Self-efficacy, Reflection, and Burnout among Iranian EFL Teachers: The Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation

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A B S T R A C T

To expand the line of research investigating individual teacher-related variables, the present research sought to test a structural model of teacher reflection, self-efficacy, burnout, and emotion regulation among Iranian EFL instructors. Moreover, a mediation model was examined, hypothesizing that emotion regulation would mediate the influences of teacher reflection and teacher self-efficacy on teacher burnout. Collecting data from a sample of 238 Iranian EFL teachers, a structural equation modeling (SEM) was embarked on to test the hypothesized relationships. The data of the study were gathered through the participants' responses to the four questionnaires related to the four variables under investigation (i.e., teacher self-efficacy, reflection, burnout, and emotion regulation variables). The outcomes of a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) verified the fitness of the used questionnaires and the structural model. Considering the centrality of teachers' affective status in how they deal with reform initiatives, it is hoped that our results can contribute to the understanding of how teachers can take practical measures to monitor their emotional states in EFL education in Iran and in the broader international context. Additionally, EFL teacher preparation programs should consider more practical strategies to enhance efficacy beliefs, emotion regulation, and reflection for pre-service teachers.

Keywords: teacher reflection; teacher self-efficacy; burnout; emotion regulation; EFL teachers

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Introduction

Among the various stakeholders in any educational system, teachers should be considered key figures, having the potential to impact the success/failure of students, and the system as a whole (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Derakhshan et al., 2020). This claim is captured well in Hattie's (2003) words that "teachers make a difference" (p. 1). The pivotal role of teachers is arguably more critical in the English language learning context where good rapport, quality communication between students and instructors, and instructors' attendance to students' learning as well as affective needs are crucial due to the nature of the language itself, being both the means and the subject of learning (Marashi & Assgar, 2019; Pishghadam et al., 2019; Roohani & Dayeri, 2019). But the important point here is that for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors to play their essential part, they should hold positive and constructive beliefs toward themselves, their students, and the instructional processes and context. This is because EFL teachers' beliefs have significant influences on the way they perform in their job (Greenier et al., 2021; Soodmand Afshar & Ghasemi, 2017). When EFL teachers hold negative beliefs toward themselves, their job, or the organization, they (un)intentionally, reduce their level of effective teaching and work engagement. Among such undesirable but influential beliefs is how much EFL teachers perceive themselves to be in a state of "burnout". This work-related threat was described as a psychological state marked by the signs of reduced personal efficacy, emotion exhaustion, and depersonalization happening as the result of persistent work stressors (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Because teacher burnout can have detrimental repercussions on the entire educational system, it has become the focus of much research that has aimed to uncover factors promoting/preventing it. Many of these studies identified teachers' own psychological and individual factors to be influential, including teachers' emotional intelligence (Fiorilli et al., 2019), teaching style (Akbari & Tavassoli, 2014), conceptions of intelligence, ambiguity tolerance (Zhaleh et al., 2018), self-efficacy (Seifalian & Derakhshan, 2018; Shoji et al., 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), resilience (Polat & İskender, 2018), emotion regulation (Brackett et al., 2010; Greenier et al., 2021), reflection (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Shirazizadeh & Moradkhani, 2018), and creativity (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2016).

Despite the array of research foci, to the best of our knowledge, there is no study that attends simultaneously to the associations among EFL instructors' self-efficacy, reflection, as well as emotion regulation in their experience of burnout. As an endeavor to fill this research lacuna, the current research examines the predictability of Iranian EFL teachers' burnout level in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs and reflection tendencies as mediated by their employment of emotion regulation strategies. Accordingly, the main research question in this research undertaking is whether there are any significant relationships among EFL instructors' self-efficacy, reflection, burnout, and emotion regulation.

This research question can be broken down into five research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Teacher self-efficacy is positively linked to emotion regulation.

Hypothesis 2: Teacher reflection is positively correlated with emotion regulation.

Hypothesis 3: Emotion regulation has a negative relationship with burnout.

Hypothesis 4: Emotion regulation mediates the linkage between teacher self-efficacy and burnout.

Hypothesis 5: Emotion regulation mediates the link between reflection and burnout.

Literature Review

Teacher Burnout

As a work-related concept, burnout was introduced first by Freudenberger (1974) as a kind of reaction to prolonged work-related stressors, being manifested in the form of a psychological condition characterized by one's diminished emotional state. Such a view toward burnout emphasized it as a concept containing the single dimension of emotional exhaustion. However, more investigations in this area resulted in its reconceptualization, highlighting two other components accompanying the emotional exhaustion dimension; namely, depersonalization and reduced personal efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In this respect, emotional exhaustion was described as an individual's feeling of emotional emptiness due to job-related strains, conflicts, stressors, as well as work overload. In such situations, individuals may always feel tired and lack enough energy and enthusiasm to keep up with daily work challenges. Reduced personal efficacy was described as one's feeling of being less productive and competent at work. Depersonalization was defined as one's feeling of being indifferent and uncaring with regard to one's profession and people to whom one gives service. In essence, depersonalized individuals tend to hold negative views toward their job and those with whom they engage at the workplace (Leiter & Maslach, 2016).

Research has shown that the occurrence of burnout is prevalent among individuals engaged in human service domains like medicine, health care, social services, and education (Lizano, 2015). Due to the nature of their profession and professional responsibilities, teachers experience high rates of burnout (Brasfield et al., 2019; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). Although the related literature evinces that the occurrence of burnout among teachers is mainly triggered by issues within the educational context itself, such as students' misbehavior (Aloe et al., 2014), work-related stress (Aflakseir & Nemati, 2018), insufficient support (Scott, 2019), and interpersonal conflicts, role ambiguity (Papastylianou et al., 2009), it is also recognized that teachers' own psychological tendencies affect the way they tackle these undesirable elements (Herman et al., 2017). One such psychological factor impacting teachers' capacities to deal with everyday stressors is self-efficacy beliefs (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy can be defined as how individuals view their ability to succeed in accomplishing a specific duty. In fact, the way individuals conceive of their efficacy potentials determines to a large degree how they manage and complete tasks, objectives, or challenges, as well as the amount of effort they put into doing things, how tolerant they are in the face of difficulties, how they encounter problems, and the level of stress they undergo in tough situations (Bandura, 2011).

Extending this concept into the instructional context, teacher self-efficacy is described as instructors' beliefs regarding their capacity to make a difference in their students' academic performance (Mok & Moore, 2019). Due to its significance for both students' performance (Piniel & Csizér, 2013) and teachers' own work satisfaction and performance (Fathi & Savadi Rostami, 2018), self-efficacy concept has been researched extensively during the last 40 years (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Teacher self-efficacy is comprised of three sub-constructs of classroom management; referring to teachers' views of their capacity to manage disruptive classroom events, student engagement; dealing with how teachers believe themselves to be able to engage students in classroom events, and instructional strategies; having to do with teachers' beliefs regarding their ability to employ different/new teaching strategies for enhancing instructional effectiveness (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Instructors with higher self-efficacy beliefs are better at

classroom preparation and organization, are more committed to and enthusiastic about their profession (Klassen & Chiu, 2011), care more about the needs of learners, are more receptive to new ideas, persist better in their career, better cope with troublesome learners (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), are more effective teachers (Klassen & Tze, 2014), have more professional satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014), and have a higher sense of well-being (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Teacher Reflection

One key factor affecting teachers' lifelong professional growth, physical and psychological well-being, and effectiveness is teacher reflection, initially proposed by scholars like Dewey (1933/1993) and Schon (1983). For Dewey (1933/1993), reflective practice refers to intentional, regular, and careful action done on the sound reasoning of an action or idea. Accordingly, a reflective teacher is an instructor who evaluates his own practice critically, arrives at new ways of enhancing learners' performance, and then realizes those reflections in his/her practice. A distinction was made by Schon (1983) between "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action"; the first pertains to ongoing, online, and real-life reflection instructors employ in classroom situations where they face a problem, and the second refers to teachers' posteriori reflection on classroom events. It is argued that by engaging in reflective thinking, teachers become aware of their own action and hence develop a better understanding of themselves as a teacher. In this regard, teachers' reflection acts as a knowledge-generation mechanism based on teachers' own experiences, which in turn guides their practice (Mathew et al., 2017).

Farrell (2019) also highlights the significance of teacher reflection for filling the gap between theory and practice in second language teacher education programs ostensibly run to prepare high-quality teachers. As stated by Richards and Farrell (2005), through continuous, systematic, and focused reflective practice, teachers can engage proactively in lifelong learning during their professional journey. Examples of reflective activities, according to Farrell (2019), are journal and diary writing, case-based instruction, critical incident analysis, metaphor analysis, and concept mapping. Following the rise of post-method pedagogy, reflective teaching also emerged in the realm of English Language Teaching and is nowadays advocated by language practitioners and educators through encouraging teachers' reflection in/on their action by writing diaries and journals and engaging in discussions about and analysis of their daily instructional performance (Fathi et al., 2015).

In a similar vein, EFL teacher reflection was conceptualized in terms of five components by Akbari et al. (2010): affective, practical, critical, meta-cognitive, and cognitive. The practical element deals with teachers' employment of various tools such as journal writing, teaching portfolios, observation, discussions and event evaluation. Included in the cognitive element are activities supporting teachers' professional development like doing action research and attending workshops and conferences. The affective element relates to teachers' reflections regarding their students' needs, backgrounds, learning, emotions, and performance. The meta-cognitive component is concerned with teachers' awareness of their own thought processes, beliefs, emotional composition, and personality. Finally, the critical element pertains to teachers' reflection on socio-political facets of pedagogy. Here it is argued that through engaging in conscious reflective practice, teachers are empowered to improve their own performance and well-being, and in turn mitigate the possibility of experiencing undesirable work-related consequences like burnout.

Emotion Regulation

Equally important for teachers' effective practice is how they manage their emotions, a process well-captured in the concept of emotion regulation (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). As a type of self-regulation strategy, it was also highlighted to affect the use of language learning strategies by learners in the process of second language learning (Kałdonek-Crnjaković, 2018). Gross (1998) defined the process model of emotion regulation as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (p. 275). This cognitive model emphasizes regulating one's own emotions (i.e., self-emotion regulation) at the expense of regulating the emotions of others. Indeed, teachers go through various instances of emotional experience in their relationships with school principals, students, colleagues, and students' parents throughout their career (Cowie, 2011). The measures teachers take to manage, regulate, mitigate, and sometimes even repress their emotions in the instructional context have significant implications for the quality and amount of their interpersonal relationships with students and their own well-being (Taxer, & Gross, 2018).

Expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal are two emotion regulation strategies commonly employed by instructors. Cognitive reappraisal, as an antecedent-focused strategy, is a kind of cognitive modification employed to down-regulate unfavorable emotions (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). On the other hand, expressive suppression is a response-focused strategy, appearing rather late in the emotion-production process with the ability to stop ongoing emotion-expressive behavior (Gross, 2015). Research has shown that reappraisers tend to express and experience fewer negative emotions and more positive emotions, can more efficiently negotiate stressful situations by holding optimistic attitudes, make a different interpretation of stressful situations, try actively to mend undesired mood states, and are more willing to share their emotions. They are also more successful at interpersonal functioning, are in better well-being conditions, are more satisfied with life, hold greater self-esteem, and suffer less from depression. In contrast, expressive suppressors experience fewer positive emotions and more negative emotions, are less effective in interpersonal functioning, are in a worse state of well-being, find themselves to be inauthentic as a result of hiding their emotions from others, and restrict the onward manifestation of their inner feelings during stressful situations. Moreover, they are less effective in repairing their moods, hold rather negative conceptions toward their emotions, contemplate more on unpleasant events, are worse at interpersonal functioning, have lower self-esteem and life satisfaction, and show more symptoms of depression (Gross & John, 2003). As a result, it is hypothesized that expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal strategies employment affect instructors' experience of burnout in negative and positive ways, respectively.

Following the mentioned significance of these three psychological variables of teacher self-efficacy, reflection, and emotion regulation strategies affecting teacher-related outcomes, as related to the concern of the present study, some empirical investigations examining the role of one or more of these factors in teachers' experience of burnout will be touched on.

Empirical Background

Previous studies have attended to teacher reflection, self-efficacy, emotion regulation, and burnout in relation to other variables. For instance, emotion regulation ability was reported by Brackett et al. (2010) to be positively linked to schoolteachers' burnout and job satisfaction. Similarly, Košir et al. (2015) investigated the influence of reflection and rumination in schoolteachers' experience of burnout and stress. Their results indicated that while burnout and stress were both significantly predicted by teacher rumination, teacher reflection played a mediating role between teachers' career features and stress. In another study, Cimermanová (2013) proposed self-reflection as a useful tool for mitigating the occurrence of burnout among

school and university teachers. Results of this study provided support for this claim as it was found that teachers' reflections on their own performance can result in their higher levels of personal accomplishment as well as feelings of decreased emotional exhaustion. Similar to these findings were the results of Javadi and Khatib's (2014) study showing that EFL teachers' reflective practice was negatively associated with burnout and its sub-components of reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion.

In a similar study focusing on the impact of three psychological factors on burnout experience of a group of Iranian EFL, Akbari and Tavassoli (2014) reported that variables of instructor emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and teaching style were negatively associated with teachers' level of burnout. Ventura et al. (2014), employing the Social Cognitive Theory of Albert Bandura, investigated the predictive link of professional self-efficacy with teachers' engagement and burnout. In this respect, high self-efficacy perceptions led to perceptions of less hindrance demands, and more challenge demands in turn increase work engagement and abating burnout. Furthermore, in a systematic review focusing on the associative link of self-efficacy with job burnout based on 57 empirical studies, Shoji et al. (2015) found that teacher self-efficacy beliefs moderately influenced the three sub-constructs of burnout, with its highest impact on reduced personal accomplishment. The findings also confirmed that instructors' self-efficacy beliefs reduced their levels of burnout. Khani and Mirzaee's (2015) study also highlighted the significance of instructors' high self-efficacy beliefs for hindering their burnout by indicating that EFL teachers' self-efficacy can mediate the relationship between contextual stressors and instructors' handling of job burnout. In another research undertaking, by drawing on the Job Demands-resources model, Putwain and von der Embse (2019) reported that what teachers perceive of their own efficacy and imposed changes on curriculum affects what they perceive of work-related stressors. In this regard, self-efficacy perceptions were found to moderate the link between perceived pressures experienced as a result of imposed curriculum changes and perceived work stress.

In a study aiming to contribute to EFL teachers' enhanced effectiveness, Ghanizadeh and Ghonsooly (2014) examined the tripartite model of the relationship among teachers' attributions, self-regulation, and burnout. The results confirmed their proposed model, revealing that while teachers' self-regulation behaviors can be positively predicted in terms of controllable and internal attributions, teacher burnout was linked to uncontrollable and external teachers' attributions. Similarly, Sarıçam and Sakız (2014) reported that self-efficacy beliefs can strongly predict special education instructors' burnout experience. Likewise, Fathi and Derakhshan (2019) noticed that high teacher self-efficacy beliefs and emotion regulation strategies employment can lessen EFL teachers' teaching stress which is the precursor to teacher burnout experience.

English Language Teaching Context

As stated previously, teachers play a key role in the successful performance of the education system and students. The teachers' role is arguably more important in the English language teaching context where teachers and students are in constant contact, build more intimate relationships, and engage in interpersonal communications as a means to develop students' language proficiency (Pishghadam et al., 2019). Attention to students' emotions is crucial if students are to develop a deep feeling for the target language as well as its culture and speakers (Shao et al., 2019). In this respect, effective instruction and learning depend on how adroitly teachers can engage learners in the process of language learning. Such an undertaking requires being in good psychological and emotional states on the part of the teachers, which itself depends on how they cope with work stressors in the instructional context, what conceptions they have toward their own abilities and job, how they manage and regulate their emotions in the face of work challenges, and the extent to which they reflect on their own practice with the aim of enhancing their effectiveness (Kelchtermans, 2005).

More particularly, in the Iranian EFL context, changes in EFL curricula and the introduction of new English textbooks, which are built on communicative language teaching (CLT) principles, have brought new challenges to English education since 2013 (Kheirabadi & Alavi Moghaddam, 2014). Kyriacou (2001) and Rizqi (2017) asserted that changes in curricula can highly impact the degree of stress and burnout undergone by EFL teachers as curricular changes can result in a myriad of new challenges and pressures on teachers who are normally the main implementers of change in the instructional context. Previous research has evinced a clear relationship between curricular change and Iranian EFL teachers' affective status (Barabadi et al., 2018; Riahipour et al., 2020).

In this regard, Razmjoo and Barabadi (2015) believed that self-efficacy beliefs are highly influential in reform initiatives, such as those undertaken in the Iranian English education context, due to its critical significance as a mediator for teachers' behavioral changes. They reported that Iranian EFL teachers' low affective states, including low self-efficacy beliefs, function as serious obstacles to the effective realization of new English curricula. Moreover, it is argued that as an affective factor, Iranian EFL teachers' level of emotion regulation can make a significant difference in how curricular changes are enacted as teachers with high emotion regulation abilities can employ effective strategies to regulate affective states of themselves and their students in the face of undesirable emotions due to modifications in the curriculum (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2019). The other factor necessary for teachers' effective practice in the context of educational reform is reflection, which can help educators evaluate their own practice against the backdrop of curricular change (Roohani & Moosavi Avendi, 2019). Given the significance of teachers' individual characteristics and because of the paucity of research simultaneously attending to instructors' emotion regulation, self-efficacy, reflection, and burnout in the EFL context in Iran, the present study set out to discover the associative and predictive links of these constructs among a group of Iranian EFL teachers.

The proposed model of this study (see Fig. 1) was grounded based on the theoretically supported relationships among teacher self-efficacy, emotional regulation, reflection, and burnout. As for the link between teacher self-efficacy and emotional regulation, a significant number of studies have corroborated the positive correlation between these two constructs (e.g., Chan, 2004; 2008; Mouton et al., 2013; Penrose et al., 2007). Fabio and Palazzeschi (2008) as well as Moafian and Ghanizadeh (2009) have also reported the positive correlation between teacher self-efficacy and emotional intelligence. Regarding the interconnections between teacher reflection and self-efficacy, Babaei and Abednia (2016) found a significant correlation between the components of the two variables. In addition, several researchers have argued that reflective practices are likely to contribute to enhancing teachers' self-efficacy (e.g., Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2011; Kennedy & Smith, 2013; Stallions et al., 2012).

With regard to the association between emotion regulation and teacher burnout, numerous studies in related literature have corroborated the correlation between these two factors (e.g., Akbari & Tavassoli, 2014; Chan, 2006; Ju et al., 2015; Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017; Platsidou, 2010; Schutz et al., 2006). From this perspective, teachers who are able to regulate their emotions more effectively are less likely to experience emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (Myruski et al., 2018). In addition, the interplay between burnout and teacher self-efficacy has been widely acknowledged in the literature (Khani & Mirzaee, 2015; Sarıçam & Sakız, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2014, 2017; Smetackova, 2017; Ventura et al., 2014). From this viewpoint, teachers' beliefs of their own competencies in accomplishing teaching activities help teachers to become less prone to burnout. Finally, it is claimed that reflective teaching is negatively correlated with teacher burnout (Javadi & Khatib, 2014; Shirazizadeh & Moradkhani, 2018). Teachers with greater degrees of reflection are always thinking about the ways to improve their teaching quality and take further pleasure in what they

do as teachers. Such teachers, therefore, are less probable to experience teacher burnout. Overall, the objective of the present research was to examine the cross-sectional relationships among teacher self-efficacy, reflection, emotional regulation, and burnout. In the meantime, the mediation role of emotional regulation in structural relationships was investigated.
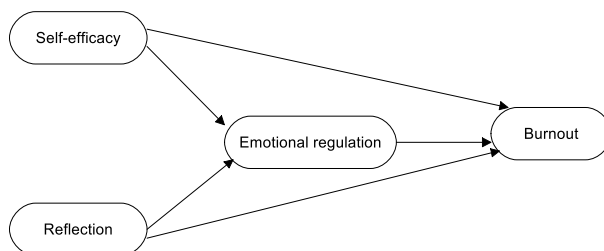

Figure 1. The Proposed Model

Method

Participants

The questionnaires, measuring the four variables of reflection, self-efficacy, emotion regulation, and burnout, were administered to 238 Iranian EFL instructors, teaching in schools and language institutes in various provinces of Iran (Fars, Golestan, Hamedan, Isfahan, Kerman, Khorasan Razavi, Kurdistan, Mazandaran, Tehran, & West Azerbaijan, among others). To increase the representativeness of the sample, a combination of cluster sampling and stratified random sampling (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2018) was employed to target the participants for this study. The used self-report scales were all in English as the respondents had a good command of English to understand the items. Of the total participants, 95 (39.91%) were male and 143 (60%) were female. With regard to teaching experience, 72 (30.25%) instructors had 1–5, 95 (39.91%) had 6–10, 45 (18.9%) had 11–15, and 26 (10.92%) had 15–20 years of experience. Two-hundred and seven teachers had studied English majors, including TEFL, English literature, translation studies, and linguistics, whereas 31 teachers had studied non-English majors. Out of the teachers who held degrees from English majors, 23 teachers held a PhD degree or were PhD students, 145 held a Master of Arts (MA) degree, and 39 held a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree.

Instruments

Teacher reflection was assessed using the English Language Teaching Reflection Inventory (Akbari et al., 2010). It constitutes 29 items evaluating teachers' perceptions of five dimensions (practical, cognitive, affective, metacognitive, & critical). This instrument is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'never (1)' to 'always (5)'. The global score on all the five components of the inventory indicates the degree of teacher reflection. Akbari et al. (2010) reported a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .91 for the total reflection inventory.

To measure the emotion regulation of the participants, the scale designed and developed by Gross and John (2003) was employed. This questionnaire is composed of 10 items created to measure willingness and ability of respondents in regulating and directing their emotions. The questionnaire includes two underlying components of Expressive Suppression and Cognitive Reappraisal. The respondents were asked to answer every item on a 7-point Likert-type varying

from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In an empirical study done in the EFL context of Iran, Fathi and Derakhshan (2019) reported that the scale enjoyed good reliability (α = .85).

To measure the instructors' self-efficacy beliefs, the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) was used, comprising 24 items. This questionnaire is a Likert-type scale assessing efficacy in the instructional strategies, classroom management efficacy, and student engagement efficacy sub-components. Greater total scores on all the three components indicate stronger teachers' efficacy beliefs. Each item is assessed on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (nothing) to 5 (a great deal). The validity and reliability of TSES have been empirically substantiated in various contexts (Klassen, Foster, Rajani, & Bowman, 2009). Fathi and Derakhshan (2019) have reported a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .89 for this scale in the EFL context of Iran.

The teacher version of the Maslach burnout inventory (MBI-ES), validated and piloted by Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996), was utilized to assess burnout of participant instructors in the present study. MBI-ES comprises 22 items assessing the reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion subscales. Each item of this questionnaire is rated on a seven-point Likert scale varying from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). Measured by this inventory, burnout is operationally defined as getting lower scores on the personal accomplishment component as well as getting higher scores on depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. MBI-ES is argued by Hastings and Bham (2003) to possess high validity and reliability indices. Zhaleh et al. (2018) have reported a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .85 for the burnout inventory in the Iranian EFL context.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection, run between March and May of 2019, began by both distributing the hard copy of the battery of questionnaires and by sharing the link of the electronic version of the survey with the respondents that agreed to complete the online questionnaires. The electronic versions were constructed via the Google Docs application. In order to gather data from different parts of Iran, convenience sampling was employed. The data were gathered from the institutes, schools, and universities located in the four regions of the country (i.e. north, south, east, & west). The participants were provided with explanations on how to complete the questionnaires. They were also assured that their information would remain confidential.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The data analysis was performed through SPSS AMOS 20. First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the fitness of the questionnaires. In addition, the fitness of the proposed structural model was examined. As for fitness investigation, the following fit indices were employed: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), and the normed fit index (NFI).

As a part of data analysis, descriptive statistics, such as the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the constructs, were computed. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

n=	238	Mean (SD)	Correlation			
			1	2	3	4
1.	Self-efficacy	131.25 (31.42)	1.00			
2.	Reflection	146.54 (32.89)	0.45**	1.00		
3.	Emotion regulation	27.52 (9.88)	0.59**	0.38**	1.00	
4.	Burnout	46.26 (16.52)	-0.68**	-0.25*	-0.74**	1.00

Note: ** indicates significance level of 0.01.

Afterwards, CFA was executed to check the proposed structural model. The indices for the CFA demonstrated a good fit (X^2/df = 1.57, p = 0.00, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.99, NFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.02). With regard to the internal consistency of the scales, all the calculated coefficient alphas for the four scales were higher than 0.70, suggesting that all questionnaires had acceptable reliability indices (See Appendix). Furthermore, construct or composite reliabilities varied from 0.793 (emotion regulation) to 0.895 (teacher self-efficacy). Also, the factor loadings of all items were significant (p < 0.001) (See Appendix). Since the values computed for the construct reliabilities and significant factor loadings were high, the model can be claimed to have convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Structural Equation Model

To find answers to the research questions, the formulated hypotheses were assessed via structural equation modeling. First, the three models of *direct effects*, *full mediation*, and *partial mediation model* (see Table 2) were examined. The fit indices (i.e., GFI, NFI, CFI, & RMSEA) of the three models were compared, and it was revealed that the partial mediation model had more appropriate fit indices. The fit indices of the partial mediation model for the whole sample turned out to be X^2/df = 1.57, p = 0.00, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.99, NFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.02. In addition, the *R*-square value (R^2 = 0.683) indicated that teacher reflection and self-efficacy produced a significant amount of variance in emotion regulation and the other value (R^2 = 0.518), suggesting that emotion regulation accounted for an adequate variance in teacher burnout.

Table 2

Results for Fit Indices of Structural Models

Model	X^2/df	Δx^2	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Direct Effects Model	2.168		0.886	0.882	0.975	0.923	0.033
Full Mediation Model	1.682	0.486	0.896	0.902	0.991	0.952	0.041
Partial Mediation Model	1.570	0.112	0.909	0.920	0.991	0.978	0.026

Note: Δx2 shows differences between the model and the following model.
*** ρ- value < 0.001.

Also, Table 3 indicates the path estimates for structural models. Teacher self-efficacy influences emotion regulation in a positive way ($\beta = 0.36$, $p = <0.001$), confirming Hypothesis 1. Teacher reflection also affects emotion regulation positively ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = <0.001$), confirming Hypothesis 2. Additionally, emotion regulation affects teacher burnout negatively ($\beta = -0.68$, $p = <0.001$), confirming Hypothesis 3.

Table 3

Path Estimates of Structural Models

	Standardized path coefficients value		
	Direct effects MODEL	Full mediation model	Partial mediation model
Self-efficacy → Burnout	-0.43 (6.15 **)		-0.26 (3.81**)
Reflection → Burnout	-0.24 (4.06 **)		-0.08 (0.55)
Self-efficacy → Emotional regulation		0.41(6.88 ***)	0.36 (7.75***)
Reflection → Emotional regulation		0.26 (4.81 **)	0.22 (4.78**)
Emotional regulation → Burnout		-0.70(10.21***)	-0.68 (8.31***)

Note : ** ϱ- value < 0.01 ; *** ϱ- value < 0.001 .
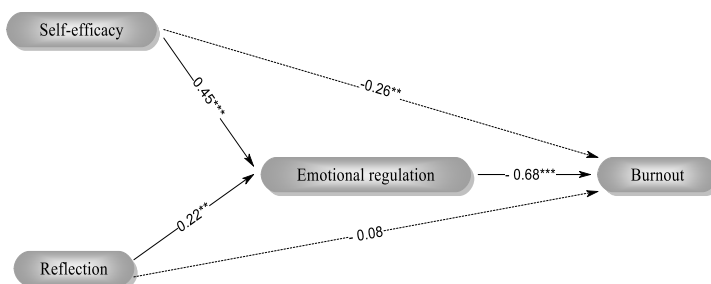

Figure 2. Path Results of the Structural Model

In the follow-up analysis, Baron and Kenny's (1986) method was utilized to test the mediating role of emotion regulation. All the requirements of their method were met by the proposed model (as seen in Table 3). Based on the partial mediation model (see Table 3), reflection did not significantly affect teacher burnout, nevertheless, teacher self-efficacy significantly influenced teacher burnout. Furthermore, teacher reflection significantly affected burnout via the mediating effects of emotion regulation. Therefore, teacher emotion regulation acted as a partial mediator in the proposed model. Based on the partial mediation model (see Table 3), teacher self-efficacy significantly affected burnout via the mediation of emotion regulation -0.30 (0.45*-0.68), fully confirming Hypothesis 4. Also, teacher reflection significantly influenced burnout through the mediation of emotion regulation -0.14 (0.22*-0.68), fully confirming Hypothesis 5. Figure 2 indicates the values for path estimates.

Discussion

The purpose of this research undertaking was to assess a structural model of self-efficacy, reflection, emotion regulation, and burnout among Iranian EFL instructors. Furthermore, the mediating role of emotion regulation in influencing the associations among teacher reflection, teacher self-efficacy, and burnout was examined. Concerning the proposed structural model and the formulated hypotheses for the objectives of the present study, the main findings offer significant implications for the intersection of these four factors.

First, it was revealed that instructor self-efficacy was positively linked to emotion regulation. It is in agreement with those of other studies (e.g., Chan, 2004; 2008; Mouton et al., 2013), which found a significant link between instructors' perceived efficacy and emotion regulation. This finding also verifies the study of Fabio and Palazzeschi (2008), who underscored the significance of emotion regulation and its correlation with professional self-efficacy of Italian instructors. In addition, as pointed out by previous studies (Chan, 2004; Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2008), the linkage of instructor self-efficacy with emotional intelligence might be bidirectional in a sense that emotional intelligence is likely to enhance teachers' efficacy beliefs, and teacher self-efficacy may foster improved emotional intelligence among teachers. The findings of this study agree with Chan's (2004) proposal of developing teacher's sense of self-efficacy to improve their emotional intelligence. Instructors' efficacy beliefs pertain to their perceptions as well as self-awareness of their abilities, a feeling which is more related to their inner world and affected by how they manage their emotions (Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2008). It may be argued that teachers who feel that they are more competent at using teaching strategies, managing their classrooms, and engaging students are more capable in controlling and directing their emotions while carrying out their vocational tasks.

Second, it was found that teacher reflection was positively correlated with emotion regulation. The link between reflection and emotion regulation can also be justified in the light of the meta-cognitive component of Akbari et al.'s (2010) model which is concerned with teachers' perceptions about their own beliefs, emotional makeup, and personality. To critically analyze one's teaching practice and improve it based on reflection, a practitioner should be able to successfully regulate emotions. Reflection enables teachers to recognize the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of instruction, allowing them to investigate the emotions which appear while interacting with others. It is argued that practitioners who are more emotionally "competent" are more successful teachers as they can establish friendly and productive relationships with their learners (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Such teachers design the syllabus based on learners' strengths and skills, employ particular strategies to engage and motivate students more effectively, and try to act as a role model by presenting the etiquettes of respect, proper communication, and moral behavior (Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014). These teacher characteristics correspond with the key defining features of reflective teachers.

Third, emotion regulation was significantly linked to burnout. This result is consistent with a substantial amount of related literature (e.g., Akbari & Tavassoli, 2014; Brackett et al., 2010; Chan, 2006; Ju et al., 2015; Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017; Platsidou, 2010), corroborating the interplay between these two constructs. Conceptualized as a psychological state characterized by diminished emotional state, burnout is considerably affected by emotional exhaustion. Teachers with higher levels of emotion regulation can manage and regulate their emotions more effectively (Gross & John, 2003). Such teachers know how to overcome negative feelings of stressful situations and are less likely to become emotionally exhausted. Instructors who can control their emotions feel more confident to overcome adverse and stressful teaching experiences (Myruski et al., 2018). Teachers' emotion regulation can result in enhancing the quality of teaching, protecting instructors against burnout, and enhancing the learning quality of the students (Chang, 2009; Schutz et al., 2006).

Fourth, teacher self-efficacy and burnout were negatively associated. This finding resonates with the results of a significant body of studies highlighting the critical relationship between these variables (Fathi & Saeedian, 2020; Khani & Mirzaee, 2015; Sarıçam & Sakız, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2014, 2017; Smetackova, 2017; Ventura et al., 2014). Such studies have verified the fact that teachers' perceptions of their own abilities in carrying out teaching activities affect their sense of job satisfaction and burnout. Instructors with higher levels of self-efficacy are less prone to sense apprehension and emotional exhaustion (Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996). Thus, a potential argument can be that since EFL instructors in this study held more positive beliefs about their own abilities in managing their classrooms, employing effective teaching strategies, and employing effective strategies for student engagement, they felt less reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion. According to Jepson and Forrest (2006), higher levels of self-efficacy decrease the possibility of experiencing emotional exhaustion and burnout.

Last, it was found that teacher reflection does not significantly influence burnout directly. This finding is partially discrepant with the findings of Javadi and Khatib (2014), who found teacher reflection has a direct impact on burnout. In contrast, the analysis of the structural model evinced that emotion regulation significantly mediated the linkage of reflection and burnout. To put it differently, teacher reflection influenced burnout via the effects of emotion regulation. This result underscores the crucial role of emotion regulation in mediating the relation of teacher reflection with burnout (teacher reflection→ emotion regulation → burnout). It might be argued that teachers with higher levels of reflection are continuously thinking about their teaching practice and are deeply concerned with improving their quality of teaching. These teachers enjoy their career and are more emotionally attached to what they do. As a result, they are better at controlling and directing their positive as well as negative emotions, and, by implication, they can cope with stressors more effectively, thereby feeling less reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion. More simply, instructors' reflection can help them regulate their emotions more effectively and feel more empowered against burnout.

Taken together, the findings of the structural model confirmed the significant mediating role of emotion regulation affecting the other teacher-related variables in an EFL context. Since learning occurs in social contexts, instructors' emotional and social capacities contribute significantly to students' learning (Ergur, 2009). Instructors who can regulate and direct their emotions successfully know how to create and employ emotions like enjoyment and interest in order to increase learning motivation among their pupils (Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014). They are well-aware of their abilities and strong and weak points in their own emotional competence. They regulate their emotions to sustain positive interactions with their students, understand the emotions of their students, and configure solutions in difficult situations. This is especially important in the current Iranian EFL context due to the aforementioned challenges of curriculum change and its emotional impact on teachers. As verified by previous research findings, when teachers' affective status is high, they can better deal with innovative reforms in the educational system and changes in curricula (Razmjoo & Barabadi, 2015; Rizqi, 2017). The present study findings can expand this body of literature as it showed predictive links among four affective factors playing key roles in EFL teachers' effective practice.

Instructors are not usually cognizant of the importance of emotions in instruction (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). According to Gibbs and Powell (2012), teachers can enhance their teaching competencies if they succeed in exerting further control over their beliefs and emotions. A burgeoning body of research in the related literature has emphasized the significance of including emotional aspects of teachers in the teaching process and called for the need to focus more on teachers' emotional skills (Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014; Sutton &Wheatley, 2003). However, the emotional competence of teachers has remained a neglected construct in L2 teacher education research and arguably in L2 teacher education itself. Due to the critical role of teachers' emotions

in affecting motivation, cognition, and behavior of both teachers and learners, teacher preparation programs should pay more attention to the emotions of prospective teachers (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2019). It is argued that the incorporation of emotional intelligence training into teacher education programs positively affects teachers' emotional competence and leads to long-term improvement in a teaching career (Edannur, 2010; Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014).

Conclusion and Implications

To expand the scope of research on EFL instructors' psychological variables, the current research undertaking sought to test a structural model of instructor reflection, self-efficacy, burnout, and emotion regulation. In addition, a mediation model in which it was hypothesized that emotion regulation would mediate the effects of teacher reflection and teacher self-efficacy on burnout was investigated. The data analysis results verified the fitness of the used questionnaires and the structural model. As Iranian EFL education is not yet disentangled from the dominance of positivistic and high stakes tests that add to the accountability and burden of practitioners, EFL teachers may be more affected by stressors and burnout. As revealed by the results, self-efficacy, emotion regulation, and reflection of EFL teachers may lead to the mitigation of the probability of experiencing burnout and hence its ensuing negative impacts such as poor job performance, psychological distress, and attrition. Therefore, EFL teacher preparation programs should consider more practical strategies to enhance efficacy beliefs, emotional competence, and reflectivity for pre-service EFL teachers. In-service teachers, who have assumed significant additional pressure as the conductors of recent curricular change, would also benefit from recognizing the value of enhancing their self-efficacy beliefs, learning to better manage emotional stress, and engaging in reflective practice. By so doing, they can help teachers to better overcome anxiety-provoking situations and contribute to mitigating the possibility of instructor attrition and burnout.

The findings of the present study, nevertheless, have some limitations. Teachers' psychological factors cannot be accurately measured and explored by using only self-report quantitative measures. To achieve a deeper and more precise appraisal of these constructs, it is recommended that future research employ qualitative methods in order to triangulate findings with this and other quantitative investigations, thereby presenting a more detailed and holistic picture of the relationship among the variables. Furthermore, this study utilized the data from English teachers in both private institutes and high schools. These two contexts might be radically different in affecting teachers' self-efficacy, burnout, and reflection. Future research is required to investigate separate samples of Iranian English teachers from both the public and private sectors. Moreover, as the teachers' perceptions of their psychological constructs are dynamic and can vacillate over time, longitudinal designs could serve to examine and predict patterns of change or longitudinal trajectories in these teacher-related constructs. Finally, the investigation of teachers' personal and professional background, including educational attainment and teaching experience, in addition to socio-demographic factors, such as age, gender, ethnicity, as well as L1, would contribute to the literature by exploring experience, education, status, and identity as crucial components to integrate into structural models and to the overall understanding of how psychological factors are related in the affective domain of EFL teachers and how they impact their lived experiences as educators and as people.

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Appendix

Appendix. Overall reliability of the constructs and factor loading of indicators

Construct	tors	Cronbach's α/CR	Factor loadings	t- value
Self-efficacy	How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	0.895/0.895	0.81	11.592***
	How much can you do to help your students think critically?		0.86	12.338***
	How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?		0.68	9.652***
	How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?		0.71	11.241***
	To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?		0.66	10.523***
	How much can you do to get your students to believe they can do well in school work?		0.88	12.521***
	How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?		0.87	12.408***
	How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?		0.68	9.652***
	How much can you do to help your students value learning?		0.71	11.241***
	How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?		0.68	10.026***
	To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?		0.84	12.126***
	How much can you do to foster student creativity?		0.84	12.231***
	How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?		0.79	11.633***
	How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?		0.68	9.652***
	How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?		0.71	11.241***
	How well can you establish a classroom management system		0.66	10.523***
	How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?		0.66	10.523***
	How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?		0.88	12.521***
	How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?		0.82	11.741***
	How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire class?		0.66	10.92***
	To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?		0.77	11.335***
	How well can you respond to defiant students?		0.86	0.12.321***
	How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?		0.90	12.611***
	How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?		0.85	12.335***
	How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?		0.84	12.385***
Burnout	I feel emotionally drained from my work	0.862/0.862	0.71	11.201***
	I feel used up at the end of the workday.		0.81	11.591***

	I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.		0.78	11.543***
	Working with people all day is really a strain for me.		0.69	10.011***
	I feel burned out from my work.		0.73	8.652***
	I feel frustrated by my job.		0.78	11.296***
	I feel I'm working too hard on my job.		0.68	9.652***
	Working with people directly puts too much stress on me.		0.71	11.241***
	I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.		0.66	10.523***
	I feel I treat some students as if they were impersonal subjects.		0.90	12.550***
	I've become more callous toward people since I took this job.		0.87	12.411***
	I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally.		0.86	12.336***
	I don't care what happens to some students.		0.79	11.633***
	I feel students blame me for some of their problems.		0.83	12.123***
	I can easily understand how my students feel about things.		0.81	11.591***
	I deal very effectively with the problems of my students.		0.78	11.543***
	I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work.		0.82	11.892***
	I feel very energetic.		0.82	11.741***
	I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my students.		0.66	10.92***
	I feel exhilarated after working closely with my students.		0.81	11.591***
	I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.		0.81	11.591***
	In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly.		0.68	9.652***
Reflection	I have a file where I keep my accounts of my teaching for reviewing purposes.	0.821/0.821	0.71	11.241***
	I talk about my classroom experiences with my colleagues and seek their advice /feedback.		0.66	10.523***
	After each lesson, I write about the accomplishments/failures of that lesson or I talk about the lesson to a colleague.		0.88	12.521***
	I discuss practical/theoretical issues with my colleagues.		0.87	12.408***
	I observe other teachers' classrooms to learn about their efficient practices.		0.68	9.652***
	I ask my peers to observe my teaching and comment on my teaching performance.		0.71	11.241***
	I read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve my classroom performance.		0.68	10.026***
	I participate in workshops/conferences related to teaching/learning issues.		0.84	12.126***
	I think of writing articles based on my classroom experiences.		0.84	12.231***
	I look at journal articles or search the internet to see what the recent developments in my profession are.		0.80	11.906***
	I carry out small scale research activities in my classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes.		0.87	12.375***

	I think of classroom events as potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them.		0.90	12.550***
	I talk to my students to learn about their learning styles and preferences.		0.87	12.411***
	I talk to my students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests and abilities.		0.86	12.336***
	I ask my students whether they like a teaching task or not.		0.79	11.633***
	As a teacher, I think about my teaching philosophy and the way it is affecting my teaching.		0.83	12.123***
	I think of the ways my biography or my background affects the way I define myself as a teacher.		0.81	11.591***
	I think of the meaning or significance of my job as a teacher.		0.78	11.543***
	I try to find out which aspects of my teaching provide me with a sense of satisfaction.		0.82	11.892***
	I think about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher.		0.82	11.741***
	I think of the positive/negative role models I have had as a student and the way they have affected me in my practice.		0.66	10.92***
	I think of inconsistencies and contradictions that occur in my classroom practice.		0.71	11.146***
	I think about instances of social injustice in my own surroundings and try to discuss them in my classes.		0.68	10.026***
	I think of ways to enable my students to change their social lives in fighting poverty, discrimination, and gender bias.		0.71	11.146***
	In my teaching, I include less-discussed topics, such as old age, AIDS, discrimination against women and minorities, and poverty.		0.68	10.026***
	I think about the political aspects of my teaching and the way I may affect my students' political views.		0.84	12.126***
	I think of ways through which I can promote tolerance and democracy in my classes and in the society in general.		0.84	12.231***
	I think about the ways gender, social class, and race influence my students' achievements.		0.80	11.906***
	I think of outside social events that can influence my teaching inside the class.		0.87	12.375***
Emotion regulation	When I want to feel more *positive* emotion (such as joy or amusement), I change what I'm thinking about.	0.793/0.793	0.79	11.591***
	I keep my emotions to myself.		0.71	11.146***
	When I want to feel less negative emotion (such as sadness or anger), I change what I'm thinking about.		0.68	10.026***
	When I am feeling *positive* emotions, I am careful not to express them.		0.84	12.126***
	When I'm faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm.		0.84	12.231***
	I control my emotions by not expressing them.		0.80	11.906***
	When I want to feel more positive emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation.		0.87	12.375***
	I control my emotions by changing the way I think about them.		0.71	11.146***
	When I am feeling *negative* emotions, I make sure not to express them.		0.68	10.026***
	When I want to feel less *negative* emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation.		0.84	12.126***