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## Investigating EFL Teachers' Resilience: Using Grounded Theory Approach

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### ABSTRACT

To deal with the harmful consequences of teachers' stress and burnout, there has been a growing call for the development of resilience in teacher preparation programs. Despite the importance of teachers' resilience, it seems that insufficient studies have been done on Iranian EFL teachers' resilience resources and strategies that make them immune to the difficulties and challenges that might lead to their burnout. To this end, a mixed-method study was conducted. The participants of the quantitative phase of the study were 79 EFL teachers who filled in the questionnaire, and only 65 questionnaires were completed. Out of 65 teachers, 36 Iranian EFL teachers who showed low and high scores on the Multidimensional Teachers' Resilience Scale (MTRS) accepted to participate in the qualitative section of the study. A series of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted. To ensure data validity, other data collection tools, including journal keeping and classroom observation, were also applied. Data analysis, guided by the grounded theory approach, resulted in a multi-dimensional approach involving interrelated aspects of personal, professional, organizational, social, and economic dimensions. The study may offer helpful resources and strategies to address some of the challenges faced by teachers in the profession.

**Keywords:** EFL teachers; teachers' immunity; teachers' resilience; Grounded Theory Approach

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## Introduction

One probable approach in understanding teachers' burnout and their attrition includes investigating the attitudes and behaviors of teachers who stay in the profession and keep their commitment despite experiencing challenges and difficulties (Day & Gu, 2010; Howard & Johnson, 2004). A more comprehensive line of research on teachers has recently been developed as language teacher immunity (Rahmati, Sadeghi & Ghaderi, 2019). Language teacher immunity is considered as a protective shield developed by language teachers to defend themselves in facing the adverse effects of contextual restraints and professional pressures (Rahmati et al., 2019). It is the most comprehensive picture aggregating teacher-related aspects, such as hardiness, coping, burnout, buoyancy, and resilience (Hiver, 2018). Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) referred to the concept of teachers' immunity as a "double-edged sword" in the sense that teacher immunity can have both positive and negative sides, which could be an essential protection purpose at one time and threaten the individuals' functioning by increasing resistance to change and threatening individuals through fossilization or apathy (Richardson, 2002; Wilkes, 2002, as cited in Hiver, 2018).

One of the most comprehensive components of language teacher immunity is teachers' resilience (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017) that unlike teachers' immunity cannot stimulate either resistance to change or maladaptive functioning, and it has only the positive side (Richardson, 2002; Wilkes, 2002, as cited in Hiver, 2018). The concept of teacher resilience has attracted growing attention in teacher education, especially in connection with the critical problem of the high degrees of attrition and burnout among teachers. Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990), define resilience as "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances" (p. 425). Teachers who have characteristics of resilience, more probably, continue in challenging situations, adapt to change easily, and may think less about leaving the profession and experiencing stress and burnout (Chang, 2009). Most of the studies conducted on teachers' burnout and retention have focused on factors influencing teachers' decision to leave the profession, and few researchers have explored resilience strategies in challenging contexts (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010). What is required is a better understanding of the factors and strategies that have enabled the majority of teachers to maintain their motivation, commitment and resilience (Day, 2008). According to Beltman, Mansfield, and Price (2011), unlike the importance of teachers' resilience, fewer studies have investigated resilience explicitly among teachers and how this may be constituted (Bobek, 2002).

To this end, this study was conducted to clarify the importance of teacher resilience, recognize the resources and strategies that have been identified to be essential for teacher resilience and contribute to the implications for teacher education. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature by providing insights into teachers' resilience comprehensively. The findings of the current study might contribute to Iranian English language teaching (ELT) teacher education programs, which may give them insights into identifying the resources of teachers' resilience and the application of resilience strategies for teachers that would become an essential part of the novice teachers' training and experiences.

## Review of literature

During the 1970s, the term resilience was introduced within fields such as psychology and psychiatry, investigating the positive development of at-risk children being faced with experiences such as abuse, trauma, and divorce (Garmezy, 1974, as cited in Masten et al., 1990). Examining resilient behaviors was gradually entered into the teaching profession to discuss why some teachers appear immune to all unfavorable conditions in the working environment (Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012). Teachers' resilience has been defined as a "process of development that

happens over time,” including “the ability to adjust to different situations and develop one’s competence in the face of difficult conditions” (Bobek, 2002, p. 202). Alternatively, teacher resilience could be defined as “specific strategies that individuals apply when they experience a challenging situation” (Castro et al., 2010, p. 263).

In recognizing how teacher resilience might be considered in a profession, identifying risk and protective factors of individuals and contexts has been beneficial. Different studies have revealed that professional work challenges, such as heavy workload, classroom management, being unprepared, lack of time, lack of support, lack of resources, and poor performances (Jenkins, Smith, & Maxwell, 2009), are potential risk factors that result in adverse conditions for many early teachers. There have been more extensive investigations in the literature on the teachers’ protective factors resulting in teachers’ resilience. Among these are protective factors that include characteristics such as intrinsic motivation (Flores, 2006; Gu & Day, 2010), optimism and flexibility (Le Cornu, 2009), sense of humor (Bobek, 2002), altruism (Brunetti, 2006), and self-efficacy (Beltman et al., 2011).

In the Iranian context, PoorAshraf and Toolabi (2009) realized that the quality of work life, teachers’ professional characteristics, individual characteristics, socio-economic conditions, and professionalization of the teaching profession were the main factors influencing teachers’ retention and motivation in their job. In addition, Soodmand Afshar and Doosti (2015), in an investigation of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among 64 secondary school English teachers, found that teachers were dissatisfied because of lack of attention, relationship problems, lack of professional commitment, and other factors that caused demotivation. Moreover, Salehi and Taghavi (2015) investigated the level of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers’ satisfaction among nine EFL teachers with various years of experience from seven different institutes in Isfahan through grounded theory approach. They found that teachers choose this job for some reasons, such as interest in teaching, ability in teaching, having the chance to get familiar with different people in this job, and having a part-time job. However, it was found that teachers were a little dissatisfied with their professional environment and low salary.

The literature has also indicated that personal and contextual resources, along with applying particular strategies, contribute to resilience consequences. For example, strong interpersonal skills (Howard & Johnson, 2004), teaching skills, such as employing a range of instructional practices (Bobek, 2002), knowing students and meeting their needs (Flores, 2006), professional reflection (Le Cornu, 2009) and having a commitment to continuous professional learning (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004) have been revealed as useful strategies associated with teacher resilience.

Reviewing the literature showed that much research has focused on risk and protective factors of resilience (Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002; Brunetti, 2006; Flores, 2006; Gu & Day, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2009; Le Cornu, 2009) and few studies have been done on searching the strategies that help teachers to develop their resilience (Burns, Poikkeus, & Aro, 2013; Castro et al., 2010). In addition, most of the studies conducted on teachers’ resilience in western countries have focused on novice teachers and less is known about resilience in experienced teachers (Gu & Day, 2015). Only a few studies (e.g., Dolati, Emamipour, & Kushki, 2014; Razmjoo & Ayoobian, 2019) have been conducted in the Iranian context which have addressed the relationship between resilience and teachers-related features, and no studies could be found which address resilience resources and strategies among Iranian EFL teachers. Therefore, this study endeavors to fill the gap by investigating the resources and strategies of EFL teachers’ resilience as a means of teacher retention and providing research in support of the notion that resilience can better help teachers to adjust to changing conditions of education (Bobek, 2002; Gu & Day 2007; Howard & Johnson 2004). To this end, the following research question was investigated.

What factors are related to teacher resilience in the Iranian EFL context?

## Methodology

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach was carried out in both data collection and analyses to find out about the research questions of the study. (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003).

### Participants

#### *Questionnaire Participants*

For the quantitative part of the study, a convenient sample of 79 English teachers took part in completing a teacher resilience questionnaire. The participants were EFL teachers who were teaching at different English language institutes in Sanandaj, Iran. Forty eight (60.8%) participants were female and 31 (39.2%) participants were male. The participants' ages ranged from 24 to 45. Their experience also ranged from 2 years to 22 years with BA, MA and PhD university degrees. Table 1 presents the distribution of the participating teachers in the quantitative section of the present study.

Table 1  
*Distribution of the Teachers in the Quantitative Section of the Study*

Gender (%)		Mean Age	Degree (%)			Major (%)				Mean teaching experience
M	F		BA	MA	PhD	Teaching	English Literature	Linguistics	Translation	
39.2	60.8	32.64	32.5	49.4	18.2	64.8	22.5	9.9	2.8	9.44

#### *Interview Participants*

After analyzing the quantitative data, the researchers identified teachers with low and high scores in resilience. Through purposeful sampling, 36 participants accepted to take part in the interview. Before data collection, the researchers obtained participants' consents by ensuring the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of their information. Table 2 displays the demographic features of the interview participants.

Table 2  
*The Demographic Features of the Participating Teachers in the Interview Section*

Gender (%)		Mean Age	Degree (%)			Major (%)				Mean teaching experience
M	F		BA	MA	PhD	Teaching	English Literature	Linguistics	Translation	
38.9	61.1	30.44	33.3	41.7	25	61.8	20.6	8.8	8.8	9.19

#### *Journal Keeping Participants*

Journal keeping was also used in the study to validate the findings of the interview section. Fourteen teachers took part in this section. Eight participants were female, and six participants were male. The participants' ages ranged from 24 to 38. Their experience also ranged from 2 to 15 years with BA, MA and PhD university degrees.

### *Classroom Observation Participants*

classroom observation was also applied in the study to triangulate the data obtained in the interview and journal keeping section. Seven participants agreed to be observed. Three participants were female, and four participants were male. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 34. Their experience also ranged from 2 to 12 years with BA, MA and PhD university degrees.

### ***Instrument***

The data for the quantitative part of the study were collected through the Multidimensional Teachers' Resilience Scale (MTRS) developed by Mansfield and Wosnitza (2015). The questionnaire includes two parts. The first part includes participants' demographic information, such as their gender, age, and years of experience in teaching. The second part of the questionnaire comprises 26 Likert-scale items intended to assess four dimensions of teacher resilience: emotional (five items), social (five items), motivational (11 items) and professional (6 items) dimensions (Mansfield & Wosnitza, 2015). All items were assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree." Mansfield and Wosnitza (2015) conducted a study on Australian teachers that resulted in a version of the scale with three dimensions: motivation/emotion (five items,  $\alpha = .76$ ), professional (two items,  $\alpha = .75$ ), and social (two items,  $\alpha = .71$ ) dimensions. The validation of the Multidimensional Teachers' Resilience Scale (MTRS) was evaluated by Peixoto, Silva, Pipa, Wosnitza, and Mansfield (2019) on 334 Portuguese teachers. Their study proposed that the MTRS is a valid and reliable instrument to measure teachers' resilience.

A series of individual semi-structured interviews were conducted for the qualitative part of the study. The interview questions were developed based on a thorough analysis of the existing literature review. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the interview questions, first, the questions were reviewed by three experts in the field of applied linguistics. The structure of some questions was then modified following the experts' advice and suggestions. The interview questions, for instance, were about the factors that make teachers stressed in their job, how they cope with stressful situations in their job, what factors help them cope with stressful situations better, what the results of teachers' resilience were, and what effects resilience had on teachers, etc.

### ***Procedure***

For the quantitative phase of the study, the questionnaire was administered to 79 EFL teachers. Different methods, including face-to-face, email and telegram messenger, were used for instrument distribution. The questionnaires were returned within a week. Out of 79 filled-in questionnaires, 14 were incomplete and excluded, and only 65 questionnaires with the response rate of 82 percent were analyzed in the final data analysis. After analyzing the quantitative data, teachers with high and low scores in resilience were identified. It was revealed that 23 teachers got high scores and 42 teachers got low scores in resilience. The scores ranged from 26 to 130. The teachers who got 26-78 were considered resilient and those who got 79-130 were considered unresilient. The researcher asked the teachers to participate in the interview section of the study; among 65 teachers only 36 accepted to participate.

For the qualitative phase of the study, a series of individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. Out of 65 teachers who participated in the questionnaire phase, 36 English language teachers agreed to take part in this phase of the study. The researcher conducted the interviews individually and face-to-face at the institutes where the participants worked. The interviews were scheduled at convenient times for the participants. The interviews were conducted in Persian to avoid teachers having problems communicating in English and provide them with the opportunity

to express their experiences and feelings freely. Each interview lasted between 25 to 40 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, a brief explanation was given on the purpose of the study to the interviewees. In addition, the participants' consent were also obtained to audio-record their voices. The interviews were conducted until saturation was achieved. The criteria for saturation was that further data collection just added to similar results rather than contributing to new information Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006).

To triangulate the data of the study and to validate the findings of interview, journal keeping and classroom observation were also applied. The volunteering teachers were instructed to keep journals on what occurred in their classes and their reactions with an emphasis on how they tackled the stressful situations in their teaching. The teachers kept the journals in Persian for eight weeks. Fourteen teachers were given a sample of teachers' journals and instructed to keep journals. The teachers were asked to document their experiences in class, including the difficulties and strategies that they used to cope with them and any insights they had about these experiences.

Finally, teachers participating in the interview and journal-keeping sections were observed in their classes. Seven teachers agreed to be observed for note-taking purposes in their classroom for two sessions. Field notes were the most common method of recording the data collected during the observation. Field notes contained two parts, including a descriptive part, i.e., a complete description of the setting, the teacher and his/her reactions and interpersonal relationships, and a reflective part: the observer's personal feelings about the events. The method of collecting data in keeping journals was teachers' writing of what occurred in their classes and their reactions to stressful events.

### *Data analysis*

The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS 24, and the data collected from interviews were analyzed following the principles of the grounded theory approach using coding process with the assistance of NVIVO software. Moreover, the analysis of data obtained from journal diaries and class observations was conducted through the coding process. In the first step, the interviews, journal keeping and observation notes were transcribed, then all texts were reviewed line by line. The extracted sentences and phrases were compared continuously, and the concepts repeated in all sentences were extracted, and similar sentences and phrases were classified into the same groups. The coding process involves three steps starting with open coding, that is coding the data into major concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the second step, or axial coding step, similar concepts were classified into categories. Axial coding aims to discover connections between categories and recognize one category that seems to be the central category, also known as the core phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). When the core phenomenon is identified, the researcher is required to go back to the data and build categories around this core phenomenon. In the final stage of the study, that is, selective coding defined as "the process of integrating and refining the theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 161), the categories were categorized into more general categories, causal conditions, and strategies, and were theoretically correlated in the form of a paradigm model proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) proposed the categories surrounding the core phenomenon as causal conditions, strategies, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences.

Four processes of trustworthiness, i.e., conformability, dependability, credibility, and transferability, were applied. Credibility was established by choosing the proper data collection methods. Member checking of the transcribed interviews, classroom observations, and journal keeping were used to increase the credibility of the data. Dependability was confirmed by detailed data analysis and direct references to the experiences of the individuals. The conformability and consistency of the analysis were also confirmed through meeting with the other researcher to discuss the initial findings and confirm the transferability of the findings. The selection of the context and demographic data of

the participants and data collection and analysis processes were presented, so that the reader could be able to determine whether the results are transferable to other environments.

## Results

### *Quantitative analysis*

In the quantitative phase of the study, the level of resilience among Iranian EFL teachers was investigated. To this end, the descriptive statistics for resilient and unresilient teachers were calculated through SPSS 24, the results of which are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3  
*Descriptive Statistics for Resilient and Unresilient Teachers*

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Unresilient teachers	42	95.00	126.00	110.83	8.09	.72	-1.03
Resilient teachers	23	39.00	68.00	54.17	8.72	-.59	-.72
Valid N (listwise)	65						

As Table 3 shows, the mean scores and the standard deviation of the unresilient teachers ( $n=42$ ) were 110.83 and 8.09, respectively, while the mean scores and the standard deviation of the resilient teachers ( $n=23$ ) were 54.17 and 8.72, respectively. Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 3, the distribution of the scores of both resilient and unresilient teachers seemed to be normal, as the pertinent skewness ratio and Kurtosis ratio values did fall within the range of -1.96 and +1.96. This point supports the normality of distribution for both resilient and unresilient teachers' scores (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

### *Qualitative analysis*

In the qualitative part of the study, the data obtained from interviews, journals and observation were analyzed using coding process with the assistance of NVIVO software. A series of themes and categories emerged in the coding process. In Table 4, an example of three coding stages is presented.

Table 4  
Themes and Categories of EFL Teacher s' Resilience Resources

Themes	Categories	Open codes	Quotation
Organizational injustice	Unfair treatment	Inconsistency between the amount of effort and receiving salary.	I have been working for four years continuously. Although I am teaching to my best, <u>my income is low, and my insurance is not provided. In addition, if I complain, I will be fired quickly.</u> I don't have enough motivation to teach. I always pray to be accepted in M.A. to get rid of teaching. On the other hand, <u>lack of educational facilities makes me stressed.</u> For example, in the institute I am teaching, <u>we don't have teachers' guidebooks.</u> I don't have enough money to buy all of these materials. <u>There is only a bookcase which is always locked.</u> So, If I go to a class where I haven't been taught the material before, I suffer from stress. <u>There is also a camera in each classroom, and I'm uncomfortable with it.</u> That is, I can't do what I usually do, which is really stressful. If one day I don't feel well and I can't hold the class well, <u>the principal criticizes me and uses this to humiliate and constantly suppresses me.</u> Also, <u>there are some sessions where we have to demonstrate our teaching methods and strategies to other teachers.</u> This is really stressful for me because I'm afraid of grammatical and pronunciation mistakes.
	Lack of job security	Teachers' exploitation, permanent job low salary, and lack of insurance.	
	Poor working condition	Lack of facility,strict rules and regulations.	

The following figure shows the emerged themes and categories obtained from the interview coding analysis for protective factors that affect teachers' resilience positively from teachers' point of view.

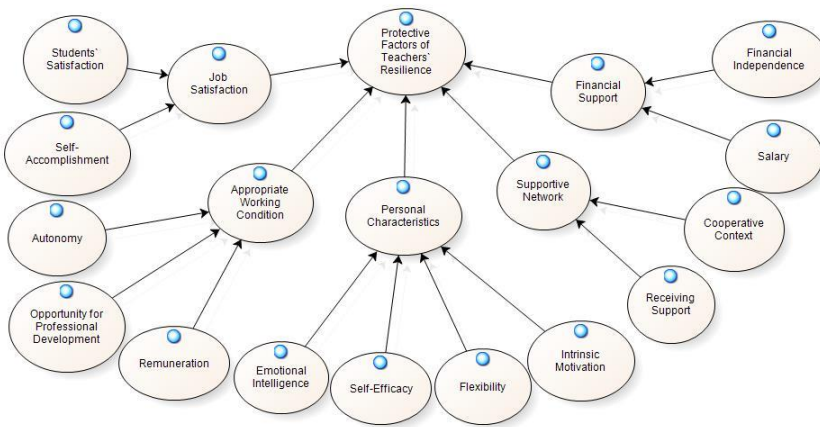


Figure 1. Protective Factors for Iranian EFL Teachers' Resilience



The factors found in the study conceptualize a multi-dimensional nature of teachers' resilience. In the following sections, the findings regarding personal, professional, organizational, social, and economic dimensions of EFL teachers' resilience are reported.

#### *Personal dimension*

The first theme that emerged in the study as protective factor of EFL teachers' resilience was personal characteristics, including flexibility, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence. Resilient teachers believed that being flexible and positive could help them tolerate most teaching problems. In addition, EFL teachers mentioned that they do not consider teaching English as a job but rather as their personal interest. The EFL teachers also believed in their ability to monitor their own and others' feelings and emotions. Some examples of teachers' comments in this regard are as follows:

*"There are a lot of problems with this job, but one thing that can help you resist is being patient and adaptable to different situations."*

*"I'm self-confident. Whenever I have a problem in my class, I can manage it successfully. In this situation, I try to control my feelings."*

#### *Professional dimension*

The second theme that emerged in the study was job satisfaction, categorized under the professional dimension. Self-accomplishment and students' satisfaction were sub-categories of this theme. Teachers in the study believed that when they see their students' satisfaction and success in their job, they feel job satisfaction and try to continue despite many stresses that they may face. An excerpt of the participants is:

*"Whenever I see my students' success or their motivation and positive feedback, it can help me tolerate most of my problems in this job."*

#### *Organizational dimension*

The third theme that emerged in the study was the appropriate working conditions. Appropriate working conditions was found as an organizational protective resource for teachers' resilience. According to teachers' interview data, appropriate working conditions involve facilities, autonomy, opportunity for professional development, rewards, promotion criteria, and positive feedback. These factors could be identified in teachers' comments. For example, a teacher said:

*"I like this institute because here I feel comfortable. The principal always seeks my opinion and encourages me. This makes me more self-confident. In addition, there is a promotion box both financially and level-headed for teachers. All these factors make me satisfied."*

#### *Social dimension*

The fourth theme that emerged in the study was supportive network. Supportive network includes not only making relationships in the working context but also includes teachers' making relationships outside of the working context. Teachers believed that support, respect, and appreciation help them tolerate most teaching problems, even low salary. In addition, the analysis of the data showed that most teachers welcome cooperative context/team working and they consider it as an important factor that causes satisfaction. For instance, they stated:

*"Something that I really like is that whenever I need help, my administrator and supervisor help me express my opinions."*

*"There are some workshops in this institute that can influence my teaching a lot. We share opinions about our problems and teaching methodologies or different ways to explain things. I think this could help me a lot in relieving some of my problems in this profession."*

### *Economic dimension*

The last theme that emerged for protective factors was financial support including salary and financial independence. Some teachers were satisfied with their salary and the promotion criteria for salary in the institutes they worked. There were also some female teachers who believed that they just tolerated their job-related problems because of financial independence. For example, they said:

*"Sometimes I decide to leave this job, but I think I have no other choices. Nowadays, most young people in Iran are unemployed."*

Moreover, a series of themes emerged from teachers' interviews for risk factors that negatively influence teachers' resilience from teachers' point of view. The following graph shows the emerged themes and categories for risk factors of EFL teachers' resilience.

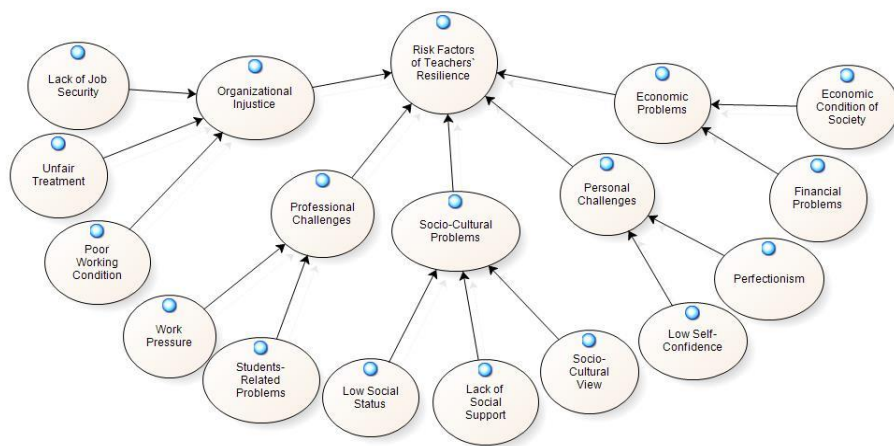


Figure 2. Risk Factors of Iranian EFL Teachers' Resilience

### *Personal dimension*

The first theme that emerged for risk factors of teachers' resilience was personal challenges which involves low self-confidence and being perfectionist. Most of the teachers stated that they experienced stress in their job due to lack of confidence.. For instance, one of the participants said:

*"I want everything to be the best (my students and myself). Sometimes, I don't receive what I expect, and this really bothers me and makes me stressed."*

*Professional dimension*

Professional challenges, namely students' related problems and work pressure, were found as a source of stress for unresilient teachers in the study. Students' related problems, such as their low motivation, misbehavior, lack of respect, and appreciation, students' negative feedback and judgments, were considered as demotivating factors. The participants, for example, mentioned that:

*"One thing that really bothers me is getting depressed. I do my best and spend all my energy, but at the end of the semester, some students are not satisfied. I don't know what I should do to satisfy them."*

*"I'm always stressed about whether I finish the book at the end of the course or not."*

*Organizational dimension*

Organizational injustice was found as one of the risk factors for teachers' resilience. It includes inappropriate working conditions, lack of job security, and unfair treatment. They were dissatisfied with their working conditions for some reasons, such as lack of facilities, lack of autonomy, tough rules, and lack of chance in the institutes for professional development. The teachers believed they were exploited, and the administrators considered them as slaves to achieve their goals. They stated:

*"Something that disappoints me is that our role in most of the institutes in Iran is nothing but passive participation."*

*"EFL teachers are considered as a means to achieve some goals and are not respected by others; that is, there is unfair treatment toward teachers."*

*"I feel stable since I have been teaching for ten years, but there has not been even one workshop, in-service or pre-service program to update our knowledge. I feel burnout."*

*"I am dissatisfied with my job because I don't have any insurance for the future, and low salary is the most important factor that makes me dissatisfied."*

*Social dimension*

It was also found that socio-cultural problems, such as lack of social support, low social status, and people's view toward English teachers in society, may decrease teachers' motivation and resilience. Lack of cooperative support from administrators and colleagues was mentioned as risk resources in this theme. Moreover, some teachers believed that teaching as a profession does not have a high status in Iran, and people would look down on teachers, especially English teachers. They also mentioned that an English teacher is expected to be all-knowing. Therefore, if they do not know even a word, people think that teacher is not knowledgeable, and they ignore that teacher. The participants, for instance, reported:

*"I think administrators and supervisors and even colleagues always try to find your weakness and make harmful criticism. The environment here is not really trusted."*

*"Nowadays, people do not respect teachers. Even students do not respect their teachers, and do not accept their teachers' advice either."*

*"This view that we should know all words and all questions to answer in English really bothers me. This is not just related to students; even our colleagues and other staff and most people in our society have the same view. If we make a mistake in our speaking, pronunciation, or grammar, they don't trust us and ignore us."*

### Economic dimension

The last emerged theme in the study was economic problems. It includes the economic condition of society and teachers' financial problems. Most of the teachers were dissatisfied with the salary and believed that low salary makes a teacher demotivated. This is especially for male teachers who are in charge of expenditures.. They argued that insufficient salaries in this economic hardship, inflation, and sanction in Iran make their lives more difficult. Hence, they lacked the courage to criticize this situation because they thought they might be fired. They said that:

*"Regarding the economic situation of this country, I can't afford my family's expenditures very well. So, by this low level of salary, how can I be motivated to continue this job and to work effectively."*

Moreover, the coding analysis of interviews revealed strategies used by Iranian EFL teachers to develop their resilience. The strategies are presented in the following graph using NVIVO software.

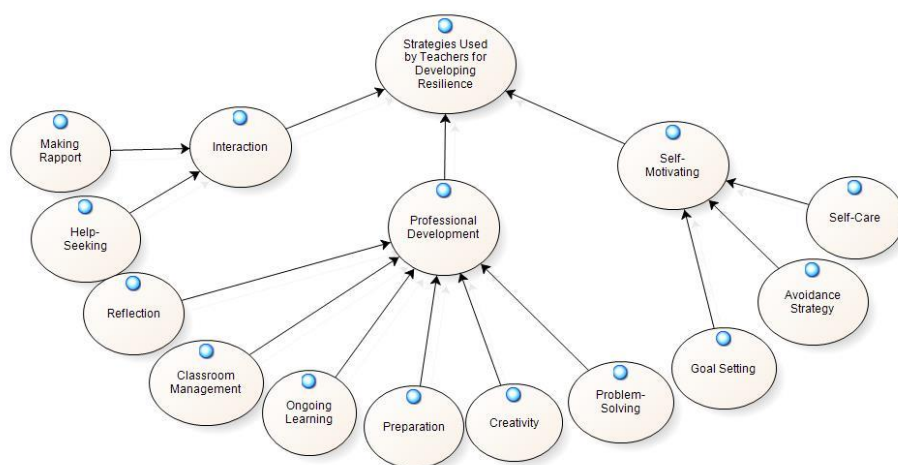


Figure 3. Strategies Used by Iranian EFL Teachers to Develop Resilience

Three themes emerged for strategies teachers used to develop their resilience, namely self-motivating, professional development and interaction. Goal setting, self-care, and avoidance strategies were self-motivating strategies used by resilient teachers that help them deal with failures and setbacks in their life. The data from the study also showed that the teachers who were more resilient were those who made a balance between their work and life and had a high level of personal awareness. Such teachers would further plan a goal for success in their job, ignore the teaching problems, and try to distract their minds with other issues. The participants in this regard reported:

*"I try really hard to do my best in teaching. I always hope to be one of the best teachers by keeping on studying. I want to get my M.A. Maybe someday, I can teach at university. This goal motivates me to work better and study more. I never give up. I have to fulfill my dream.s"*

*"I don't spend my free time doing teaching-related activities. I try to enjoy life as much as possible.*

*"Sometimes, I think I'm not treated fairly. I try just to forget it because if you think of problems, you will not be able to do your job".*

The second theme that emerged as teachers' strategy for developing their resilience was professional development. Reflection, preparation before class, professional growth, classroom management, and creativity were revealed as professional development strategies from teachers' interviews as beneficial strategies for increasing teachers' resilience. They believed that reflecting on previous experiences could help them cope with problems, and they viewed problems as a challenge to resolve. Moreover, resilient teachers argued they were interested in developing their linguistic and pedagogical knowledge to address students' difficult questions. They always try to provide lesson plans before each session and use different strategies for involving and motivating students. For example, they expressed that:

*"Whenever one of my students doesn't learn or faces a problem, I look back on my teaching methods and think about it to see what drawbacks I had and what I should do to make it better."*

*"Whenever I have time, I study because I have to study new books to develop my vocabulary knowledge and to read new articles to learn new methods and techniques. I read psychology a lot to apply it to students in the class. In addition, I like to participate in workshops and conferences related to teaching to update my knowledge. "I try to find new techniques to control students. I involve weak and noisy students in class activities through some new tasks. This technique helps me make the situation better."*

The last theme which emerged as teachers' strategies for developing their resilience was interaction. Making rapport and seeking help were two components of this theme.

*"I'm good at making relationships with people. I always try to build friendly relationships with everyone at work soon. Whenever I need guidance, I seek help from one of my experienced colleagues. She helps me and gives me new ways to solve my problems. I have no stress, then."*

Finally, the coding analysis of interviews revealed the consequences of resilience from Iranian EFL teachers' point of view. The consequences are presented in the following graph using NVIVO software.

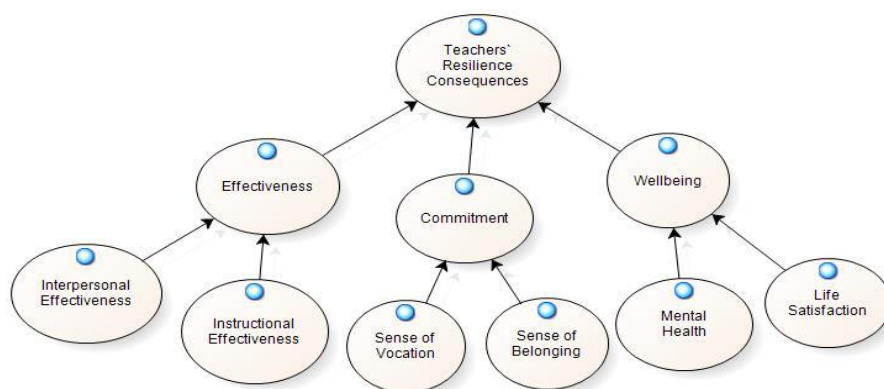


Figure 4. The Consequences of Iranian EFL Teachers' Resilience

The consequences of teachers' resilience were teachers' well-being, effectiveness, and commitment. According to teachers, resilience can not only increase their mental health but also result in their life satisfaction. As a teacher said:

*"Ignoring problems and coping with challenges successfully, can decrease teachers' depression and burnout."*

In addition, teachers reported that satisfaction with work and being able to cope with job stresses successfully, could increase the quality of teaching, which in turn can affect students' achievement positively. One of the participants said:

*"A resilient teacher is a qualified teacher with high motivation and high teaching quality which can result in students' high achievement."*

Finally, teachers' commitment was found as a result of teachers' resilience. Teachers believed that resilience could increase their sense of vocation and belonging to the organization. A teacher, for instance, reported that:

*"Resilient teachers are more engaged in their students' learning and developing their own work performance."*

To analyze the data obtained from teachers' journals and observation, the researchers applied the same coding process. The following figure shows the resources of teachers' resilience obtained from teachers' journals.

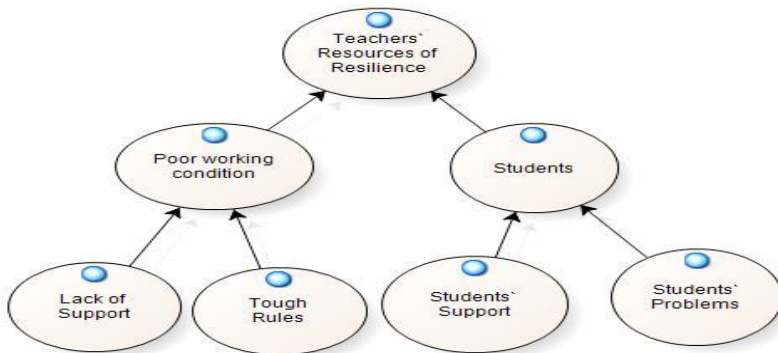


Figure 5. Teachers' Resources of Resilience Obtained from Teachers' Journals

Students and poor working condition were found as resources for teachers' resilience in teachers' journals. Students' problems were found as a risk factor, and students' support was realized as a protective factor of resilience. Based on teachers' journals, students' low motivation, misbehavior, difficult questions, and negative judgements are sources of stress. In addition, lack of support, tough rules and regulations, frequent observation, and time limitation were found in teachers' journals as risk factors affecting teachers' resilience. An example of these resources in teachers' journals is presented here:

*"The supervisor came to the class today for class observation. I was really stressed. I was afraid of making mistakes, such as pronouncing a word inaccurately, because I was sure she only focused on my weak points. There are frequent observations"*.

On the other hand, the teachers referred to some protective factors, such as students' positive feedback and good relationship with them, which helps them to bounce back and develop their motivation. The participants mentioned that:

*"Today, I was tired and wished I hadn't had class anymore. After going to the class, some students wanted me to be their teacher for the next term too. They also said, 'we like you very much. We learned a lot in this class'. Suddenly, I became motivated".*

Moreover, the coding process of teachers' journals revealed some strategies teachers use to deal with some difficulties in their work. The following figure shows the strategies for teachers' resilience found in analyzing teachers' journals.

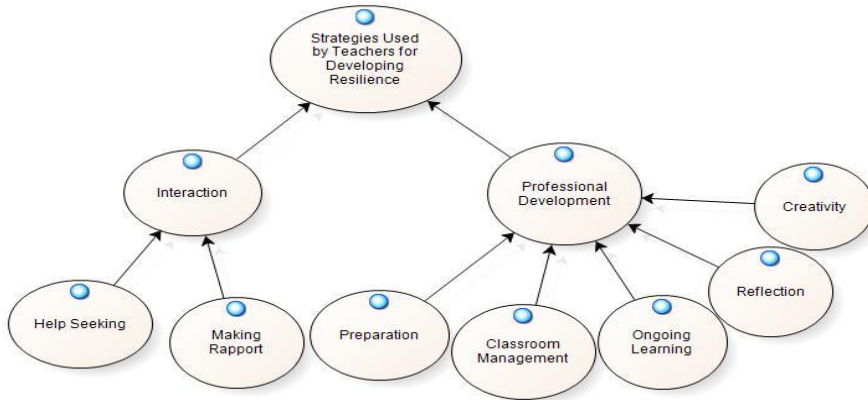


Figure 6. Teachers' Strategies Used for Developing Resilience Obtained from Teachers' Journals

Making rapport and professional development were two identified strategies in teachers' journals. Teachers referred to making relationships, asking for help, using reflection, classroom management, creativity, preparation, and ongoing learning as useful professional strategies in teachers' journals. One of the participants, for example, reported that:

*"Today, I had a question, and I could ask one of my experienced colleagues to help me. I had no stress before going to the class. My problem was addressed".*

On the other hand, the data obtained from classroom observations were analyzed using coding process. The following graph shows the resource for teachers' resilience uncovered from teachers' observation analysis.

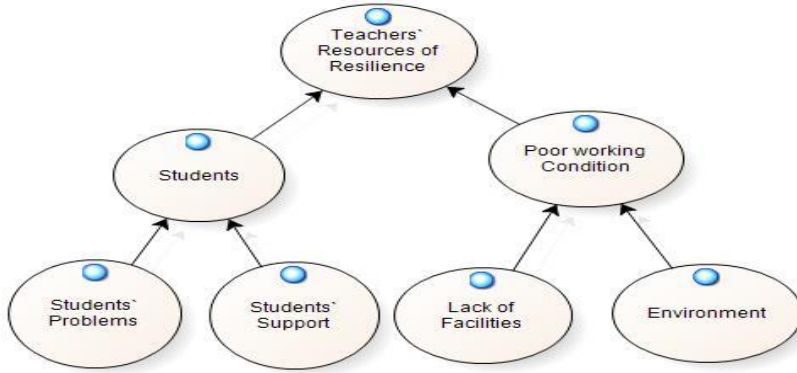


Figure 7. Teachers' Resources of Resilience Obtained from the Observation of Teacher s' Classes

The analysis of classroom observation showed that students and poor working conditions are two identified sources of resilience. Students' problems, namely misbehavior, lack of interest, difficult questions, and poor working conditions, such as lack of facility and class environment, were observed in some teachers' classes. However, in the classes of resilient teachers, students' support was observed. In these classes, it was observed that students were more polite, talked respectfully to the teachers, and had decent behavior. In some classes, even it was observed that some of the students thanked the teacher after the class.

In addition, the following figure shows the strategies of teachers' resilience found in analyzing teachers' observations.

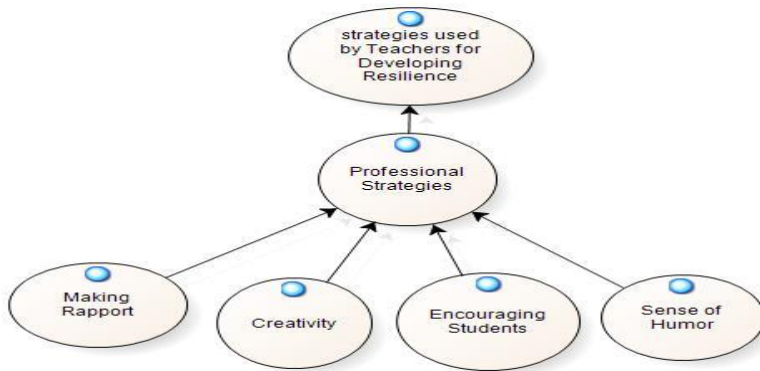


Figure 8. Teachers' Strategies Used for Developing Resilience Obtained from the Observation of Teachers' Classes

Strategies identified in the classroom observation were interaction and professional development. Close relationships with students, creativity, encouraging students, and sense of humor were observed in some of the resilient teachers' classes. The teacher made funny jokes and the students laughed and after the class, the students had a personal chat with teacher. The teacher called them by their first name and asked them to make a group on Whatsapp to have more connections with



each other. She shared her phone number with some of them. Creativity was observed by using some instructional activities teachers used to involve students in class.

Finally, after identifying the resources, strategies and outcomes of teachers' resilience in the coding process, the researchers investigated the role of these factors in teachers' resilience. To this end, the data of the study were reviewed continuously and the categories and the relationship between them were identified using the paradigm presented by Strauss and Corbin (1998). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), the paradigm model includes the phenomenon under study, causal, intervening, contextual conditions, strategies and consequences. The paradigm model is presented in the following figure.

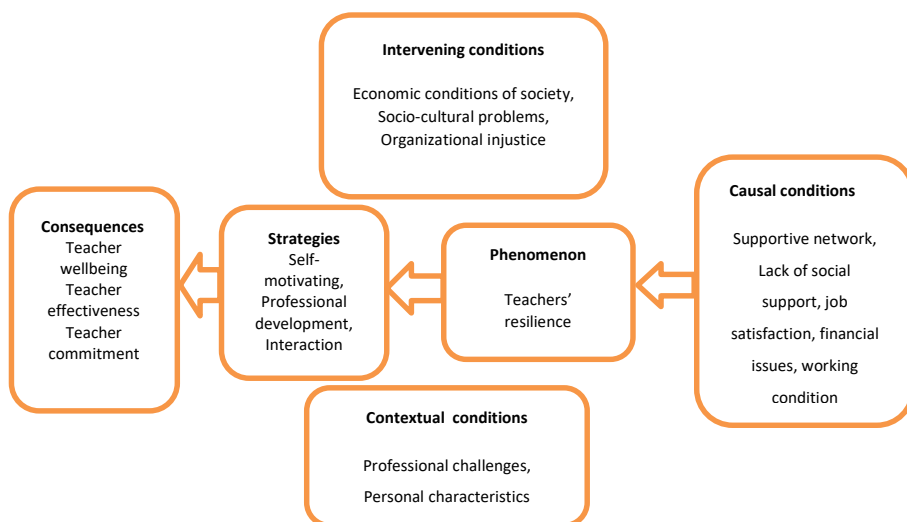


Figure 9. The Paradigm Model Based on Grounded Theory Approach Presented by Strauss and Corbin, (1998)

**Causal conditions:** As shown in Figure 9, supportive network, lack of social support, job satisfaction, financial issues, and working conditions were found as causal conditions.

**Intervening conditions:** Economic condition of society, low social status, socio-cultural view, and organizational injustice were found as intervening conditions.

**Contextual conditions:** Professional challenges and personal characteristics were found as contextual conditions.

**Strategies:** Self-motivating, professional development and interaction were found as strategies that may affect teachers' resilience over time.

**Consequences:** Teacher well-being, commitment, and effectiveness were found as consequences.

## Discussion

This study aimed at providing insights into the Iranian EFL teachers' resilience. In so doing, EFL teachers' resilience resources and strategies that teachers used to cope with stressful situations were investigated by adopting grounded theory approach. The findings of the study revealed a multi-dimensional resources for teachers' resilience involving personal, professional, organizational, social, and economic interrelated aspects of teacher' resilience. The findings in this regard support the previous studies (Brunetti, 2006; Castro et al., 2010) proposing that resilience is multi-dimensional and encompasses personal qualities of teachers' strategies applied in challenging situations and the ability to 'bounce back' from difficult situations. Supportive network, lack of social support, job satisfaction, financial issues, and working condition were identified as causal conditions affecting teachers' resilience directly. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), "causal conditions are factors that result in the occurrence of the phenomenon, the subject under study, or the central idea" (p. 131). From teachers' point of view, supportive network involves receiving support from the principal, supervisor, students, family and friends, which can help teachers tolerate most of problems easily and increase their resilience, and lack of social support from administrators or supervisors can decrease their motivation to remain in the institute where they work. For instance, a teacher said that *"I left three institutes just because of the administrators' behavior. So, I decided to leave this job since I had no other choice."* According to Ross, Altmaier, and Russell (1989), lack of social support, friendship, and assistance from colleagues may be important factors in creating teacher burnout. This can also be confirmed by the previous studies in which the role of administrative support (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, Wyckoff, 2011; Day & Gu, 2010), colleague relationships (Brunetti, 2006; Hong, 2012; Howard & Johnson, 2004), family and friends (Howard & Johnson, 2004) and students' support involving positive feedback and respectful behavior from them (e.g. Brunetti, 2006; Castro et al., 2010; Day et al., 2007) has been reported as crucial not only in teachers' resilience but also in their commitment and motivation.

Moreover, job satisfaction was found to motivate EFL teachers to continue and tolerate most teaching problems. This is confirmed by a study conducted by Dolati et al. (2014) in which a significant positive relationship between resilience and job satisfaction was found. According to Mifsud (2011), when teachers are satisfied with their job, they are less stressed, more productive, and tend to stay more in the teaching profession. In addition, teachers in this study believed that appropriate working condition in which they have autonomy and receive remuneration and a context in which there is a chance for professional development could be a safe place in which they feel less stress. For instance, a participant stated *"one reason that I stay in this institute is that I can do whatever I like in my class."* The findings in this regard are supported by the study of PoorAshraf and Toolabi (2014), in which financial support, social support, opportunity for professional development, autonomy and decision making were causal conditions of teachers' resilience. Moreover, Patterson et al. (2004), in their study of eight experienced teachers, identified strengths that teachers rely on in the face of adversity, including decision-making, autonomy, seeking professional development, problem-solving, relying on friends and colleagues, and being flexible. Another important causal condition mentioned by teachers was financial issues that directly affect their resilience. For instance, one of the participants stated: *"After finishing this term, I will not continue to teach in institutes. The income is low. I try to teach at home. It has a better income."* This result supports some studies conducted in Iran in which teachers' financial issues and working conditions were mentioned as one source of stress and demotivation among Iranian EFL teachers (Moinvaziri & Razmjoo, 2015; Rahmati, Sadeghi, & Ghaderi, 2018; Salehi & Taghavi, 2015).

On the other hand, some strategies, namely self-motivating, professional development, and interaction, were found in the study as helpful coping resources that teachers in the study used to deal with stress and develop their resilience. Strategies can help weaken or strengthen a phenomenon over time (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Self-motivating strategies found in the study were goal setting, self-care, and avoidance strategies. As found in the study, resilient teachers take care

of themselves, do not consider challenges as significant problems, and set goals for the future. The findings of the study support the previous studies in which it was revealed that teachers' self-care (Tait, 2008), goal-setting (Curry & O'Brien, 2012), and avoidance (Kyriacou, 2001) are useful strategies for coping helpful in well-being, resilience, and ongoing professional development. Moreover, humor was found in observing some teachers' classes as a strategy for relieving stressful situations. Bobek (2002) concluded that humor could relieve tension which, in turn, could make a trusted relationship between teacher and students that may support teaching and learning at school. Professional development was found as the second strategy, which includes reflection, ongoing learning, classroom management, preparation, and problem-solving. The findings of the study are in line with the previous studies. For example, the role of professional reflection (Beltman et al., 2011; Le Cornu, 2009), problem-solving (Castro et al., 2010; Dolati et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2014), ongoing learning (Tait, 2008), preparation before class (Mansfield et al., 2012), and creativity (Bobek, 2002) have been reported as useful strategies assisting teachers to overcome stresses and difficulties and develop their resilience. The third theme of strategies found in the study was interaction involving making rapport and help-seeking. Coping skills, such as seeking help and interpersonal skills, play a significant role in enhancing resilience (Mansfield et al., 2012; Patterson et al., 2004). Castro et al. (2010) also found that resilient teachers use help-seeking strategies. Howard and Johnson (2004) referred to strong interpersonal skills that pave the way for development of social support networks which in turn develop teachers' resilience.

However, the phenomenon in the study was also affected by the intervening conditions indirectly. Intervening conditions refer to a broad host of factors that "mitigate or otherwise impact causal conditions or phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 131). Intervening conditions found in the study were economic conditions of society, socio-cultural problems, and organizational injustice. These conditions may indirectly affect teachers' resilience by reducing teachers' motivation or increasing their stress and burnout, which may lead to the reduction of resilience and leaving the profession. As stated by one teacher in the study, *"Due to the economic situation in Iran, inflation, financial problems, and the amount of salary, I cannot afford even my basic needs. I always feel frustrated, and I regret choosing this profession"*. According to PoorAshraf and Toolabi (2014), economic and social conditions have an intervening role in teachers' resilience that indirectly affect their motivation to stay in the job. The crucial role of economic conditions in teacher demotivation was confirmed in Tziava (2003)'s study. Furthermore, another intervening condition mentioned by teachers was socio-cultural problems, namely low professional status and people's view toward English teachers. Fenech (2006) referred to the role of low professional status as one of the reasons for teachers' leaving the teaching profession and teachers' burnout. Moreover, teachers in the study believed that they are faced with high levels of expectations from students, parents, and principals, that make them stressed. A teacher said, *"I'm afraid of making mistakes. I always suffer from stress because English teachers are considered as all-knowing sources. They are expected to be like a dictionary to know all of the words and speak like a native person"*. It seems that there are insufficient research studies found in the literature investigating the relationship between teachers' resilient levels and socio-cultural views toward teaching. In this regard, the information provided by the current study is thought to contribute to the literature. According to Gu (2015), because of wide-ranging reforms of curriculum and the fast-changing knowledge economy, additional pressure has been imposed on teachers' workload volume, and complexity and they are expected to become high-level knowledge workers who "constantly advance their own professional knowledge as well as that of their profession" (OECD, 2012a, p. 11, as cited in Gu, 2015). On the other hand, organizational injustice involving lack of job security and unfair treatment was found in the study as another intervening condition that may result in a low level of resilience indirectly. For example, a teacher said, *"I'm not hopeful for a better position in this job; there is no job security, no insurance. This demotivates me to keep on my studying to get an M.A degree"*. In Dornyei and Ushioda's (2011) classification of demotivating factors for teachers, inadequate career structure is mentioned as one of the factors leading to teacher demotivation. This factor refers to what they call futurelessness or no-career-ladder situation, meaning that there are few areas of advancement or further goals for teachers to attain.

In addition, teachers' use of coping strategies can be affected by contextual conditions, which are "specific set of conditions that intersect dimensionally at this time and place to create a set of circumstances or problems to which persons respond through actions/interactions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 131). Personal characteristics, personal challenges, and professional challenges were found as contextual conditions that may indirectly affect teachers' use of strategies for developing resilience. For example, a resilient teacher mentioned that *"in the face of problems, she is flexible and patient and tries to control her emotions to think about her problems and find the best solution for them."* When a teacher is patient and flexible, he/she may control his/her stresses better, which in turn, may lead to teachers' resilience. However, unresilient teachers referred to lack of self-confidence and being perfectionist by expecting everything to be the best. This is in line with the study of PoorAshraf and Toolabi (2014), in which it was found that teachers' professional, personal and demographic features are among the contextual factors affecting teachers' resilience in their job. Personal resources, such as flexibility and agency (Castro et al., 2010; Patterson et al., 2004), inner drive and motivation (Hong, 2012; Salehi & Taghavi, 2015), self-efficacy (Razmjoo & Ayoobian, 2019) have been realized as important features which can help teachers control challenging situations and maintain their resilience. The findings in this regard are also supported by the study of Mansfield et al. (2012). In their study, they found different resources for developing teachers' resilience, including sense of humor, managing emotions, optimism, self-confidence, interest in teaching, motivation, flexibility and adaptability, being organized and prepared, reflection, help-seeking, and building relationships as important resources of teachers' resilience. Teachers in the study also recognized professional challenges such as student-related problems and work pressure as contextual conditions affecting resilience negatively. Mifsud (2011) found that students' misbehavior and workload were two important demotivating factors for teachers. There is also evidence for work pressure as a source of risk factors for teachers' resilience. For example, Castro et al. (2010) concluded that the most common professional work challenge was lack of time due to heavy workloads that negatively influenced teachers' resilience across all phases of the teaching experience.

Finally, the participants adopted coping strategies to deal with the perceived problems, which might lead to subsequent consequences. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), consequences are the outcome of the phenomenon. Teacher well-being, effectiveness, commitment, and job satisfaction were found as the most frequent outcomes associated with resilience. Pretsch, Flunger, and Schmitt (2012) argued that measures of resilience predicted the outcomes of well-being and job satisfaction. In addition, Brunetti (2006) defined teacher resilience as a quality that enables teachers to maintain their commitment to teaching and teaching practices despite challenging conditions and recurring setbacks. Resilience is important not only for novice teachers but also for all teachers, as it can enhance teaching effectiveness, heighten career satisfaction, and better prepare teachers to adjust to education's ever-changing conditions (Bobek, 2002; Gu & Day, 2007; Howard & Johnson, 2004). Generally, the findings of the study are confirmed by the study of Mansfield et al. (2012), in which they found a multi-dimensional and overlapping framework of teachers' resilience, including four profession-related, emotional, motivational, and social dimensions of teachers' resilience.

### **Conclusion and Implication of the Study**

The results of this study showed that teachers' resilience depends on a multi-dimensional framework of interrelated aspects involving personal, professional, organizational, social, and economic factors for developing teachers' resilience. The findings of this study can help educational programs to consider some pre-service programs for teachers through which different strategies for developing teachers' resilience can be taught. In order to develop teachers' resilience and motivation, some measures are to be taken by the organization to protect and retain teachers, such as providing job security, supportive network, enough financial income, appropriate working conditions, and improving and enhancing the quality of professional life for teachers. In addition,

considering teachers' personality characteristics before entering the teaching profession and providing healthy competition among teachers resulting in their professional development can help the teachers stay in their jobs more likely and continue to be in their socio-economic environment despite other job opportunities. Moreover, the importance and value that society places on teachers is the result of the efforts and activities of the organization to maintain and protect teachers. It's worth noting that the obtained findings were from a relatively small sample of participants who worked in the specific context of Kurdistan in Iran. Replication of this study could involve a larger sample of teachers over a longer period of time and teaching in various settings. Assuming that building resilience is a complex process, further research may explore which kinds of overarching themes or resources may have the most positive effect on teacher resilience.

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