

Exploring the Relationship between Teacher Burnout, Personality Traits, and Psychological Distress among Iranian EFL Teachers: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate the relationship between burnout, personality traits, and psychological distress among Iranian EFL teachers. Moreover, it was an attempt to examine the effectiveness of five personality factors in predicting burnout aspects among EFL teachers. To this end, a sequential mixed-methods design was utilized. Maslach Burnout Inventory, Personality Traits Scale, and Psychological Distress Scale were the instruments administered to 110 Iranian EFL teachers working in private English language institutes in Tehran. Additionally, a semi-

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structured interview was conducted to delve into the teachers' opinions regarding the reasons and repercussions of teachers' burnout. The results of the study revealed that teachers' burnout aspects were associated with both psychological distress and personality traits. The results also found a significant negative correlation between the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization aspects of burnout and the four personality traits involving openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. Finally, the results of the study indicated that the rise in neuroticism led to an increase in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization aspects of burnout. The results of independent-samples t-test revealed that teaching experience contributed to teachers experiencing less burnout. The results of the study can enlighten teachers as to what extent teachers' burn out can be predicted by psychological distress, and personality traits, which, in turn can encourage teacher training programs to concern themselves with the mental health and preparedness of trainees to teach.

Keywords: Burnout, Personality Traits, Psychological Distress, Teaching Experience, EFL Teachers.

Introduction

Teaching has been ranked as an exceedingly stressful career. The related literature has consistently characterized teaching as a highly stressful career involving higher emotional tension (Borg et al., 1991; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Travers & Cooper, 1996). Teaching is not limited to dealing with the academic states of students, but at the same time it involves managing the emotional states of students as well. Cokluk (2000) indicates that teachers generally experience more stress in comparison to the average stress level of those who work in other careers. This condition enhances the probability of experiencing burnout for teachers. Burnout is prevalent in teaching and school administration professions involving intense and emotionally-charged human relationships (Kalker, 1984; Maslach, 1986; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Burnout is a negative affective reaction provoked against the chronic occupation stress which occurs mainly in interpersonally oriented occupations such as the teaching profession (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Identifying the roots and strategies to cope with tense situations and prevent the occurrence of burnout is thus of crucial significance (Hiver, 2015). The psychosocial distress for teachers originates from the interplay between individual, organizational, and social factors. Among the factors exerting influence on burnout, personal characteristics play a crucial role. Individuals' personality properties denote to characteristics that may lead or enhance the likelihood of burnout or may diminish burnout and its consequences. Gender, education, age, years of teaching experience, marital status, personality, social support and expectations are some of the social and personal variables influencing burnout (Saglam-Ari & Cina-Bal, 2008). To compensate for this problem and to contribute to the existing literature, the current study aimed to investigate the possible correlation among personality traits, psychological distress, and burnout among Iranian EFL teachers.

Literature Review

Burnout

Burnout is considered to be a psychological construct that has received considerable attention in recent literature. Freudenberger (1974) coined the term burnout to delineate the demotivation and emotional exhaustion he observed in volunteers engaged in a free health clinic. Freudenberger witnessed that by passage of time, demotivation and emotional exhaustion increased and were accompanied by diverse psychological and physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, irritability, insomnia, and exasperation (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Maslach (1976) also noticed that individuals working in human service professions are not only emotionally exhausted, but they also develop negative orientations towards their customers.

Maslach (1982) provided a definition of burnout as "a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people-work' of some kind (p. 2). More specifically, Maslach (1993) described burnout as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to depletion of emotional resources and the state of being emotionally burdened/overstrained. Depersonalization is defined as negative, uncaring, or extremely disconnected reaction to other people, who are generally the receivers of one's services or care. Reduced personal accomplishment denotes "a person's negative self-evaluation in connection to his or her job performance" (Schaufeli et al., 1993, p. 17).

Teacher burnout is considered to be a grave problem in education environment (Shen et al., 2009). Teachers' burnout has been documented (e.g., Carson et al., 2011; Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005; Maslach et al., 2001) to adversely influence teaching effectiveness and decrease their quality of life. Feelings of burnout also play a cardinal role in teachers' regular absence from work and job turnover (Whipp et al., 2007).

A large number of research studies have explored the impact of the characteristics of teachers on burnout (e.g., Byrne, 1991; Jackson et al., 1986; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982), and there sometimes exists disagreement in the findings. For instance, some studies have indicated that teachers with less experience are typically vulnerable to higher degrees of burnout (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984; Fisher, 2011); nevertheless, at times, there happens to be different results (Friedman, 1991; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). Conversely, teacher age has had an influence on burnout in a consistent manner. Previous research has revealed that young teachers are susceptible to experiencing higher degrees of emotional exhaustion compared to their older co-workers. (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Schwab et al., 1986). Moreover, a correlation exists between teacher burnout and the grade level that teachers teach, in a way that secondary school teachers tend to undergo higher degrees of depersonalization and decreased personal accomplishment than elementary school teachers (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982).

In the context of Iran, Vaezi and Fallah (2011) carried out a study with group of 104 Iranian EFL teachers to ascertain the correlation between burnout and their emotional intelligence. The participants were presented with EI and Burnout questionnaires. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was utilized in order to analyze the data. The findings of the study revealed a negative correlation between burnout and emotional intelligence.

Personality Traits

Personality traits are defined as individual differences, which are relatively stable patterns of behavior (Matsumoto, 2009). According to Soto et al. (2016), personality traits are associated with an idiosyncratic facet of an individual's affect, behavior or cognition, that is inclined to be steady over time and unchanging across related circumstances. A number of scholars (e.g., Kennedy, 2012; Rose et al., 2014; Thornton et al., 2005) support not just the investigation of the correlation between the performance of teachers and their personality traits, but recommend that personality traits potentially should be explicitly reflected upon during the selection of teachers and the process of their recruitment as well.

The bulk of the recent investigations on personality traits has been basically associated with the Five Factor Model (Soto et al., 2016) which categorizes personality traits into five inclusive dimensions: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience (Soto et al., 2016). These five dimensions effectively tap into a broad spectrum of individual variations in personality, and as a result the FFM is the most broadly utilized structural model in measuring personality and enquiries.

Extraversion is generally considered the degree to which an individual is garrulous and gregarious in social circumstances (Soto et al., 2016). Its essential facets involve sociability (vs. shyness), assertiveness (vs. submissiveness), and activity (vs. lack of energy). In terms of behavior, extroverts have the inclination to be talkative, assume responsibility in group situations, and show positive emotions, while introverts have the tendency to be uneasy in social situations, and do not reveal what they think or feel.

Agreeableness is a significant facet of social conduct. It deals with the degree to which someone treats pro-socially in relation to others and keeps amiable, congenial interpersonal relations (Soto et al., 2016). Central aspects of agreeableness embrace compassion (vs. lack of concern for others), politeness (vs. antagonism), and trust (vs. suspicion of others). Individuals who enjoy high levels of Agreeableness appear to be more eager to assist and condone others, and behave respectively towards other people; those who possess low levels of Agreeableness are apt to treat others with contempt, begin controversies, and feel resentful.

Conscientiousness refers to the ability of an individual to arrange things, finish tasks, and put effort in accomplishing long-term purposes (Soto et al.,

2016). Its core aspects include orderliness (vs. disorganization), self-discipline (vs. inefficiency), and reliability (vs. inconsistency). Those with high conscientiousness opt for order and structure, are fertile workers, are inclined to abide by regulations and standards, and are more capable of postponing gratification, whereas those with low levels of Conscientiousness have problem handling their desires and temptations and their attentions are easily diverted from tasks.

Neuroticism (sometimes called by its socially favorable pole, Emotional Stability) is concerned with the degree to which an individual is vulnerable to experience negative feelings and spirits (Soto et al., 2016). Its key aspects encompass anxiety (vs. calmness), depression (vs. contentment), and emotional volatility (vs. stability). Those with high levels of neuroticism more frequently undergo keen negative emotions, such as fright, grief, and exasperation, and experience frequent changes of mood. Those who are less neurotic, keep relaxed and sanguine, yet in tough circumstances, and can more easily control their emotions.

Openness to Experience is related to the all-around depth and breadth of an individual's artistic, intellectual, and experiential life (Soto et al., 2016). Significant aspects of Openness involve aesthetic sensitivity (vs. insensitivity), imagination (vs. lack of creativity), and intellect (vs. lack of intellectual curiosity). Individuals who are highly open, tend to possess a wide range of interests, and take pleasure in learning and trying novel things. On the contrary, those with low levels of Openness are inclined to have limited interests, and opt for routine and familiarity over diversity and innovation.

Psychological Distress

According to Guazzaroni (2018), psychological distress is a general term used to depict disagreeable feelings or emotions that influence your level of functioning. In other words, it is a psychological uneasiness that affects your activities of daily living negatively. Psychological distress can lead to negative views of the environment, others, and the self. Sadness, anxiety, disturbance, and symptoms of mental illness are demonstrations of psychological distress. Psychological distress is associated with an emotional problem by related symptoms of both depression and at times anxiety. The symptoms of psychological distress are realized in the form of physical problem (Darcy & Siddique. 1984). Many studies confirmed a negative significant correlation between psychological distress and health-related quality (Paul, 2009; Prochkska & Diclemente, 1999; Selye, 1976).

Among teachers, very high levels of psychological distress have been observed and recorded. For example, Punch and Tuettman (1990) found that secondary teachers experienced psychological distress twice more than that of the general population. In a similar study, Johnson et al. (2005) made a comparison among the psychological health of 26 different professions, and discovered that teaching is one of the six most stressful jobs. Comparative studies have also been conducted on the differences between psychological health of male and

female teachers. Kovess-Masfety et al. (2007), for instance, found that female teachers consistently scored higher on psychological distress than their male colleagues. Utilizing the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSC), they spotted the biggest differences in the secondary school sector, where male teachers gained lower scores (so they were healthier) and female teachers obtained higher scores (so they were less healthy) than teachers elsewhere. In another study, Punch and Tuettmann (1990) found that whereas work-related stress factors just comprised a small amount of variance in psychological distress, these factors accounted for much more variance among female teachers than among their male counterparts. As Punch and Tuettmann have argued, this might have been due to their previous investment in teaching and thus placing themselves in higher danger. Punch and Tuettmann recommended that environmental facets of teaching are more significant in engendering and alleviating psychological distress among female than male teachers and urged researchers to further investigate these discrepancies.

The Five Factor Model, Psychological Distress, and Burnout

Personality can be explained with regard to five fundamental factors, often labeled as the Big Five. The current labels for the bipolar factors are a) Extraversion versus Introversion, b) Agreeableness versus Hostility, c) Conscientiousness versus Lack of Conscientiousness, d) Neuroticism versus Emotional Stability, and e) Openness to Experience versus Closedness to Experience.

Extroverts' generally cheerful temperament (Watson & Clark, 1992) might result in them concentrating on the pleasant and positive aspect of their experiences. Furthermore, extraversion is essentially connected with the utilization of rational, problem-solving coping strategies and with seeking of social support and positive reassessment (Dorn & Matthews, 1992; Watson & Hubbard, 1996). Therefore, it is not startling that some research has indicated a negative correlation between burnout and extraversion. More precisely, Francis et al. (2004), Michielsen et al. (2004), and Piedmont (1993) have observed that extraversion has a negative correlation with emotional exhaustion. Kim et al. (2019) also revealed that extraversion was in negative correlation with burnout. The inclination of extroverts to search for interactions with other individuals may also neutralize depersonalization processes. In fact, Lingard (2003) found that social extraversion and action extraversion are negatively correlated with cynicism among civil engineers.

Agreeableness is characterized by altruism, caring, and nurturance in contrast to hostility, self-centeredness, indifference to others, and noncompliance. There appears to be some evidence for a mild correlation between agreeableness and social support (Hooker et al., 1994; Vickers et al., 1989; Watson & Hubbard, 1996). The stereotypical picture of an ideal nurse, a sort of Florence Nightingale, may possess a high level of agreeableness. The findings of the few studies that dealt with the association between burnout and agreeableness are in accord with this idea. For instance, Piedmont's (1993) first study indicated

that agreeableness is in a negative correlation with emotional exhaustion and in a positive correlation with personal accomplishment. In a second study, Piedmont (1993) revealed that, in filling a 7-month follow-up questionnaire, therapists who received high scores on agreeableness were less prone to experience emotional exhaustion and negative attitudes toward their clients. In the same vein, Deary, et al. (1996) stated that depersonalization and agreeableness are negatively correlated. Nevertheless, they found no association between agreeableness on the one hand and personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion on the other. Zellars et al. (2000) came up with analogous findings and discovered a weak negative correlation between depersonalization and agreeableness and no correlation between agreeableness and the two other burnout variables.

Researchers (e.g., Watson & Hubbard, 1996) have consistently attributed conscientiousness to problem-solving coping strategies, presumably due to the tenacity attribute of individuals enjoying high levels of this construct. Additionally, Costa et al. (1991) and McCrae and Costa (1986) have related conscientiousness to self-discipline, competence, dutifulness, and achievement striving. The conscientious individual's tenacity and self-discipline will perhaps assist him or her in completing tasks and accomplishing things as well. In fact, the studies conducted by Piedmont (1993), Deary et al. (1996), and Deary et al. (2003) have indicated that personal accomplishment and conscientiousness correlate positively. Kim et al. (2019) maintained that conscientiousness negatively correlated with burn out. Deary et al.'s (2003) longitudinal analysis of burnout in nursing students revealed that there is a positive correlation between depersonalization and conscientiousness.

What characterizes neuroticism includes a tendency to experience negative, disturbing emotions and to have related cognitive and behavioral traits. Among the traits that categorize this aspect are irritability, fearfulness, social anxiety, low self-esteem, and helplessness (Costa & McCrae, 1987). Generally, people who suffer from high neuroticism have a propensity for setting extremely high purposes for themselves and are inclined to undervalue their own performance (Eysenck, 1947). Bolger (1990) and Heppner et al. (1995) have made an association between neuroticism with the use of inefficient coping strategies. It seems that avoiding and distracting coping strategies (e.g., denying and self-criticism) are more frequently used by individuals with high levels of neuroticism compared to more approaching strategies like problem solving and proactive behavior (Bolger, 1990; Costa & McCrae, 1987). Furthermore, neuroticism appears to be connected with intense emotional reactions to anxiety-provoking situations, ultimately resulting in physical illness (Van Heck, 1997), with a higher risk of developing psychopathology (Widiger & Trull, 1992).

A number of scholars (e.g., Deary et al., 1996; Hills & Norvell, 1991; LePine et al., 2004; Lingard, 2003; Zellars et al., 2000) conducted a study on the correlation between burnout and neuroticism. The findings of their studies have generally indicated that those who suffer from high neuroticism are more prone to experience feelings of emotional exhaustion, and lower degrees of

personal achievement. Working with a sample of Spanish special education and elementary school teachers, Cano-Garcia et al. (2005) discovered that teachers high in neuroticism and introversion attained the highest scores in burnout.

Finally, the intelligence and curiosity that are connected with the fifth factor, intellect/autonomy, might be related to an inclination to attempt to learn something worthwhile from demanding experiences with regards to, for instance, personal growth or other positive outcomes (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1993). Intellect is not related to coping but seems to manifest a more flexible, imaginative, and intellectually curious approach in coping with situations that induce stress (Watson & Hubbard, 1996).

Kokkinos (2007) made a study with the purpose of investigating the relationship between burnout, job stressors and personality characteristics in primary school teachers from Cyprus. The results of the research demonstrated that both work-related stressors and personality were correlated with the three dimensions of burnout. Neuroticism was a common predictor of all dimensions of burnout. It was concluded that individual characteristics of teachers along with job related stressors should be taken into consideration when inquiring into the burnout phenomenon.

In a similar study, Pishghadam and Sahebjam (2012) made an attempt to conduct an investigation into the correlation between teachers' personality types, burnout and emotional intelligence among 147 teachers in the city of Mashhad. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), AND Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) were used to analyze the data. The findings of the study demonstrated a significant association between personality types and emotional intelligence and the three dimensions of burnout. Moreover, it was revealed that extraversion and neuroticism were the best predictors for emotional exhaustion; intrapersonal scale of emotional intelligence and agreeableness were the best predictors for depersonalization, and so were interpersonal scale and conscientiousness for personal accomplishment.

Yilmaz (2014) carried out a study aiming to examine the relationship between personality characteristics and burnout levels. The results of the study indicated that the participants displayed maximum participation concerning personality characteristics respectively in conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience, extraversion, and emotional stability dimensions. The levels of emotional exhaustion of participants were at the medium level, whereas depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment levels were low. Moreover, there was no significant correlation between teachers' personal traits and burnout levels. Therefore, it was concluded that increasing the positive views of teachers about personal characteristics can lead to a decrease in their burnout levels.

Bakker et al. (2006) conducted a study aimed at examining the correlation between the 5 basic personality traits and burnout as measured by Maslach Burnout Inventory among 80 volunteer counselors. The three separate step-wise multiple regression analyses were carried out to analyze the data. The

results of the study revealed that emotional exhaustion was anticipated by emotional stability; depersonalization was predicted by extraversion, emotional stability, and intellect/autonomy; and personal accomplishment was anticipated by extraversion and emotional stability. Moreover, a number of the fundamental personality factors moderated the correlation between the relative number of negative experiences and burnout, implying that personality might contribute to protection against dangers of fostering burnout in voluntary human service work.

The Present Study

This study was an attempt to investigate the possible correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' burnout, personality traits, and psychological distress. Moreover, it explored the predictive power of personality traits, psychological distress in teachers' burnout. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there any statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' personality traits, psychological distress, and burnout levels?
2. Among personality traits and psychological distress which one is a stronger predictor of teachers' burnout?
3. To what extent do the components of teacher personality traits predict their burnout levels?
4. Is there any statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' years of teaching experience and burnout levels?
5. From teachers' perspectives, what are the reasons behind teachers' burnout?
6. From teachers' perspectives, what are the consequences of teachers' burnout?

Method

Participants

The participants for the present study were 110 Iranian EFL teachers teaching English in different private language institutes in Tehran. The sampling strategy for selection was convenience sampling procedure. The participants had at least five years of teaching experience and were considered as expert teachers based on Berliner's (1994) five-stage model of teacher development (cited in Andrews, 2007). The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 50 years old. The participants had mostly majored in different branches of English: English literature, English teaching, and English translation.

Instrumentation

This study employed three questionnaires and a semi-structured interview to collect the necessary data. The participants were given Maslach Burnout Inventory, Personality Traits Scale, and Psychological Distress Scale.

Maslach Burnout Inventory. The participants completed Maslach Burnout Inventory developed and validated by Maslach and Jackson (1986) in order to determine their burnout level. By virtue of its popularity, the MBI has been surveyed by a good number of researchers concerning its validity and reliability; a large number of findings demonstrated its validity and reliability to enjoy a high value and be strong (Maslach et al., 1996; Schaufeli et al., 1993). This questionnaire consists of 22 statements where the respondents identify their feelings at a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 'never' to 'always'. The three components of professional burnout assessed by this tool are emotional exhaustion (9 items; $\alpha = 0.84$), depersonalization (5 items; $\alpha = 0.67$), and reduced personal accomplishment (3 items; $\alpha = 0.78$). Scoring is carried out separately for each factor. Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization dimensions consist of negative items while Reduced Personal Accomplishment dimension comprise positive items which were scored inversely. The reliability of the instrument in this study was estimated to be .77 which was quite acceptable.

Personality Traits Scale. The second questionnaire was Five Factor Model of Personality (FFM) questionnaire, often referred to as the Big Five, developed by Soto et al. which consists of 100 statements where the respondents reacted at a four-point Likert- scale ranging from 'very inaccurate' to 'very accurate'. It is divided into five sub-scales statements: Openness to experience (20 items), Conscientiousness (20 items), Extraversion (20 items), Agreeableness (20 items), and Neuroticism (20 items). Measures of the Big Five have displayed remarkable reliability and inter-rater agreement, and could be utilized to predict a variety of significant social, occupational, psychological, and health outcomes (Soto et al., 2015). In this study, the Conbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was .92.

Psychological Distress Scale. The third questionnaire was Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10, Kessler, 1996) which consists of 10 statements where the respondents need to generally identify their feeling at a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 'None of the time' to 'All of the time'. For all items, the respondent chooses the answer that seems to be truest for them in the past four weeks. Scores are then extracted with the maximum score of 50 which shows severe distress, and the minimum score of 10 showing no distress. The Conbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of this instrument in this study was .92.

Semi-structured Interview. In the second phase of the study, a semi-structured interview delving into teachers' opinions about the reasons and consequences of teachers' burnout was developed by the researcher (Mackey & Gass, 2005). As put forward by Mackey and Gass, "interviews can allow researcher to investigate phenomenon that are not directly observable, such as learners' self-reported perception or attitudes" (p. 173). Ten participants were randomly employed to take part in the interview.

Design

This study followed sequential mixed-methods research design (Creswell, 2009) with the purpose of complementarity to investigate the relationship between EFL Teacher's personality traits, psychological distress, and their level of burnout as well as the reasons and consequences of teachers' burnout. The justification for pursuing a mixed methods approach is that both quantitative and qualitative research methods by themselves cannot be adequate for demonstrating and explaining the complexity of language studies (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The researcher launched the study by collecting the quantitative data using the related questionnaires. Having collected and analyzed the required quantitative data, a sub-sample of the participants were randomly asked to be interviewed to clarify the reasons and consequences of teachers' burnout.

Procedure

To collect the quantitative data, the researcher used the three questionnaires (Maslach Burnout Inventory, Personality Traits Scale, and Psychological Distress Scale). The questionnaires were collected online. To obtain the qualitative data, interviews were conducted with 10 English teachers who were recruited randomly. The interviews were held via Telegram application. Each interview lasted between 25 to 35 minutes. We used a social networking platform for conducting interview, since, teachers preferred to use this social networks because of the convenient access to this networking platform in which teachers could freely voice their opinions rather than hold in person interview. The interview questions revolved around the prevalence of burnout among EFL teachers, the reasons resulting in burnout, and the repercussions of burnout. The personal and educational factors the reasons which may give rise to burnout among EFL teachers were delved into.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out on the basis of the data obtained from both questionnaires and interviews. First, the Cronbach's alpha of each questionnaire was calculated to estimate the internal consistency. To provide an appropriate answer to each research question of this study, other statistical methods were applied. For quantitative research questions, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, Multiple Regression, and Independent Samples t-test were run.

To answer the qualitative research questions exploring teachers' opinions about the reasons behind teachers' level of burnout and the consequences of burnout, their responses to interview questions were transcribed verbatim. The researcher read interview transcripts to search the themes in their opinions. Then, teachers' responses were sorted into broad categories representing the overarching themes common across interviews. Through thematic analysis,

teachers' responses to interview questions were categorized in order to extract major recurrent themes supplied by teachers regarding the reasons behind teachers' level of burnout and the consequences of burnout. Thematic analysis is defined as a useful method for recognizing, analyzing, and presenting patterns or themes in the data, organizing and presenting a description of the data set in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is frequently applied in qualitative research and focuses on extracting main recurrent themes within data (Daly et al., 1997). Then, frequency analyses were applied to discover the most frequent answers provided by teacher to interview questions.

Results

Quantitative Results

To answer the first research question exploring the relationship between EFL teachers' five factors of personality traits, psychological distress, and their three dimensions of burnout, Pearson correlation was run. The following table summarizes the results of descriptive statistics of five personality traits and three dimensions of burnout.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Five Personality Traits and Three Dimensions of Burnout

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Emotional exhaustion	30.1727	5.84016	110
Depersonalization	16.7545	3.50409	110
Personal accomplishment	21.7818	4.44824	110
Openness to experience	43.3909	9.28459	110
Conscientiousness	51.5545	7.22456	110
Extraversion	47.4364	8.06115	110
Agreeableness	47.6000	7.36867	110
Neuroticism	51.1364	6.52937	110

Table 2.

Correlation between Teachers' Five Personality Traits and Three Dimensions of Burnout

		Openness to experience	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
Emotional exhaustion	Pearson Correlation	-.44**	-.43**	-.63**	-.48**	.29**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	110	110	110	110	110
Depersonalization	Pearson Correlation	-.53**	-.415**	-.699**	-.55**	.19**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	110	110	110	110	110
Personal accomplishment	Pearson Correlation	.92**	.59**	.69**	.73**	-.38**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.97	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	110	110	110	110	110

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results indicated a significant negative correlation between the four personality traits including openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional exhaustion. In addition, the same four personality traits were in significant negative relationship with depersonalization. However, they were in significant positive correlation with personal accomplishment. On the other hand, neuroticism was in significant positive correlation with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, while it was in significant negative correlation with personal achievement.

To explore the possible correlation between psychological distress and burnout, again Pearson correlation was calculated.

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Psychological Distress and Three Dimensions of Burnout

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Emotional exhaustion	30.1727	5.84016	110
Depersonalization	16.7545	3.50409	110
Personal accomplishment	21.7818	4.44824	110
Psychological distress	26.1000	5.83245	110

Table 4.
Correlation between Teachers' Psychological Distress and Three Dimensions of Burnout

		Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal accomplishment
Psychological distress	Pearson Correlation	.973**	.810**	-.535**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	110	110	110

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results revealed that there was a significantly positive correlation between psychological distress and emotional exhaustion on the one hand and psychological distress and depersonalization on the other, while there was a significantly negative correlation between psychological distress and personal accomplishment.

In order to address the second research question investigating among personality traits and psychological distress which one was a stronger predictor of teachers' burnout, multiple regression was run.

Table 5.
Model Summary for Teachers' Personality Traits and Psychological Distress in Predicting Teachers' Burnout

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	.876 ^a	.767	.763	3.63536	.000 ^b

a. Predictors: (Constant), personality traits, psychological distress

The results revealed that total variance explained by the model was .76 implying that 76% of the variance in teachers' burnout was explained by personality traits and psychological distress (Adjusted R Square = .76).

Table 6.
Regression Analysis for Teachers' Burnout in terms of their Personality Traits and Psychological Distress

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	8.925	5.248		1.701	.092	-1.479	19.329
1 Psychological distress	1.325	.073	1.035	18.14	.000	1.180	1.469
Personality traits	.105	.016	.369	6.461	.000	.072	.137

a. Dependent Variable: burnout

Table 6 shows that personality traits and psychological distress were significant predictors of teachers' burnout. However, psychological distress was a stronger predictor of teachers' burnout (Beta: 1.03)

As an attempt to answer the third research question exploring to what extent teachers' five personality traits predicted teachers' burnout multiple - regression was run. The first regression analysis was conducted with five personality traits as predictors and emotional exhaustion as the criterion variable.

Table 7.
Model Summary for Teachers' Five Personality Traits in Predicting Teachers' Emotional Exhaustion

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	.667 ^a	.445	.418	4.45	.000 ^b

a. Predictors: (Constant), Neuroticism, Openness to experience, agreeableness, Conscientiousness, extraversion

As shown in Table 7, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 41. In another word, 41 per cent of the variance in teachers' emotional exhaustion can be explained by the independent variables, including extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism and emotional exhaustion (Adjusted R Square = .41).

Table 8.
Regression Analysis for Teachers' Emotional Exhaustion in terms of their Five Personality Traits

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	42.156	5.780		7.29	.000	30.693	53.618
Openness to experience	-.091	.064	-.145	-1.43	.155	-.218	.035
Conscientiousness	.123	.098	.152	1.25	.212	-.071	.318
1 Extraversion	-.580	.103	-.801	-5.61	.000	-.785	-.375
Agreeableness	.162	.116	.205	1.39	.165	-.068	.393
Neuroticism	.106	.071	.118	1.49	.138	-.035	.246

a. Dependent Variable: emotional exhaustion

As indicated in the Table 8, extraversion was significant predictor of teachers' emotional exhaustion (Beta: $-.80$). The second regression analysis was performed utilizing the five personality factors as predictors and depersonalization as the criterion variable.

Table 9.
Model Summary for Teachers' Five Personality Traits in Predicting Teachers' Depersonalization

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	.74 ^a	.56	.54	2.37	.000 ^b

a. Predictors: (Constant), Neuroticism, Openness to experience, agreeableness, Conscientiousness, extraversion

The results revealed that the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 54, indicating that 54 per cent of the variance in teachers' depersonalization is accounted for by the independent variables, including extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and emotional exhaustion (Adjusted R Square = $.54$).

Table 10.
Regression Analysis for Teachers' Depersonalization in terms of their Five Personality Traits

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	29.008	3.084		9.405	.000	22.891	35.124
Openness to experience	-.101	.034	-.267	-2.967	.004	-.168	-.033
Conscientiousness	.167	.052	.345	3.192	.002	.063	.271
Extraversion	-.384	.055	-.884	-6.972	.000	-.494	-.275
Agreeableness	.045	.062	.096	.733	.465	-.078	.168
Neuroticism	-.008	.038	-.016	-.222	.825	-.083	.067

a. Dependent Variable: Depersonalization

Table 10 shows that openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extraversion were significant predictors of teachers' depersonalization. However, extraversion was a stronger predictor of teachers' burnout (Beta: $-.88$). The next multiple-regression was run with the five personality factors as predictors and personal accomplishment as the criterion variable.

Table 11.
Model Summary for Teachers' Five Personality Traits in Predicting Teachers' Personal Accomplishment

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	.947 ^a	.897	.892	1.4593	.000 ^b

a. Predictors: (Constant), Neuroticism, Openness to experience, agreeableness, Conscientiousness, extraversion

The results illustrate that the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 89 suggesting that 89 per cent of the variance in teachers' personal accomplishment can be explained by the independent variables, including extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and emotional exhaustion (Adjusted R Square = $.89$).

Table 12.
Regression Analysis for Teachers' Personal Accomplishment in terms of their Five Personality Traits

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	3.669	1.894		1.937	.055	-.087	7.424
1							
Openness to experience	.377	.021	.786	18.046	.000	.335	.418
Conscientiousness	-.082	.032	-.133	-2.544	.012	-.146	-.018
Extraversion	.114	.034	.206	3.357	.001	.046	.181
Agreeableness	.064	.038	.106	1.684	.095	-.011	.140
Neuroticism	-.048	.023	-.070	-2.064	.041	-.094	-.002

a. Dependent Variable: Personal accomplishment

Table 12 shows that openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extraversion were significant predictor of teachers' personal accomplishment. However, openness to experience was a stronger predictor of teachers' personal accomplishment (Beta: .78).

To investigate the fourth research question investigating the influence of years of teaching experience on teachers' burnout, independent samples t-test was run.

Table 13.
Descriptive Statistics for Less and More Experienced Teachers' Burnout Level

	Teaching experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Burnout	Less than 15 years	75	71.06	7.65177	.88355
	15 and above 15 years	35	63.657	3.57230	.60383

Table 14.
Independent Samples t-test Comparing Less and More Experienced Teachers' Level of Burnout

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	5.367	.022	-5.44	108	.000	-7.409	1.359	-10.10	-4.713
Equal variances not assumed			-6.92	107.9	.000	-7.40	1.070	-9.530	-5.288

The result of t-test shows that there was statistically significant difference between less experienced ($M = 71.06$, $SD = 7.65$, two-tailed) and more experienced teachers ($M = 63.65$, $SD = 3.57$; $t(108) = -5.44$, $p = .00$, $p < .05$) with respect to their burnout level.

Qualitative Results

To answer the fifth research question which sought teachers' opinion about the reasons behind their burnout, their responses to interview question were content analyzed and showed that teachers attributed burnout to a host of reasons related to teachers' working conditions, and society. In the following, firstly, the percentages of each reason behind teachers' burnout are presented. Secondly, these reasons are illustrated on the graph. Finally, some samples of teachers' excerpts on each reason for burnout have been presented.

Table 15.
EFL Teachers' Extracted Themes Regarding the Reasons behind Burnout

EFL teachers' most frequent answers	Percentage
Low salary	90
Workload	70
Work pressure	50
Personal characteristics	40
Personal problems	60
Lack of social support	40
Low social status of teaching profession	60
Controlling behavior of supervisors and teachers' lack of autonomy	50
Institutes' high level of expectations of teachers	70
Teaching is a stressful job	60
Teachers' psychological and physical states	30
Dealing with large number of students and their parents	70

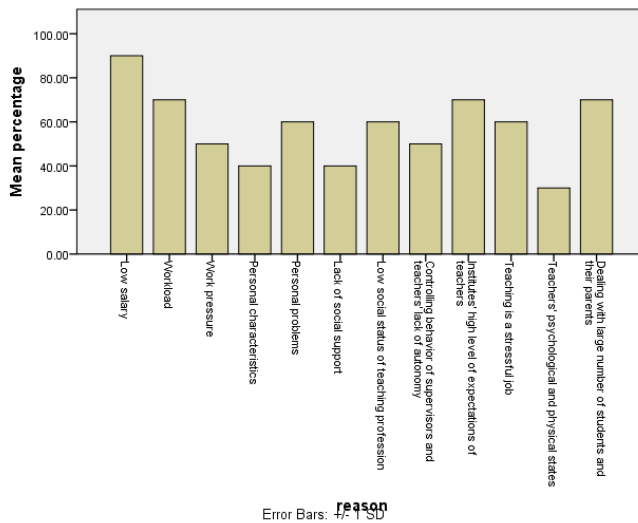


Figure 1. *EFL Teachers' Extracted Themes Regarding the Reasons behind Burnout*

The most frequently mentioned reason leading to burnout was low salary of teaching. EFL teachers also believed that workload, high level of expectations set out on them, and dealing with large number of students and their parents were among the reasons which caused teachers' burnout. They indicated that teachers' personal problems, the stress and tension integrated in teaching, and low social status of teaching profession were also contributing to teachers' burnout. Work pressure and domineering behavior of supervisors which restrict teachers' autonomy were also two reasons which resulted in teachers' burnout. Other reasons teachers referred to were personal characteristics, lack of social support, teachers' psychological and physical states which lead to burnout

The content analyses of teachers' responses to the last research question examining teacher' opinions with respect to the consequences of burnout are summarized in the following table and displayed on the following graph.

Table 16.
EFL Teachers' Extracted Themes Regarding the Consequences of Burnout

EFL teachers' most frequent answers	Percentage
Reduced self-efficacy	70
Abandoning the teaching profession	80
Absenteeism	50
Lessened effort	60
Feeling of inferiority	70
Lower quality of personal life	40

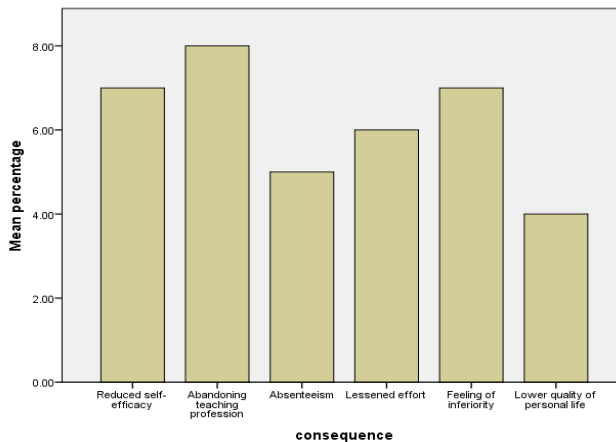


Figure 2. *EFL Teachers' Extracted Themes Regarding the Consequences of Burnout*

EFL teachers indicated that burnout mainly may lead to abandoning teaching profession, feeling of inferiority, and reduction of teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Other consequences of burnout according to them were lessened effort, absenteeism, and lower quality of personal life.

Discussion

This study delved into empirically investigating the link between teachers' personality traits, psychological distress, and burnout in a representative sample of Iranian EFL teachers. Furthermore, this study examined the relative contribution of five personality factors in predicting burnout dimensions among EFL teachers. The findings determined that both personality trait and psychological distress were related to teachers' burnout dimensions. The results revealed that there was a significant negative correlation between the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of burnout and the four personality traits including openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. However, these two dimensions of burnout were in significant positive correlation with neuroticism, suggesting that a high level of neuroticism is likely to increase both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

People who suffer from high neuroticism may manifest more emotional reactions whenever they are faced up to tough and worrying situations (Van Heck, 1997). They are apt to articulate more negative emotions, emotional variability and stress reaction, and hence they become more prone to burnout and to increased psychopathology (Watson et al., 1994). Furthermore, they appear to employ strategies such as self-criticism, and wishful thinking, which are intrinsically avoiding and distracting coping strategies, rather than strategies which tend to be more approaching (Bolger, 1990; Heppner et al., 1995). Futile and inefficacious dealing with stressful and worrying situations in the work environment cause people with a high level of neuroticism to be more susceptible to the symptoms generally connected with burnout.

The psychological traits of openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness were found to be negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and had a positive relationship with the feelings of increased personal accomplishment. Specifically, teachers who scored higher in these four personality traits and lower in neuroticism were more prone to undergo feelings of increased personal accomplishment, and hence low burnout inasmuch as feelings of decreased personal accomplishment indicate burnout. Conscientiousness is a facet associated with involvement and persistence and therefore is a manifestation of a person's need for achievement. It is also connected with traits of punctuality and organization considered to be important work attributes; therefore, gaining high scores on conscientiousness, is a predictor of success at work (Hogan et al., 1996). From another perspective, extraversion is associated with sociability, high interpersonal relationships, and the level of expectancy motivation. Teachers enjoying high conscientiousness and extraversion, but suffering from low neuroticism, are highly encouraged to accomplish and hence improve performance. All these facets are highly pertinent and contribute to goal achievement to a great extent and controlling stressors. Results of the current study revealed that low levels of openness anticipated more feelings of depersonalization, while those high levels of this personality trait were found to experience more feelings of personal accomplishment.

Conclusion

The results of the present study suggest that specific personality features may increase or impede the probability of burnout among teachers. It is well-recorded that specific personality traits would prompt people to behave in specific ways when they are faced with adversity; as a result, one could easily detect probable ways in tackling burnout among teachers by examining what coping responses they utilize to deal with work-related stress. In this way, it could be assumed that by raising teachers' level of consciousness on the process of burning out and presenting them with opportunities to reflect on personal variables such as coping resources it would be possible to lower the use of maladaptive or dysfunctional coping.

To sum up, the findings of the present study contribute to the wider literature on psychological distress, personality traits, and burnout among EFL teachers and accentuate to what degree teachers' burnout can be predicted by personality traits and psychological distress. The results recommend that teacher training programs should concern themselves with the mental health and preparedness of trainees to teach. According to Friedman (2000), there is ample evidence to show that professional development, either before entering the teaching profession or while teaching, appears to play a significant role in combating burn out. Familiarity with effective classroom management strategies intended to overcome stress and burnout resulting from disorder, disorganization and overload has also been proved to be a beneficial skill.

Additional research is required to explore the association between psychological distress, personality traits, and burnout. Considering that most burnout research has made use of cross-sectional designs (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), future studies can utilize longitudinal data. These studies would not only give rise to more robust tests of causal relationships, not often feasible with cross-sectional data, but they would also permit researchers to delve into how personality anticipates changes in burnout through time. More studies are also needed to explore contextual factors in that personality may be more strongly associated with burnout in some, but not in all, contexts.

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