

The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Burnout among Iranian EFL Teachers

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Abstract—This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and burnout among 104 Iranian EFL teachers. In addition, teachers' differences on EI and burnout were examined with respect to demographic variables. The participants were administered EI and Burnout questionnaires. The results obtained through using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation showed that there were significant negative correlations between EI and burnout, burnout, teaching experience and age and positive correlations between teachers' EI, teaching experience, and age. Finally, using T-Test, the researchers found no significant differences in teachers' EI and burnout with respect to gender. Implications of the study are discussed, and suggestions for further research are made.

Index Terms—emotional intelligence, burnout, EFL teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching profession has historically been viewed as the labor of love and kindness. It has many intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for people entering the pedagogical arena. However, teaching is not without its inherent problems. Problems associated with job related stress remain at the top of many teachers' list. In recent years, it has become a global concern, considering that about as many as a third of the teachers surveyed in various studies around the world reported that they regarded teaching as highly stressful (Borg, 1990). The amount and degree of stress a teacher experiences may be related to his negative self-perception, negative life experiences, low morale, and the struggle to maintain personal values and standards in the classroom (Worrall & May, 1989). Kyriacou (2001) stated, "the stress experienced by a particular teacher will be unique to him or her, and will depend on the precise complex interaction between his or her personalities, values, skills, and circumstances" (p. 29). According to Milstein and Farkas (1988), while the stressors (e.g. students' misbehaviors and discipline problems, students' poor motivation for work, heavy workload and time pressure, role conflict and role ambiguity, conflicting staff relationships in school management and administration, and pressure and criticisms from parents and the wider community) are found to be quite common across settings in the teaching profession, teachers do not react identically to these common stressors. Specifically, some teachers might develop psychological symptoms of varying severity, ranging from mild frustration, anxiety, and irritability to emotional exhaustion as well as psychosomatic and depressive symptoms (Kyriacou & Pratt, 1985). In this connection, burnout is seen as a distinct negative manifestation of chronic stress (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996).

Burnout phenomenon is considered to be most prevalent among human service professionals whose primary role is to help and interact with others in emotionally demanding contexts over time (Maslach, 1982). Given that teachers are the main provider of emotionally challenging and intensively interactive human service work in schools, it is not unusual that teachers have been a popular subject pool in the burnout literature (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Teacher burnout has been defined in a variety of ways throughout the history of the phenomenon (Gold, 1984). Although there is yet to be universally accepted definition for the term, researchers have often chosen to describe and operationalize teacher burnout in the same manner meant by Maslach and other scholars (e.g., Gold, 1996; Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987; Schwab, Jackson & Schuler, 1986). That is, the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment are generally used as the basis for any discussion on teacher burnout, along with the MBI, or its more recent teacher-specific version (MBI-ES) as the standard measurement tool (see Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996).

Burnout might have serious negative repercussions not only on the teacher's wellbeing but also on the teaching-learning processes in which he or she is immersed. Prior studies show that burnout negatively influences student performance and quality of teaching, and it might also lead to job dissatisfaction, work alienation, and teachers' leaving the profession (see Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). Also burnout negatively affects interpersonal relations between student and teacher (Yoon, 2002). Therefore, teachers should be helped to manage occupational stress to avoid burnout. Apropos of this issue, a question may be raised as to why some teachers succeed in surmounting high levels of

occupational stress, while others cannot meet expectations imposed on them and tend to collapse under the burden of everyday stress, the chronic level of which may render burnout. One reason might be teacher emotional intelligence as a personal coping resource.

According to Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer (2000), individuals differ as to their abilities to practice effective control over their emotional lives. Such individual differences are now thought of as differences in emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Oginska-Bulik (2005) held that the ability to effectively deal with emotions and emotional information in the workplace assists employees in addressing occupational stress and retaining psychological health. Also a study conducted by Gohm, Corser, & Dalsky (2005) revealed that emotional intelligence was associated with relatively lower reported stress levels.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) held that emotional intelligence consists of specific competencies that orchestrate skills in perceiving emotions, facilitate thought, understand emotions and manage emotions. Also according to Bar-On, Brown, Kirkcaldy and Thome (2000) emotional intelligence includes a range of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that have an impact on one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures. Therefore, it could be extrapolated that the integrated operation of these competencies and skills might establish a moderately protective shield for teachers against burnout phenomenon.

A review of the scholarly literature has revealed that definitions of emotional intelligence widely vary. Some researchers view EI as an ability, which can be measured most accurately by a performance test (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The skill sets which are included in this explanation of EI are using emotion to facilitate thinking, understanding emotion, managing emotion, and perceiving emotion. Other researchers view EI as a mixed model, incorporating both ability and dispositional traits (Goleman, 1995). Still, other mixed models take into consideration the factors of mood, motivation, social skills and well being to define emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 2007). In fact, Bar-On credits, Darwinism, Thorndike's theory of social intelligence, Wechsler's observation of non-cognitive factors, and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, and others as major influences on his model (Bar-On, 2007).

To assess individuals' emotional intelligence, Bar-On developed a 133-item self-report Emotional Intelligence test. The Bar-On EI test, called the emotional quotient inventory (EQ-I), is a self report measure of emotionally and socially intelligent behavior that provides an estimate of emotional-social intelligence (Bar-On, 1997). This test includes five major scales and 15 subscales which contribute to the emotional energy and self motivation required to cope with daily environmental demands and difficulties as follows (see also Bar-On, 2000):

- (1) Intrapersonal: managing oneself, the ability to know one's emotions.
 - (a) Emotional self-awareness (the ability to be aware of, recognize and understand one's emotions).
 - (b) Assertiveness (the ability to express one's feelings, beliefs, thoughts and to defend one's right).
 - (c) Self-regard (the ability to be aware of, understand, accept and respect oneself).
 - (d) Self-actualization (the ability to realize and reach one's potential).
 - (e) Independence (the ability to be self-directed and self-reliant in one's thinking and actions and to be free from emotional dependency).
- (2) Interpersonal: managing relationships with others.
 - (a) Empathy (the ability to understand and appreciate others' feelings).
 - (b) Interpersonal-relationship (the ability to establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationships that are characterized by emotional closeness and intimacy and by giving and receiving affection).
 - (c) Social responsibility (the ability to demonstrate oneself as a cooperative, contributing and constructive member of one's social group).
- (3) Adaptability: ability to adjust to change.
 - (a) Problem solving (the ability to effectively solve problems).
 - (b) Reality testing (the ability to validate one's feelings and thoughts by assessing the correspondence between what is subjectively experienced and what objectively exists).
 - (c) Flexibility (the ability to adjust one's feelings/thoughts to change).
- (4) Stress management: controlling stress
 - (a) Stress tolerance (the ability to manage one's strong emotions, adverse events, and stressful conditions by positively coping with problems).
 - (b) Impulse control (the ability to control one's emotions and resist an impulse to act).
- (5) General mood: the ability to be optimistic and positive as well as to enjoy life.
 - (a) Happiness (the ability to feel satisfied with life and to have fun).
 - (b) Optimism (the ability to look at the brighter side of life and maintain a positive attitude in the face of problems).

Within the few last decades, numerous theoretical and experimental studies have been done on EI. EI has been related significantly and positively to increased adapted behavior such as: overall relationship satisfaction and stability (Gottman, et al., 2001), higher quality social life (Lopes, et al., 2003), more academic achievement (Nelson & Nelson, 2003; Parker et al., 2004), longer retention in the educational system (Parker, et al, 2006), more satisfaction in life (Bastin, et al. , 2005) and the use of better adjusted coping strategies (Gohm & Clore, 2002; Matthews et al., 2006).

Moreover, there has been some research carried out to investigate teachers' EI, especially that of EFL teachers. Moafian and Ghanizadeh's (2009) study investigated the relationship between perceived EI and self-efficacy among

Iranian EFL teachers in private institutes. Findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between EI and self-efficacy, also three subscales of emotional intelligence - emotional self-awareness, interpersonal-relationship, and problem solving – were found to be potent predictors of teacher self-efficacy. In another study,

Iordanoglou (2007) examined the relationship between EI, leadership, job commitment and satisfaction among 332 primary education teachers in Greece. Results showed that EI had a positive effect on leadership effectiveness and is also strongly related to teachers' commitment and satisfaction. The findings suggested that besides cognitive abilities, the selection criteria in education should also include emotional competencies to ensure adequate performance of educators.

Finally, Mendes (2002) utilized an early form of the MSCEIT, known as the MEIS, to measure emotional intelligence in order to evaluate correlations and build models of prediction between EI and burnout in school teachers. The results showed no significant correlation between any of the MEIS emotional intelligence subscales and the MBI-ES burnout scales. However, it was concluded from a subset of school teachers ($n = 15$) who had a high level of emotional exhaustion that managing emotion was negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r = -.53, p < .05$). Also, there was a significant negative correlation among personal accomplishment and managing emotions ($r = -.65, p < .05$) for that subset of school teachers. Furthermore, it was observed that teachers who reported a low level of personal accomplishment ($n = 36$), had a positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and managing emotions ($r = .34, p < .05$). Finally, Mendes determined from a hierarchical regression analysis that none of the predictor variables (identifying emotions, understanding emotions, and managing emotions) accounted for a significant proportion of variability in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment.

However, the available literature is admittedly slim on empirical research on the relationship between burnout and emotional-social construct of EI as introduced by Bar-On (1997), especially in the context of teaching a foreign/second language. As such, the scarcity of research in this area necessitates undertaking a rigorous study into examining the role of EI in teacher burnout in a foreign language context. To this end, the present study aims to; first, investigate the relationship between EI and burnout, and the relationship between these two constructs and teachers' age and teaching experience, second, to investigate whether there are any differences in teachers on EI and burnout scores with respect to gender.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants and Procedure

The participants in this study consisted of 104 EFL teachers (52 females and 52 males) aged between 20 and 47 years old ($M = 28.45, SD = 5.15$) with a range of between 1 and 19 years of teaching experience ($M = 6.57, SD = 3.99$). The participants were selected from 5 private language institutes in Tehran. The institutes were chosen based on accessibility.

The study was carried out at October 2010. The participants took the questionnaires home, filled them in and submitted it to the researchers within a week. To receive reliable data, the researchers explained the purpose of the study to the participants, and assured them that their information would be confidential.

B. Instruments

An anonymous self-report questionnaire, comprising 2 scales and a subject fact form, served as the research tool in this study. The 2 scales measured teachers EI and burnout and the fact form enquired about participants' demographic information including age, gender and years of teaching experience.

1. EI scale

To evaluate language teachers' EI, the researchers employed "Bar-On EI test" (Bar-On, 1997). This test employs a 5-point response scale with a textual response format ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. It includes 5 major factors and 15 subfactors or components (discussed in the introduction section). In this study, a Persian version of the EI test with 90 items was utilized. According to Samouei (2003), the questionnaire has generally good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and constructs validity. To analyze the questionnaire in Iran, Samouei chose a group of 500 university students (aging from 18 to 40) in Tehran and analyzed the norms of the test. As he stated, the questionnaire has generally good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity. With the adapted version in Iran, the Cornbach's alpha coefficient was found to be 0.93 and the reliability index gained through odd-even, split-half method was [0.88].

2. Burnout scale

Teacher burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator's Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). The scale is a 22-item self report instrument consisting of three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). Participants respond on a seven-point frequency rating scale, ranging from "never" (0) to "every day" (6). High scores on the EE and DP subscales and low scores on the PA subscale are characteristic of burnout. In this study the original English version of the scale was utilized, and reliability estimates were $\alpha = 0.91$ for EE; $\alpha = 0.78$ for DP, $\alpha = 0.89$ for PA subscales.

III. RESULTS

A. Correlation between EI, Burnout, Age and Years of Teaching Experience

In order to test the relationships between teachers EI, burnout, age and years of teaching experience, a series of Pearson Product-Moment Correlations was run. The results indicated that there were significant positive correlations between EI and Age ($r = 0.25, p \leq 0.01$) and EI and years of teaching experience ($r = 0.38, p \leq 0.01$), and significant negative correlations between EI and Burnout ($r = -0.64, p \leq 0.01$), Burnout and Age ($r = -0.34, p \leq 0.01$) and Burnout and Years of teaching experience ($r = -0.37, p \leq 0.01$) (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
THE RESULTS OF CORRELATIONS BETWEEN EI, BURNOUT, AGE AND YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE

	Burnout	Age	Years of teaching experience
EI	- 0.64**	0.25**	.38**
Burnout		- 0.34**	-.37**

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

To analyze the data further, Regression Analysis was conducted. The results indicated that teachers' total score of EI was a negative predictor of the dependent variable (teacher burnout). In this part of the research $R^2 = 0.41$ ($\beta = -.64, t = -8.55, p < .01, F(1,103) = 73.13$), indicating that 41% of the variance in burnout is explained by the independent variable, EI (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
REGRESSION ANALYSIS SUMMARY FOR EI PREDICTING BURNOUT

Predictor	R	R ²	F(1, 103)	B	SEM	Beta (β)	t
EI	.64	.41	73.13**	134.03	12.04	-.64	- 8.55**

**p < .01

Also it was found that, all of the 15 components which compose the total EI test had significant negative correlations with teachers' burnout. Among these components, Self actualization and happiness were found to have the highest negative correlations with burnout as follows: burnout and (1) self-actualization ($r = -0.58, p \leq 0.01$) and (2) happiness ($r = -0.62, p \leq 0.01$) (see Table 3).

B. Teacher Differences on EI and Burnout with Respect to Gender

To explore whether there were significant EI and burnout differences among teachers with respect to gender, a series of independent t-test analyses was conducted. The results indicated that, with respect to gender, teachers were not significantly different on their scores on EI ($t = .28, df = 102, p \leq .05$) and burnout ($t = 1.65, df = 102, p > .05$) (see Table 4).

TABLE 3
THE RESULTS OF CORRELATION BETWEEN COMPONENTS OF EI AND TEACHERS' BURNOUT

	Burnout
Emotional self-awareness	- 0.42**
Assertiveness	- 0.27**
Self-regard	- 0.41**
Self-actualization	- 0.58**
Independence	- 0.31**
Empathy	- 0.50**
Interpersonal relationship	- 0.52**
Social responsibility	- 0.55**
Problem solving	- 0.27**
Reality testing	- 0.45**
Flexibility	- 0.45**
Stress tolerance	- 0.42**
Impulse control	- 0.28**
Optimism	- 0.49**
Happiness	- 0.62**

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

TABLE 4
COMPARISON OF MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND T-VALUES OF TEACHERS ON THEIR EI AND BURNOUT SUBSCALES SCORES BY GENDER (N=104)

	Male (N=52)		Female (N=52)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
EI	344.44	47.18	342.47	31.68	.28 ^a
Burnout	28.76	18.34	34.69	18.24	1.65 ^a

^a Non-significant

IV. DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, the purpose of the present study was to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and teacher burnout among EFL teachers in private language institutes. Furthermore, differences in EI and burnout scores were examined with respect to demographic variables. The results indicated that there was a significant negative relationship between EI and teacher burnout. The size of this correlation indicates that the higher the teachers' EI, the less likely they are to experience burnout in their profession. The findings also showed that EI was a potent negative predictor of burnout. This is in accordance with previous theoretical and empirical studies on the role of emotional intelligence in burnout, though these are limited where teachers are concerned, and quite sparse in the foreign/second language context altogether. Those who score high on emotional intelligence skills are more likely to cope effectively with environmental demands and pressures connected to occupational stress and health outcomes than those who enjoy less EI (Mendez, 2002). A study conducted by Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, and Mayer (1999) discovered that individuals who are able to regulate their emotional states are healthier because they "accurately perceive and appraise their emotional states, know how and when to express their feelings and can effectively regulate their mood states" (p. 161). This suggests that there is a direct connection between emotional intelligence skills and physical as well as psychological health (Tsaousis & Nikolaou, 2005). Emotionally intelligent individuals can cope better with life's challenges and control their emotions more efficiently (Taylor, 2001). Harrod and Scheer (2005) also held that emotional intelligence is the driving force behind the factors that affect personal success and everyday interactions with others.

As indicated earlier, among the EI components, self-actualization and happiness were found to have the highest negative correlations with teacher burnout. One explanation for this finding is that "there is a strong connection between the level of our self-actualization and our general well-being and health" Bar-On (2006, p.94). Self-actualization, the inclination to actualize one's capacities (Maslow, 1943), necessitates a certain amount of emotional energy to sustain the motivation needed for setting and achieving goals (Bar-On, 2006). Therefore, teachers experiencing burnout due to gradual reduction of their emotional resources may feel less self-actualized. Thus, they can no longer give themselves to students as they once could.

One possible explanation for the high negative correlation between happiness and teacher burnout is that happiness offers distance from the source of stress (Sultanoff, 1994) and can be regarded as a protective shield against stressful classroom situations for teachers. Sultanoff (1994) found that feelings of depression, anxiety, and anger were eliminated temporarily when people experienced joy. If stress can lead to burnout and happiness can neutralize stress, then happiness may be a coping mechanism to assuage teacher burnout.

The results also indicated a positive correlation between EFL teachers' EI and years of teaching experience, as well as age. In other words, teachers' emotional experience tends to increase over time and with every year of teaching. This is consistent with previous research that indicated EI is acquired and developed through learning and repeated experience, in contrast to IQ, which is considered relatively to be stable and unchangeable (Goleman, 1995). Bar-On (2000) also posited that EI develops over time and that it can be improved through training, programming and therapy.

Somewhat unexpectedly, regarding the influence of gender on teachers' EI, it was found that there was no significant difference between emotional intelligence of male and female teachers. These findings confirmed the results reported by Hopkins and Bilimoria (2008) while in conflict with the findings of Ciarrochi, Chan and Bajjar (2001) which indicated that there were significant differences between females and males, with females reporting higher EI levels. However, one plausible reason for this conflict may be related to cultural and environmental factors. Another reason for this lack of gender difference is that female teachers might underrate their competence or men might overrate theirs or both. Whether there were no real gender differences, or the real gender differences could not be detected by self-report questionnaires in the present findings has to await further studies.

Further, findings of the present study indicated a significant negative correlation between EFL teachers' age and their burnout, i.e. teachers' burnout tends to decline over time. This is consistent with previous research that demonstrated that age is an important factor in predicting teacher burnout. Substantial evidence has shown that younger teachers have a higher propensity to experience burnout (Farber, 1984). One explanation for these results can be based on Huston's (1989) additional finding that younger teachers, due to their age and lack of effective skills, feel entrapped with few alternative possibilities. Due to lack of experience, these teachers might get demoralized in a demanding situation. Consequently, their level of burnout might increase.

Regarding teaching experience, it was found that the more years of teaching experience EFL teachers enjoyed the lower levels of burnout they sustained. These findings were in line with those reported by Capel (1987) while in conflict with the findings of Friedman (1991) which contended that older and experienced teachers were more prone to the accumulated effects of stress, and therefore, may suffer higher levels of burnout than the younger workforce. Regarding the findings of the present study, one explanation is perhaps experience cures nervousness, disorganization, and various stressors associated with novice teaching in an EFL context, which is replete with anxiety and feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt and apprehension for both teachers and learners. Further, more experienced teachers may have a comfort in what they do and, therefore, feel less negative and chronic stress that may lead to burnout.

Moreover, it was found that there was no significant difference between burnout levels of male and female EFL teachers. These findings are in accordance with those of Farber (1984) and Gold and Bachelor (2001). It suggests that

regardless of age, teaching experience and other factors male and female teachers are almost equally well at addressing stress, thereby suffering approximately the same level of burnout.

V. CONCLUSION

The yielded results of the current study lead to the conclusion that enhancing teachers' EI and self efficacy might have a buffering effect on their burnout. This in turn may lead to amelioration of teachers' well-being, motivation and teaching effectiveness and accordingly students' achievement. The findings also indicate that EFL teachers, particularly experienced ones, would do well to take a closer look at their own emotional skills and to systematically reassess these skills through an emotionally intelligent lens. Despite some limitations, this study extends past findings on teacher burnout and EI and contributes to better understanding of these phenomena and how they are related. Based on the results of this study, school-based social and emotional learning programs should be developed for EFL teachers. Kremenitzer (2005) stated: "an increase in a teacher's emotional intelligence significantly impacts on student learning in a powerful way both in academic and interpersonal domains" (p. 6). Greenberg (2002) also argued that emotionally intelligent teachers are less vulnerable to stress and might easily retrieve healthy information and action tendency within emotions, and avail themselves of this information to better react to stressors as well as to inspire adaptive action.

The findings also underlie the importance of establishing some courses for EFL teachers especially young and less experienced ones to focus particularly on raising teachers' awareness of stress levels and learning judicious strategies for surmounting chronic stress. This may prove to be an effective means of burnout prevention.

The lack of diversity among the participants in the present study creates difficulty in generalizing to other settings. Therefore, it is recommended that the present study be replicated with a larger and more representative and diverse sample of the EFL teacher population, among middle, and high school level teachers. This may identify differences in emotional intelligence and burnout among different teaching levels. Also for obtaining a more precise estimate of teacher EI and burnout, future research should combine self-reporting measures with other measures based on objective performance.

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