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Accounting for Iranian EFL Teachers' Burnout: Educational Beliefs and Teacher Self-Disclosure in Focus

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Abstract

Teaching is considered a high-risk profession for those suffering from burnout syndrome. Burnout syndrome affects the person who suffers from it and everyone around them, e.g., family, friends, co-workers, students, and parents. The main purpose of this study was to investigate any probable relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' educational belief and their tendency to self-disclose with their likelihood of suffering from burnout. The research instruments were The Teacher Self-Disclosure Scale (Cayanus & Martin, 2008), Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-ES) (Maslach, C., & Schaufeli, 1993), and the Teachers' Educational Belief Questionnaire. The participants were 98 EFL teachers selected from 25 private language schools in Shiraz, Iran. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach Alpha coefficients, and Person Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient were used to answer this research question. Analyzing the data collected through the questionnaires indicated a positive correlation between some dimensions of teacher burnout and teachers' constructive or traditional beliefs. Thus, 'lack of personal achievement' and 'constructive beliefs', 'emotional exhaustion' and 'depersonalization', and teachers' traditional beliefs were positively correlated. On the contrary, a negative correlation was identified between 'lack of personal achievement' and teachers' traditional beliefs. Likewise, 'emotional exhaustion' and 'depersonalization' on the burnout scale were correlated with teachers' constructive beliefs. However, no significant correlation was observed between teachers' neutral beliefs and any dimensions of the burnout scale. Moreover, teacher self-disclosure quantity and negativity were correlated with 'emotional exhaustion' and 'depersonalization' on the burnout scale.

Keywords: burnout; teachers' educational beliefs; ELT teachers

Introduction

As a stressful job, teaching can put teachers under such pressure that they feel tired,

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discharged, hurt, and helpless to cope with its demands. It can also lead to physical and mental problems. Some factors that may cause teacher burnout are feeling overworked, everyday challenges, under time pressure, and conflict with co-workers. Burnout is emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by extreme and chronic stress. It is also interpreted as a persistent negative mental state identified by emotional fatigue associated with anxiety (Maslach, C., & Schaufeli, 1993).

Thus, perceived loss of efficiency and competence at work due to belief dissonance is a further consequence of burnout (W. Schaufeli & Enzmann, 2020). These possible causes may explain why people neglect their own needs.

In some cases, stress at work is a common reason for taking sick leave. As a severe state of mental stress, burnout syndrome reduces resources due to prolonged exposure to stressors (Cooper et al., 2001). According to Maslach (1982), burnout is the three-dimensional construct consisting of (a) 'feelings of emotional fatigue', (b) 'depersonalization', and (c) 'lack of personal achievements.' This definition implies that burnout happens when individuals work with people. In addition, burnout may be due to cognitive and affective factors such as dysfunctional beliefs and a tendency to self-disclose.

Teachers' professional practice is strongly influenced by their educational beliefs (Handal & Herrington, 2003). These beliefs are embodied in all educational activities of teachers, for example, in selecting topics and activities and decision-making and assessment in the classroom (Borg, 2003). Teachers' beliefs and conceptions are critical to understanding and improving the teaching process. They are connected to teachers' abilities to cope with all educational activities, such as daily professional life challenges and general satisfaction, and how they shape students' learning environment and influence their motivation and achievement. In recent decades, teacher beliefs have been recognized as a complex cognitive activity (Farrell and Patricia as cited in Borg (2003). However, more questions are presented about various issues of teachers' beliefs. Teachers' beliefs and ideas shape the

teachers' teaching methodology. Teachers' beliefs about education, students, and their impact on learning activities and achievements are among the controversial issues that researchers have paid attention to (Burns, 1992; Hassan & Kahil, 2005; Shavelson & Stern, 1981).

Another influence on teacher burnout may be related to teachers' relationship with their pupils. For a long time, the dominant conception of a teacher-student relationship, both among professionals and in the minds of the general public, assumed that teachers are not intimate enough with their pupils to talk about personal matters. However, with new methods, e.g., Communicative Language Teaching, this assumption has been challenged, so it is common today for teachers to sometimes talk about themselves by assuming a certain degree of intimacy. Classroom communicative activities usually begin with the exchange of superficial information and gradually move into more meaningful conversations. Self-disclosure can thus represent an element of the communicative teaching practice where teachers may, for example, express what they feel at certain times during the class hour, talk about feelings they share with their pupils, or openly reveal some of their personal experiences.

According to Sorensen (1989) teacher self-disclosure is a distinctive educational instrument in that it is a related teacher rather than a coursebook. The information disclosed by an instructor is a part of informal teaching materials, which is an educational instrument for students learning. Palmer (1998) suggests that it is highly vital for teachers to develop a sense of rapport with learners to boost the

learning process. He suggests that "a good teacher must stand where personal and public meet" (p. 17). However, being able to "stand" on the "fine line" where personal and public meet can be complicated. A teaching strategy that is related to the sense of rapport is teacher self-disclosure (Cooper, P. J., & Simonds, 1999).

Educational beliefs comprise teachers' visions, recommendations, and hypotheses concerning subjects related to education (Hermans et al., 2008). Teachers' educational beliefs are extremely significant in their decision-making in education, pedagogy, and curriculum (Woolley et al., 2004). Accordingly, they affect their teaching approaches (Pajares, 1992). Moreover, these special beliefs stand at the core of the teaching process (Tondeur et al., 2008). Thus, they contemplate how teachers supply instructions in the classroom (Levin & Wadmany, 2005). Moreover, teachers' educational behaviors are due to their teaching perspectives. Sometimes these educational behaviors are such that they cause fatigue or burnout in the individual.

Teacher burnout

One issue that has attracted much attention during the last two decades is teacher burnout. The fact is that teachers who suffer from burnout have a low level of engagement and enthusiasm for their profession. According to Montero-Marín & García-Campayo (2010), burnout syndrome is more severe than the feeling of being worn out, as it is a long-term response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stress at work. In other words, burnout is a situation that continues over time and causes the teacher to select one of three coping mechanisms: fatigue, pessimism, and inefficiency. This situation harms students, teachers, the government, parents, and the educational administration. While the sign of teachers' burnout may identify any instructor who has reached the limit, these conditions mostly affect classroom teachers, who deal with students' daily interactions. This alarming situation of education in the world is bad not only for instructors but also for learners. This problem is as dangerous as teacher prejudice and teacher stress.

Durr et al. (2014) classified the roots of teacher burnout at three distinct levels: organizational, individual, and transactional. Organizational factors that impact teachers' burnout involve poor classroom situation, role conflict, low wages, large classroom load, student misconduct, insufficient administrative support, overwork, job mobility, demands of bureaucracy, over-testing, and ambiguity of the role (Durr et al., 2014; W. B. Schaufeli et al., 2017). Gold & Roth (2013) believe that Individual elements which chip into teacher burnout are age, teaching experience, level of education, language, gender, or socioeconomic status. Chang (2009) claimed that transactional elements also cause burnout. Transactional agents include the communication between personal and organizational, and social factors. Chang (2009) indicates self-efficacy, teachers' attitudes, and beliefs as models of transactional elements. The transactional level has prepared educational research by providing much input for burnout studies focusing on contextual communications. Scientifically, this shift in focus is proven by the abundant evidence that confirms the main role of reciprocal or contextual variables in educational settings.

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Teachers' educational beliefs

According to Williams et al. (2003), what people perceive and know varies from person to person because the construction of individuals' beliefs is largely the result of their personal life experiences. Human beings are unique, and no one is like any other. Teachers' performance in the classroom and their interaction with students, implicitly or explicitly, reflect their beliefs about education, their viewpoints of the world, and their perspectives toward the subjects and the learners. Scholars strongly believe that everything teachers do in the classroom relates to their attitudes about education, whether tacit or explicit. Therefore, even teachers' performance in education is due to their deepest beliefs in this field, which are sometimes not even explicitly stated.

According to Borg (2003), the relationship between beliefs and training is mutual. Studies investigating the influence of teacher education on teacher practice have consistently reported that any course input is strongly influenced by teachers' prior knowledge and beliefs (Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000). In this regard, the importance of beliefs in understanding teacher behavior has been noted by empirical evidence (Calderhead, 1996; Clark, C., & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992). As Borg (1998) put it, teaching experiences and professional development can result from changes in teachers' beliefs. As Johnson (1994) asserted, teachers' beliefs influence their decisions and understanding of classroom activities. These can help teacher education programs and improve teaching methods. Every classroom activity of teachers can be described as the belief system that guides teachers in the path of their actions in the classroom. Richards, J. C., Gallo, P. B., &

Renandya (2001) claimed that teachers' beliefs are shaped through school methods, reading, previous experiences, personalities, and educational theory.

Teachers' constructive beliefs vs. traditional belief

Numerous studies have been conducted since the early 1990s to identify teachers' knowledge and beliefs (Borg, 2003). Beliefs about the nature of education contain direct transition and constructivist beliefs around education. Regarding their beliefs, teachers can be classified into two groups: a) teachers with direct transfer beliefs about education (traditional perspective) and b) teachers with constructive beliefs about education. The role of teachers in the first group is to transfer knowledge in a transparent and structured way, describe the proper solutions, give explicit and explainable problems to learners, and ensure serenity and attention in the classroom. In contrast, the constructivist perspective focuses on learners not as passive recipients but as active participants in the knowledge acquisition process. Teachers with the second view try to facilitate learner inquiry; they prefer to allow learners to create problem-solving solutions themselves, and they allow learners to engage in educational activities. Developing thinking and argument processes is more significant for these teachers than acquiring specific knowledge (Staub & Stern, 2002).

Teacher self-disclosure

As one of the topics of great concern in psychological research, self-disclosure refers to the disclosure of information about oneself to a target by an individual (McBride, M. C., & Wahl, 2005). Self-disclosure is a communication

process by which one person reveals information about themselves to another. Information can be descriptive or evaluative, including thoughts, feelings, aspirations, goals, failures, successes, fears, and dreams, as well as one's likes, dislikes, and favorites.

Teacher self-disclosure refers to "a teacher's sharing personal and professional information about himself or herself" (Goldstein & Benassi, 1994). Examples of topics of personal self-disclosure include families, feelings/opinions, daily activities outside the classroom, and personal history (McBride, M. C., & Wahl, 2005). Teacher self-disclosure can be related to both one's personal and professional life. Vogel and Wester (2003) refer to self-disclosure as "a process whereby a person verbally reveals private feelings, thoughts, beliefs, or attributes to another person". Jourard and Jaffee as cited in Gilbert (1976) define it in this way: "self-disclosure can be described as an act of revealing personal information to others". Derlega, V. J., Metts, S., Petronio, S., & Margulis (1993) believe that self-disclosure "plays a major role in close relationships" (p. 1). Wei et al. (2005) state that "comfort with self-disclosure" is one of the indicators of "social competence". Self-disclosure is the three-dimensional construct, which includes the quantity, relevance, and negativity of the thoughts disclosed (Cayanus & Martin, 2008).

Though researchers have shown some interest in the importance of relational instructional communication for teachers (Cayanus & Martin, 2008), little has been told about the impact of relational instructional communication on teachers themselves. The present study addresses this gap by positing the following research questions.

1) Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' educational beliefs and their burnout rate?

2) Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' self-disclosure and their burnout rate?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 98 EFL teachers from Shiraz, Iran. (32 male and 66 female) aged between 25 and +50 years old with a range of between -1 and +25 years of teaching experience. The participants were selected based on their availability; therefore, they had different educational backgrounds (BA, MA, and Ph.D.) in different English majors, i.e., Teaching English as Foreign Language (14 male and 25 female), English Literature (10 male and 13 female), Translation (5 male and 23 female), and General Linguistics (3 male and 5 female).

Instruments

The required data in this study were gathered through three instruments as follows:

Teachers' burnout inventory

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-ES) is divided into two sections. The first part includes demographic information to collect the members' demographics, including their genders, ages, teaching experiences, academic degree, and first languages. The second section is a questionnaire consisting of 22 items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0= never to 6= daily and is a version of the original MBI for use with educators.

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Teachers' educational beliefs questionnaire

The Teachers' Educational Belief Questionnaire (researcher-made) was used to elicit pedagogical beliefs of EFL teachers about the teaching conceptions in the Iranian educational context. It contains 31 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". In addition, the reliability of items in two parts of the questionnaire was checked through Cronbach's alpha.

Teacher self-disclosure scale (TSDS)

Teacher self-disclosure was assessed using a scale developed by Cayanus and Martin (2008). Teacher Self-Disclosure Scale (TSDS) is a 14-item Likert-style tool for dealing with teachers' use of self-disclosure, i.e., how often they talk about themselves in class. The scale consists of three modules that explore three dimensions of self-disclosure: Quantity, Relevance, and Negativity. In addition, the participants used a seven-point scale ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (7) to illustrate how each questionnaire item applied to them.

Procedure

The teacher participants in this study were 98 ELT teachers of private language institutes from Shiraz, Iran. They were selected from both genders with different ages, teaching, and educational experience. In order to collect the required data for this study, two questionnaires were distributed through face-to-face contact in the institutes or via email. The approximate time needed to complete the questionnaires was 15 minutes. Finally, after collecting, categorizing, and tabulating the data, they were analyzed to answer the research question.

Data analysis

The teachers participating in this study were divided into three groups based on the mean scores obtained from the teachers' educational beliefs questionnaire.

1) Teachers with traditional beliefs: Teachers whose average scores were higher in the second 18 items.

2) Teachers with constructive beliefs: Teachers whose average scores were higher in the first 12 items. and

3) Teachers with neutral beliefs: Teachers who got the same scores in both question groups.

Then Pearson correlation was run to determine the strength of the relationship between beliefs about learning and burnout. Pearson correlation was also used to determine the strength of the relationship between teachers' tendency to self-disclose and burnout.

Reliability and validity

The instruments used in the research process are fundamental tools that provide information; therefore, any data collection instrument must be valid and reliable. The present study investigated the questionnaires' content validity, face validity, and reliability. Moreover, the sample size was determined after performing face and content validity, considering the questionnaire's psychometric properties.

Content validity, conducted through the experts' judgment, achieved a score of 0.78, 0.89, and 0.83 for teachers' burnout inventory, teachers' educational beliefs

Findings and Discussion

Finding

Descriptive statistics (Frequency and percentage) were used to classify the participants into three groups, namely (a) teachers with traditional beliefs, (b) teachers with constructive beliefs, and (c) teachers with neutral beliefs based on their scores on the Educational Beliefs Questionnaire.

Table 1

Teachers' Classification Based on their Average Scores on Educational Beliefs Questionnaire

Groups	Frequency	Percent
Teachers With Traditional Beliefs	34	27.26%
Teachers With Constructive Beliefs	46	36.35%
Teachers With Neutral Beliefs	18	31.2%
Total	98	100%

The results of the descriptive statistics presented in table 1 indicate that in our sample, the predominant teaching beliefs, according to the self-reported questionnaire, is the constructive beliefs, with 46 participants, followed by traditional beliefs (n=34) and neutral beliefs (n=18).

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the participants' average scores on different dimensions of burnout rate. According to Maslach Burnout Inventory, if the average mean score is between 0 and 2, it is taken as never. It is considered a few times if it is between 2 and 4. It is considered daily if the average mean score is between 4 and 6. According to the findings of this table, all three sub-scales refer to a few times.

As shown in Table 2, depersonalization (Mean=3.6808), lack of personal achievement (Mean=3.1524), and emotional exhaustion (Mean=2.7598) contributed to the feeling of burnout among the teachers in order of magnitude. Further, Cronbach Alpha was used to calculate the internal consistency reliability of three dimensions of burnout, Educational Beliefs, and Teacher Self-disclosure questionnaires.

Table 2
Teachers' Classification Based on burnout rate

Components	N	Min.	Max.	Mean.	SD	Decision
Lack of personal achievement	*98*	*1.0*	*5.30*	*3.1524*	*.52953*	*A few times*
Emotional Exhaustion	*98*	*0.0*	*5.50*	*2.7598*	*.54178*	*A few times*
Depersonalization	*98*	*1.0*	*6.20*	*3.6808*	*.63592*	*A few times*
Total	*98*	*0.66*				

Table 3
Sub-Scales of Burnout and Educational Beliefs, Cronbach Alpha Coefficients (α)

Scales	Components	Items	(α)
Burnout	Lack of personal achievement	3, 6, 7, 12, 13, 17, 19, 21	0.82
	Emotional Exhaustion	1, 4, 9, 10, 15, 16, 18, 20, 22	0.90
	Depersonalization	2, 5, 8, 11, 14	0.79
Educational Beliefs	Traditional Beliefs	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	0.72
	Constructive Beliefs	13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30	0.80
Teacher Self-disclosure	Quantity	1,2,3,4	0.80
	Relevance	5,6,7,8,9	0.87
	Negativity	10,11,12,13,14	0.84

As evident in Table 3, all dimensions of the three research tools enjoy appropriate levels of internal consistency reliability, i.e., above .70. A correlation analysis was conducted to evaluate the possible associations between the teachers' educational beliefs and professional burnout syndrome, presented in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that a strong positive correlation exists between emotional exhaustion and traditional beliefs (r = - 0.652, p < 0.031), a very strong negative correlation is reported between emotional exhaustion and constructive beliefs (r = - 0.795, p < 0.048). The correlation between emotional exhaustion and

neutral beliefs is insignificant (Sig. > 0.05). Furthermore, there is a moderate positive correlation between depersonalization and traditional beliefs (r = .585, p < 0.025). There was a moderate negative correlation with constructive beliefs and depersonalization (r = -.461, p < 0.041). As with the other two components, the component of constructive beliefs has no significant correlation with neutral beliefs (Sig. > 0.05). The findings also revealed moderate negative correlations between lack of personal achievement and traditional beliefs (r = -.415, p < 0.021). However, lack of personal achievement had a

weak positive correlation with constructive beliefs (r = -.135, p < 0.018). No significant correlation is reported between lack of personal achievement and neutral beliefs.

Pearson correlation was run to answer the second research question and show the relationship between teacher burnout and teacher self-disclosure.

Table 4
Correlation between Teachers' Educational Beliefs and Burnout

Components of Burnout		Traditional Beliefs	Constructive Beliefs	Neutral Beliefs
Lack of Personal Achievement	Pearson Correlation	-.415	.132	.099
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.018	.135
	N	98	98	98
Emotional Exhaustion	Pearson Correlation	.652	-.795	.134
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.031	.048	.105
	N	98	98	98
Depersonalization	Pearson Correlation	.582	-.461	.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	.041	.214
	N	98	98	98

Table 5
Correlation between teachers' self-disclosure and burnout

Components of Burnout		Amount of self-disclosure	Relevance of self-disclosure	Negativity of self-disclosure
Lack of Personal Achievement	Pearson Correlation	.006	.188	. 113
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.069	.000
	N	98	98	98
Emotional Exhaustion	Pearson Correlation	.171	.261	.477
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.066	.010	.000
	N	98	98	98
Depersonalization	Pearson Correlation	.599	.191	.564
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	.071	.031
	N	98	98	98

Table 5 revealed that there is not any positive and significant correlation between

Lack of Personal Achievement and any aspects of teacher self-disclosure. However, there is a

positive and significant relationship between Emotional Exhaustion and two aspects of teacher self-disclosure i.e., Negativity (r_1 = .423, p = .000) and Relevance (r = .261, p = .010). In addition, Depersonalization and the Amount and Negativity of self-disclosure were shown to be positively correlated (r = .599, p = .025). (r = .564, p = .031) respectively. The correlation between Negativity and Emotional Exhaustion (r < .5) is moderate. However, the correlation between Emotional Exhaustion and Relevance is weak (r < .29).

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore any probable relationship between EFL teachers' educational beliefs and burnout in private language institutes in Shiraz, Iran. The results demonstrated that except for the first component of burnout, lack of personal achievement, there is a significant positive relationship between teachers' burnout and traditional beliefs. The higher the teachers' traditional beliefs, the higher they will likely experience burnout. On the other hand, the relationship between constructive beliefs and burnout was negative. In other words, two components of teachers' burnout, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were negatively related to constructive beliefs. Therefore, teachers with traditional beliefs were more at risk of burnout on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization components. In sum, teachers with a traditional view of education are more prone to burnout than teachers with a constructive view.

Results also demonstrated a significant positive relationship between burnout and teachers' tendency to self-disclose on two dimensions of self-disclosure quantity and negativity. That is, the greater the tendency of teachers to talk about their negative experiences and the more time they spend doing so, the more likely they are to experience burnout. Therefore, teachers with a higher tendency had a higher risk of burnout in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization components. Thus, self-disclosure quantity and negativity may be warning signs.

These results show the importance of developing actions aimed at promoting teachers' emotional and psychological well-being since it is evident that teachers' tendency to self-disclose and their traditional beliefs about the profession correlate to their burnout. It is important to highlight that at least some aspects of self-disclosure and educational beliefs are harmful to the well-being of teachers.

Though no studies address the relationship between teachers' self-disclosure and teacher burnout, some studies in adjacent areas suggest that excessive self-disclosure may have negative consequences (McBride, M. C., & Wahl, 2005). The communicative teaching approach puts tremendous pressure on language teachers to talk or self-disclose, ignoring its possible negative consequences. Therefore, teacher openness and self-disclosure must be managed carefully. We also found that the teachers who view themselves as a conduit for information (traditional view of teaching) are more at risk of developing negative consequences due to teacher self-disclosure.

Conclusion

The findings revealed that most EFL teachers in this study had constructive beliefs and were consequently less at risk of any level of

burnout. However, teachers with traditional beliefs suffer more from burnout regarding emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Teachers' burnout rate can be a product of their educational beliefs. According to the results, there was no significant relationship between the level of burnout and the type of belief among teachers who did not have a particular tendency towards the type of education. Moreover, it was revealed that two aspects of teacher self-disclosure, namely the amount of self-disclosure and negativity of self-disclosure, were correlated with some aspects of teacher burnout, namely, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. In other words, teachers who suffer from teacher burnout are more likely to get engaged in personal talk, as if they were asking for help, though unconsciously. In short, teacher beliefs and their tendency to self-disclose are significant indicators of their behavior in the classroom. Successful teachers can devise their teaching. Therefore, one major benefit of conducting this study is to come across findings that could feed into classroom practice and provide teachers with guidance. Thus, the following recommendations are proposed to deal with this problem:

1. Offering psychological help to teachers suffering from work stress,

2. Developing training programs on stress control and management to provide teachers with the necessary tools to deal with it,

3. Improving working conditions for teachers, which, in turn, will improve their work in the teaching-learning process,

4. Managing the workload of teachers to avoid physical and mental exhaustion,

5. Promoting healthy habits among teachers to improve their living conditions,

6. Promoting the development of emotional support programs and coping with daily challenges.

7. Evaluating the physical and mental situation of teachers regularly, and

8. Requesting support from the pertinent educational authorities to improve the infrastructure of the schools.

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