoid this kind of support due to their masculinity role, but they may also stick to other coping strategies like medication. Besides, men's resistance and insurgence are some of the factors that make their strategies different from their female counterparts (Nazari & Atai, 2022).

Regarding the burnout experienced by the two genders, as discussed by Maslach and Jackson (1985), the female role in the working environment is usually shaped by a caring and training viewpoint when they face various individuals and the problems accompanied by them. Consequently, this can be the reason why female EFL teachers are, to some extent, protected from the consequences of job burnout. This finding is entirely in line with the results of Kucuksuleymanoglu (2011) and Motallebzadeh et al. (2014), who showed that female teachers were not likely to be influenced as much as male teachers by the displeasing situations in the teaching job. On the other hand, Marandi et al. (2015) maintained that EFL female teachers were experiencing signs of burnout more than male teachers (as cited by Alimorad & Tajgozari, 2016). Moreover, as stated by Lippel (1999), women were under more pressure since their work was often regarded as unimportant by others, and this made them experience burnout

more than men (as cited by Shamsafrouz & Haghverdi, 2015). However, all these findings are in sharp contrast with the results of studies conducted by Sadeghi and Khezrlou (2016), who reported no relationship between gender and burnout.

Overall, it has been stated that men and women usually incorporate various coping strategies, and this variety can be attributed to their social context of professional roles (Greenglass, 1991). Therefore, as maintained by Greenglass, "Gender-role factors constitute an important contribution to the understanding of burnout, its consequences, and how people cope with it" (Greenglass, 1991, p. 570).

Looking closely at the related literature, innumerable controversies can be observed regarding the comparison of the levels of burnout among male and female language teachers and their coping strategies. Therefore, it is essential to further investigate this topic since it can directly affect the quality of instruction. Besides, it is mandatory to become acquainted with the most common strategies teachers use to cope with burnout. Additionally, since men and women are biologically different, it is worth studying their levels of burnout separately, along with their coping strategies. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate men's and women's levels of burnout in the Iranian context and specifically tries to compare it among the EFL teachers of Iran Language Institute. To the best knowledge of the researchers, no study has been conducted to explore this issue in this context, and due to the heavy nature of the workload at this institute, the teachers seem to be more prone to burnout. Moreover, this study also tries to examine whether these two genders differ regarding the coping strategies they employ and aims to investigate whether the age of the students to whom these instructors are teaching affects the burnout they experience or not. Thus, the following research questions are going to be answered in the following study:

1. Is there any significant difference between the burnout experienced by male and female EFL teachers of ILI?
2. Does the teachers' teaching age group significantly affect their burnout?
3. What are the teachers' coping strategies when facing burnout?

METHODOLOGY

The Study Context

This study has been carried out in the context of Iran Language Institute (ILI) which is the largest institute for teaching foreign languages in Iran. Being established in 1925 in Tehran and previously known as Iran-America Society, it is also the oldest educational center for this aim. After the Islamic Revolution, in 1979, this educational center became affiliated with the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (which is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education) and was renamed to Iran Language Institute.

Currently, the headquarters is located in Tehran with branches in 31 provinces of Iran and more than 135 cities. At the moment, more than one million students are learning various foreign languages including English, French, Arabic, Chinese, Turkish, German, Spanish, Italian, and Russian. Furthermore, the Persian language is recently being taught to non-Persian

speakers. Moreover, numerous educational materials have been developed for teaching and learning purposes.

ILI offers English courses to three age groups: children, young adults, and adults. The students studying in the children's department are aged from 7 to 10, those studying in the young adults' department are 11 to 14 years old, and adult students are older than 14. This language is taught from the basic level up to advanced and students must study the institute's self-developed teaching materials and pass exams to earn their certificate of completion at the end of the program which lasts for several years.

Design of the study

To compare the levels of burnout among male and female EFL teachers of Iran Language Institute and in order to understand their coping strategies, a mixed-method design was adopted in this study. In the quantitative phase, to minimize any possible misunderstanding, the Persian version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) test was distributed online to EFL teachers. Moreover, in the qualitative phase, 6 male and 6 female EFL teachers were interviewed via different social media platforms.

Participants

In the quantitative part of the study, 104 EFL teachers completed the questionnaire. These teachers were teaching different age groups, including 15 children (14.4%), 49 young adults (47.1%), and 40 adults (38.5 %) in different provinces of Iran. Out of 104 participants, 80 (76.9%) were female and 24 (23.1%) were male. 54 (51.9%) of the overall participants were aged more than 35, 20 (19.2%) were between 31 to 35, and 30 (28.8%) were aged between 20 to 30 years old. Most of the participants, 62 people (59.6%), had Master of Arts (M.A.). In addition, 88 (84.6%) of the participants were educated in language-related majors including English language teaching, English literature, English translation (translation studies), and linguistics. A point worth mentioning is that only 12.5% of these teachers had been teaching for more than fifteen years and most of them (44.2%) had been working there for less than five years. Moreover, only 14.4% of the participants were teaching children, as the majority were working in the young adults and adults' department.

Instruments

I) Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

MBI is the most popular instrument used to determine the levels of burnout among teachers. It includes 22 statements and has 3 sub-components of "emotional exhaustion", "depersonalization" and "personal accomplishment". High scores on the first two sub-components and low scores on the "personal accomplishment" sub-section indicate a high score on the overall experienced burnout. The kind of test employed in this study was a 7-point Likert scale ranging in options from never (0) to every day (6).

II) Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted on social media platforms. A comfortable environment was tried to be made so that the participants would freely share their ideas and thoughts about how exactly they tried to cope with burnout. To avoid any miscommunication and problems of this sort, the interviews were held in the participants' first language (Persian) and then were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Data analysis

The quantitative data of this study were analyzed by SPSS, using both descriptive and inferential statistics. For the qualitative part, the interviews were held online due to the lack of in-person access to the participants. After conducting the interview sessions, all the recordings were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Moreover, all the recordings and transcriptions were reviewed several times to guarantee the trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULT

Result of the quantitative phase

In this phase, the Persian version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, having 22 items under there sub-categories of EE, DP, and PA, developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) was distributed among 104 male and female EFL instructors teaching at ILI. Table 1 demonstrates the descriptive statistics for these participants. To understand whether the levels of burnout among males and females were significantly different or not, the Maan Whitney U-test was administered. In addition, to investigate EFL teachers' burnout teaching at three levels of children, young adults, and adults, One-Way ANOVA was carried out.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for EFL teachers' burnout

Total Burnout		
	Valid	104
N	Missing	0
Mean	50.9808	
Std. Error of Mean	1.27655	
Std. Deviation	13.01827	
Variance	169.475	
Range	68.00	
Minimum	26.00	
Maximum	94.00	

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for EFL teachers' responses to the burnout questionnaire. Overall, 104 male and female EFL teachers participated in this study and the mean of their total burnout score equaled 50.98. The range of the total burnout score was 68 with a minimum of 26 and a maximum of 94.

In addition, Table 2 shows the number of male (24) and female (80) teachers who participated in the study. As presented in the Table, the mean value for male EFL teachers' level of burnout is 47.66 and the mean value for female EFL teachers is 66.13.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for male and female teachers' total burnout

	Gender	Valid		Missing Cases		Total Burnout Mean	
		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Value
Total Burnout	Male	24	100.0%	0	0.0%	24	47.66
	Female	80	100.0%	0	0.0%	80	66.13

As indicated in Table 3, the data are not normal, therefore, non-parametric tests must be utilized to compare the mean differences between male and female teachers.

Table 3. The result of the Test of Normality

Tests of Normality							
	Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Total Burnout	Male	0.169	24	0.076	0.926	24	0.079
	Female	0.109	80	0.019	0.953	80	0.005

As shown in Table 4, the difference between male and female teachers' level of burnout is not significant (Sig. > 0.05).

Table 4. The results of the Maan Whitney U-test

Total Burnout	
Maan-Whitney	764.500
Wilcoxon	1064.500
Z	-1.509
Asymp Sig. (2-tailed)	0.131

In order to understand whether teaching different age groups affects the burnout experienced by the teachers, the non-parametric equivalent for One-Way ANOVA, Kruscal Wallis, was employed. Table 5 shows no significant difference between the teachers' level of burnout and their teaching age group (Sig. > 0.05).

Table 5. Maan Whitney U-test of the differences in the level of burnout between the teachers teaching different age groups

Total Burnout	
N	104
Median	49.0000
Chi-Square	0.467
Df	2
Asymp.Sig	0.792

Results of the Qualitative Phase

ILI EFL Teachers' Causes of Burnout

The analysis of the qualitative data indicated some reasons for the teachers' burnout and their coping strategies. The themes are presented in this section.

Low Wages and Income

The main disadvantage of teaching at language institutes is that teachers are often underpaid compared to their working hours and responsibilities. This might be a more crucial problem especially when teaching at less well-known branches. However, although ILI is the most prestigious institute for teaching foreign languages and is affiliated with a public organization, the teachers attributed their most salient reason for burnout to low incomes. For example, one adult teacher said:

“I have been working here for 15 years. Our income has been becoming worse each year. It used to be far better before. The institute only pays us 10% of what it receives from the students and I wonder what happens to the rest 90%! We are undoubtedly the most crucial part of the whole system but unfortunately, we have been forgotten!”

Another teacher teaching to Young Adults maintained that:

“I have been working here for 10 years and only God knows how tired I feel after work but the sad news is that teachers are not paid enough for their hard work”.

Another Participant teaching to Children had the same idea:

“During these 3 years that I have been working here, I understood that we are not appreciated at all. My colleagues and I try to teach as best as possible, but we are not paid enough”.

Rigid Curriculum

Unlike most language institutes of the country, ILI has its own curriculum and teaching methodology meaning that the teachers have to precisely follow a predetermined guideline. For instance, they have to teach a specific number of pages in each session regardless of how simple or complicated the content might be. They should also assign specific assignments to their students in each session and there is no option for any creativity. Although these guidelines might be appropriate for novice teachers who do not have any experience in teaching based on different methods, they are mostly outdated as the classes have to be taught based on the Direct and Audiolingual Methods. This already predetermined methodology and the repetitive nature of the teaching was another cause for teachers' burnout in this context. For example, one young adult teacher said:

“It has been about 2 years since I have been working here but in the first months of working, I understood how boring teaching here is! All I have to do is teach based on a preplanned audiolingual method! There is no room or time for any special creativity. I should avoid speaking in Persian at all and this makes my job really demanding”.

Another adult teacher stated that:

“The nature of teaching here is really boring and repetitive. I teach full-time by working from 1-8:30 P.M. for four days a week. In these classes, I have to teach by drilling and repeating which is tiring. Unfortunately, even the students complain about this nature of teaching and they say it is boring”.

Perceived Lack of Appreciation from Managers

Lack of appreciation by the managers is another problem for those teaching at the institutes. Some managers may not have true perceptions of how difficult teaching is; therefore, they do not realize teachers' need to be appreciated and supported. For instance, a children's teacher mentioned:

“Apart from that, most of the managers do not care about their teachers' professional development. I remember the time when I wanted to move to another city's branch to pursue my studies in the Ph.D. program but instead of thanking me for working hard and pursuing my academic journey to be a better teacher, they said you cannot go! Do not study and stay here and teach! Teaching children does not need a Ph.D.!”

Furthermore, another children's teacher stated:

“During a year that I have been teaching here, the thing that bothers me is neither the methodology nor the students. It's the lack of respect and appreciation from the administration. I have bought many supplementary instruments for teaching so that I could be a popular teacher among the students and easily get promoted. However, these facilities must be provided by the administration and whatever I might need when teaching children should be at my service. Not only do not they provide what I need, but also I am not appreciated!”

High Expectations from Students and their Families

As many people do not have true perceptions of the difficulties of the teaching profession, they have high expectations from the teachers. As teachers are the main individuals dealing with students and their families, these illogical expectations are mainly from them. As maintained by an adult's EFL teacher:

“I have 8 years of teaching experience at ILI and during these years one thing was dominant. Since ILI has been known as the most distinguished institute for teaching foreign

languages, many students and specifically their parents expect a lot from us and sadly, their expectations are not logical at all. For example, they expect me to give them my phone number and answer their calls whenever they wish to talk to me. They do not consider that I am a human and I also have a family to look after and spend time with!"

ILI EFL Teachers' Coping Strategies

Having encountered various stressful conditions, the EFL teachers try to cope with them. Some of the coping strategies applied by the teachers are as follows:

Not Thinking About the Job When it is Over

As maintained by a children's teacher:

"Whenever my classes are finished, I say goodbye to everyone present there and leave the institute. I do not think about either my job or my students until the next class".

Moreover, an adult EFL teacher also stated:

"After teaching for years, I have come to the conclusion that the best way to prevent burnout is resting and not thinking about the job when the work is over; therefore, I try to rest as much as possible and free my mind from work-related issues".

Spending Time with Family

Regarding this theme, a children's EFL teacher mentioned:

"I work at ILI six days per week. On Fridays when I am free, I always spend time with my family by going on a picnic or visiting my loved ones. On this day, I try to do whatever I like and be myself, not a teacher!"

Moreover, an adults' EFL teacher said:

"I am a full-time teacher here and since my wife is a nurse, I have to look after our little son most often. Spending time with him makes me forget about the difficulties of my job and prevents me from being burned out".

Resting

A young adult EFL teacher mentioned:

"Although I work here just two days a week, whenever I get home I eat my dinner and sleep as soon as possible, otherwise I will not be able to do my work and I am tired all the time".

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the levels of burnout experienced by the EFL instructors teaching at ILI along with their coping strategies. To this aim, a mixed-method design was employed. In the quantitative phase, data were collected using the Persian version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), followed by a qualitative phase by holding online semi-structured interviews, followed by analyzing the data by SPSS and thematic analysis, respectively.

Regarding the first research question, the results of the first phase of the study indicated that although female teachers had a higher mean regarding their burnout score, that value was not significantly different from their male colleagues. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the context of ILI, even though female teachers seem to be more burned out, their level of burnout was not significantly different from their male counterparts. This finding is in line with a study by Jamshidirad et al. (2012) in the Malaysian context who mentioned that gender was not a variable affecting teachers' burnout and both male and female teachers were the same in their overall level of burnout and its sub-components. This finding was also supported by Soltanaadi and Omranzadeh (2014) who found out that teachers' gender cannot affect their burnout. Moreover, the results of a study conducted by Shamsafrouz and Haghverdi (2015) support these findings as there was not a significant difference in Iranian male and female EFL teachers' levels of burnout. Moreover, they concluded that the similarity was applicable to every three sub-components of burnout: EE, DP and PA. Additionally, the findings of a study carried out by Sadeghi and Khezrlou (2016) are in line with these findings as a weak, negative, and insignificant relationship was found between Iranian EFL teachers' burnout and gender. Nevertheless, these findings are in sharp contrast with the findings of Roohani and Iravani (2020) and Asgari (2010) showing that gender can be regarded as a variable affecting teachers' burnout. Additionally, a study conducted by Farshi and Omranzadeh (2014) concluded that male and female EFL teachers are different in terms of the burnout they experience.

Regarding the second research question, the results of the quantitative phase exhibited that based on the Kruskal Wallis Test, the level of burnout among the instructors teaching children, young adults and adults was not significant. As a result, it can be surmised that in the context of ILI, the age group that these instructors teach does not affect the burnout they experience. To the best knowledge of the researchers, no study has been done to compare burnout among teachers who teach different age groups in the same context.

Concerning the third research question, as many studies exploring teachers' burnout had considered male and female coping strategies at the same time, this study therefore aimed to compare their strategies in order to investigate whether there had been differences among them to bridge the existing gaps of the literature. Consequently, it was found that their coping strategies were mostly the same as they tried to put aside the work at home and not think about their jobs. They stated that when a day at work is over, it means that at that time they just must focus on their own life, but this might not be in line with the expectations of the students and their families who desire to be in touch with their teacher whenever they wish. Moreover, these teachers try to spend time with their loved ones, especially their family members as doing this, frees their mind from any job-related issue. The findings of Küçüköğlu (2014) support these

results as attempting to relax after work, spending time for themselves, and getting support from others were among the coping strategies that were utilized by the EFL teachers. However, these results are in contrast with the findings of Akbari and Eghtesadi (2017) who mentioned that to cope with burnout, Iranian EFL teachers establish rapport with students, discuss their problems with the principal and colleagues, adhere to moralities, and adopt traditional teaching methods. However, both spending time with family and discussing problems with colleagues and principals are among what Berry and Houston (1993) refer to as social interaction which emphasizes receiving assistance and affection from others. On the other hand, as stated by Akbari and Eghtesadi (2017), strategies such as forgetting about work and not thinking about it are among the avoidance strategies which means fleeing oneself from job-related issues and being devoted to something else.

The same levels of burnout and utilization of similar coping strategies might be because in ILI, unlike some other institutes in Iran, males and females are paid equally for the same job and are considered the same regarding what they do and achieve and little gender discrimination exists.

Besides, unlike Nazari and Ataei (2022) who investigated EAP teachers preferring to discuss job-related stressors with their colleagues, in this study, nothing had been mentioned by the ILI teachers about this and instead, they tried to cope with burnout merely by spending time near their loved ones, instead of their co-workers. Additionally, teachers stated that they try to take fewer classes by working part-time and resting at home since the repetitive nature of work in this institute and the low wages they earn make them burn out most often. The finding of this study is in sharp contrast with what was stated by Greenglass (1991) who stated that male and female teachers employ different coping strategies due to different social contexts of professional roles. The reason for this contrast might be because the assertions made by Greenglass were made more than three decades ago when a lot of gender discriminations were observed in various places of the world. Nowadays, it can be stated that in this context, male and female teachers' context of professional roles are regarded the same and they are treated the same; therefore, the similarities observed among these two genders regarding their burnout and coping strategies can, to some extent, be justifiable.

CONCLUSION

Due to the deficiencies of the educational system in Iran, especially in the area of English language teaching, many students along with their families prefer to attend EFL classes in private language institutes to keep up with their counterparts in other EFL countries. Iran Language Institute as the most well-known and oldest language institute for teaching and learning foreign languages is where many students attend. Because of this, many teachers in this context face high expectations from students, families, supervisors, and administrators; therefore, teachers might be more likely to be dealing with burnout in this context.

The results of this study indicated that there is not a significant difference between the levels of burnout among the male and female EFL teachers of the ILI. Moreover, it was revealed that students' age group (children, young adults, and adults) to whom they teach is not

a significant factor affecting their burnout within this context. Furthermore, the findings of the semi-structured interviews shed light on the causes of teachers' burnout the most salient of which was low wages and income earned by teaching there. Besides, heavy workload due to rigid curriculum and teaching methodology, lack of appreciation from the administrators, and high expectations from students and their families were among the other factors contributing to these teachers' burnout. In addition, some of the teachers also stated their coping strategies that assist them in preventing burnout. Not thinking about the job when the work is over, spending time with family members, and taking a rest were among the strategies utilized to prevent burnout.

Educational policymakers and administrators at ILI should implement measures to mitigate job-related stressors and improve working conditions for teachers, given the significant impact these stressors have on teacher burnout. Furthermore, considering the importance of in-service professional development programs (Navidinia, 2021); implementing targeted programs that equip teachers with effective stress management and coping strategies could yield significant positive outcomes.

This study has some limitations. Apart from the relatively small sample size, the proportion of male and female EFL teachers was not also balanced. As gender was one of the dependent variables in this study, this inadequacy might affect the findings making them less generalizable and putting the external validity at risk.

Given the importance of teachers' psychological well-being, delving into the causes of burnout and attempting to eliminate them is of pivotal importance (Navidinia, et al., 2023; Navidinia & Heiran, 2017). Therefore, further research is suggested to be done to explore more deeply the causes of burnout by having a larger sample and holding more interview sessions. Furthermore, as the role of teaching various age groups (children, young adults, and adults) on teaching burnout seems not to have been investigated adequately, it is worth carrying out further research on this topic to bridge this existing gap in the body of literature.

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