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## EFL teachers' stress and job satisfaction: What contribution can teacher education make?

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### ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to find out the level of job satisfaction and stress among Iranian EFL teachers. More precisely, an attempt was made to investigate the main sources of EFL teachers' stress, their level of satisfaction with the job and the relationship between occupational stress and instructors' age, marital status and tenure. Using a localized self-reported questionnaire, adapted from Ferguson, Frost, and Hall (2012), data was collected from 149 EFL teachers working in Urmia, Iran. The analysis of the data revealed that 29.93% of the teachers reported feelings of stress in one way or another. In addition, more than one-third of the teachers claimed to be somewhat or very dissatisfied with their job. It was also observed that age, marital status and employment play significant roles in the level of occupational stress perceived by EFL teachers. Suggestions are offered for relieving teachers from stress and how teacher education programmes can contribute.

**Keywords:** occupational stress; job satisfaction; EFL teachers; teacher education

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## Introduction

Modern lifestyle is accompanied with a great amount of stress; and nowadays in many societies, individuals with a job find the workplace to be more stressful than it used to be. Kyriacou (2011, p.1) defines teachers' occupational stress as "the experience by teachers of unpleasant negative emotions, resulting from aspects of their work as a teacher which is triggered by a perception of threat in dealing with the demands made upon them". Selye (1976) argues that an absolute stress-free life is neither conceivable nor preferable and that a proper amount of tense feelings and stress may act as a motivator and can boost work performance. However, excessive doses of stress seem to lead to distress and physical pain (Cedoline, 1982). The teaching profession, especially English language teaching, is no exception and teachers in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) suffer from high levels of tension. Kyriacou (2000) confers that teaching in schools is now widely recognized to be among 'high stress' occupations. Piechurska-Kuciel (2011) considers teaching profession highly demanding since instructors obviously need to demonstrate proper behavioral characteristics crucial for interaction management. According to Hepburn and Brown, (2001), teachers are seen as bearing the brunt of the stresses created by the daily activities and modern schooling system.

A study by Borg and Riding (1991), showed high levels of occupational stress among Maltese teachers. Almost 34% of Maltese teachers reported their jobs as being either very stressful or extremely stressful. Ferguson, Frost, and Hall (2012, p. 27), quotes Manthei and Gilmore (1996), as saying, "well above 26% of New Zealander intermediate teachers felt that teaching occupation was either very or extremely stressful". Kyriacou (2000) also reported that the level of teaching stress made teaching profession as stressful as working in the police, the prison service, or being air traffic controllers, doctors and nurses. Occupational stress experienced by EFL teachers can be a major source of various health problems the result of which can affect the learners and the whole society in turn. According to Coates and Thoresen (1976), more than half a century ago, Kaplan estimated that stress may affect as many as 200,000 teachers in the US and through them, five million pupils.

EFL teachers' stress can have many detrimental effects both on individuals and organizations. It may, for example, influence job satisfaction which is a highly influential factor on teachers' performance and effectiveness (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). Therefore, diagnosing the sources of occupational stress and making an effort to surmount the problem will help speed up the process of learning and assist the teaching community to keep strong-willed and healthy. Nagra and Arora (2013) claimed that a stress-free teacher can teach more effectively in the classroom and can provide a better quality environment making the school a challenging and interesting place for students. The abundance of research on the subject of occupational stress, especially of teacher stress (Boyle, Borg, Falzon & Baglioni, 1995; Forlin, 2001; Friedman, 1991, 1999; Fuller, 1969; Kyriacou, 2000, 2011; Pithers & Soden, 1998; Putter, 2003; Selye, 1976; Travers, 2001) is a proof that the issue is of great importance for scholars all over the world and deserves further attention. In addition, the ever-increasing amount of stress and chronic experience of the feeling among teachers, which can lead to physical and emotional health problems as well as to job dissatisfaction, necessitates further studies and proactive measures in this regard. The present study was accordingly conducted to add to the thriving body of cross-cultural research in this area, not touched adequately in the Iranian context, with a hope to arrive at a better understanding of the sources of teachers' stress as one source of their job dissatisfaction in an attempt to offer solutions for them to survive the profession.

## Literature Review

### *Sources of teachers' stress*

Occupational stress perceived by EFL teachers in different situations can generally be explained as a complex psychological phenomenon influenced by numerous variables contributing to the amount of stress teachers experience in their career. It can also vary from one individual to the other based on personal, psychological and contextual factors. Teachers' age, marital status, tenure, gender, teaching experience, physical condition of the class, teacher's personality, students' personal and social characteristics, rapport with administrators and students' parents, the context, grade level of teaching, family concerns, financial status, variation in curriculum are not all but some of the factors contributing to the level of stress and its symptoms. Travers (2001) believes that undesirable or unfavorable conditions in which teachers and instructors work generally force them to do their job improperly. Considering contextual characteristics of a language school, to take as an example, a majority of such places in Iran, and especially in the context of the present study, are located in old buildings with shabby classes and poor ventilation, most of which are residential houses neither planned nor built for educational purposes. This can get on teachers' nerves and irritate them while teaching. Travers (2001), citing the works of other experts working on a similar issue, highlights that the improper basal factors directly influence teaching, bring about limitations and yield tension. Such basal factors include "inadequate school buildings and equipment, unpleasant work environment, poor physical working conditions, class sizes and noise levels" (p. 138). Forlin (2001), inspecting the results of 72 research projects published over a period of 13 years between 1980-1993, identified 24 common potential sources of stress for teachers. These stressors were classified into three main clusters: *administrative*, *classroom-based* and *personal*.

With the purpose of investigating the level of burnout among Iranian EFL teachers and its relationship with personal and contextual factors, Sadeghi and Khezrlou (2016) studied 40 teachers working in the context of Iran. Their findings revealed that English language teachers experience occupational stress stemming from curriculum related and organizational factors. They argue that the incongruity and imbalance between the educational demands or course objectives on the one hand and course resources, allocated class hours and assessment procedures on the other hand, make teachers feel stressed in their job.

### *The relationship between marital status and teaching stress*

Marital status is among the influential factors which may affect the level of stress. Some scholars working in the field have found no significant relationship between demographic factors and the level of teaching stress experienced by instructors. For instance, Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) in a study of 257 teachers from mixed comprehensive schools in England found no significant correlation between the level of stress and age, the length of experience and position held in the school. Nevertheless, many others (Ameen, Guffey & Jackson, 2002; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Powell & Ferraro, 1960) argue that personal and environmental factors contribute to the level of stress perceived by teachers. For example, married teachers face huge amounts of responsibility and take the burden of keeping a balance between their job and family affairs. The situation becomes even tenser when children are involved, especially the ones who are dependent on parental resources like financial and emotional care. A correlational study investigating the relationship between age, marital status and the way stress is perceived, conducted by Vokić and Bogdanija (2008) revealed that marital status was one of the influential factors playing a role in the amount of stress perceived. To be more precise, married instructors suffered from a higher level of occupational stress.

In a comparative study conducted by Duyilemi (1995), a questionnaire was distributed among 425 primary school instructors. The results indicated that married teachers reported greater levels of the job-related stress. The findings highlight the role of marital status, as a demographic variable, in the level of teaching stress in general terms; nonetheless, the factors contributing to stress in primary schools may be different in nature from those affecting EFL/ESL teachers. In 2013, Nagra and Arora inspected the level of occupational stress and its relation to common health problems among 206 teacher educators in Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur Districts of Punjab (India). Utilizing 'occupational stress index' in the process of data collection, the researchers found that teacher educators experienced a moderate level of stress stemming from their profession. Significant differences were also reported among different genders and teachers with different marital status. In other words, married and female teachers revealed higher levels of occupational stress.

#### *The role of age in teaching stress*

The level of stress perceived by teachers has been reported to be affected by teachers' age. Some researchers argue that as teachers get older, they become more experienced and have more control over tense situations involved in the job. Travers (2001), for example, claims that age and experience have been connected to the experience of tense feelings in teaching. That is to say, generally higher levels of stress might be experienced by members who recently joined the profession (usually younger teachers). This can be in part due to the fact that they have not yet acquired the required skills and proficiency to deal with the job. Meanwhile, others have found some contradictory results indicating that younger teachers have more potential to control their stress on the job. Veronica (2011), as an example, claims that age and tenure of teachers have very low effects on the level of stress experienced. Although the differences were not statistically significant, she found a growth on stress scores in regards to the age of instructors. Individuals falling into the young segment (24-35 years) of organizational adult age manifested fewer stress symptoms. She hypothesized that the change can be due to the fact that at that age people may be able to deal with the situation more effectively and mobilize themselves with more ease. Furthermore, they can benefit from stronger motivation in their profession. Nevertheless, ageing may bring a tangible reduction of biological strength for teachers over 50 years, although intellectually, their abilities can reach superior levels because of the gained expertise.

In a study conducted by Ameen, Guffey and Jackson (2002) in the United States, it was found that teaching stress was mainly linked with rank, age and years of experience. In their investigation, the results showed that younger teachers experienced a higher level of stress. A study in Australia by Laughlin (1984) suggested that major concerns of younger teachers were the learners, while for others practicing their middle years the main source of tense feeling was the aspects of the career. Moreover, the experience of stress was reported to occur at any time of the year. Likewise, in Coates and Thoresen's (1976) study, younger and less experienced instructors had feelings of greater stress than their co-workers, from pressures linked to discipline, poor promotion prospects and management issues. These variations can be regarded as unique for the contexts where the study was conducted as some other findings strongly reject the correlation between some demographic features as age, experience, etc. and stress. Putter (2003), considering teaching profession stressful, noted that there were no significant differences in the level of perceived stress regarding gender, age and teaching experience. Given these widespread and inconsistent findings on the links between demographic features of teachers in different professions and their stress level, the need arises to look at these same variables in the context of EFL teaching as well.

*The effect of tenure on teaching stress*

Job security has been the concern of many employees and also employers in any working area. Usually, the labor force has a demand for assuring permanent job and not to be short-listed for job loss in problematic situations. On the other hand, employers try to avoid taking extra responsibilities and keep the right of having control over the workers. Teaching profession is not an exception and people working in the field find the above-mentioned factors as major sources of stress. Travers (2001) claims that teaching has always been believed to be a very secure job, and yet increasingly this is not necessarily the case. In addition, the rapid pace of change within teaching, both in terms of the nature and requirements of the job, and the technologies and materials that teachers have to deal with, means that they need to consider retraining and possible career change. Nowadays, there is an immense emphasis on the proficiency and competence of teachers (Richards, 2015), especially in the field of EFL/ESL, and the potential for being sacked and dismissed in the competitive teaching market adds to the level of teacher stress perceived by professionals. In a quantitative study conducted by Kaur, Kumari, and Sharma (2013) in Doaba region of Punjab-India with the aim of finding the main sources of job-related stress among college teachers working in different fields, it was reported that job security was among the important stressors that caused various types of problems for the participants in the study. In an investigation conducted among university teachers, Veronica (2011) reported that academics without tenure had considerably lower job satisfaction compared to their tenured counterparts. Considering the connection between stress and job satisfaction, as it is stated earlier, tenure can also play a role in the level of stress.

*Teachers' stress and job satisfaction*

Job satisfaction seems to be the realization of one's expectations in regard to their job, and in turn to social and personal affairs. Robbins and Timothy (2007) define job satisfaction as a positive feeling about one's job resulting from an evaluation of its characteristics. In the field of work psychology, teachers' job satisfaction is defined as "teachers' affective reactions to their work or to their teaching role" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, p. 1030). Feeling of gratification is a multifaceted phenomenon and can be affected by many personal, social and contextual factors. Indeed, the sense of satisfaction expressed by teaching professionals can influence their personal and social behaviors and in turn their performance. It is commonly known that occupational stress among teachers is an influential factor in occupational commitment and job satisfaction. Soodmand Afshar and Doosti (2016) argue that the sense of job satisfaction among EFL teachers can boost teachers' performance. In their study, they found satisfied teachers to be substantially better performers compared to unsatisfied teachers. Jepson and Forrest (2006) maintained teachers with a high level of stress reported low levels of job satisfaction and had stronger desire to leave the profession. In their study, Baghbani and Dehghan Neishabory (2012) argued that satisfied teachers establish good rapport and have better performances.

Job stress and satisfaction are generally experienced individually, but they are considered to have communal effects on the whole society. Klassen, Usher and Bong (2010) claimed that teachers' sense of satisfaction is generally experienced individually; nonetheless, teaching is not a profession to be practiced in a social or cultural vacuum; and accordingly, demographic features like gender, age, marital status, experience, and the working context are part of the larger socio-cultural context that can affect job satisfaction among teachers. This, in part, results in organizations to search for their teachers' level of performance and any influential factors in order to provide the employees with suitable incentives and motivators to keep them functioning better.

Many studies have shown that there is a negative relationship between the level of experienced stress and job satisfaction, that is, the more stressed the teachers are, the less satisfied they are likely to be. Klassen and Chiu (2010) investigating 1430 practicing teachers in Western Canada found

that teachers with higher levels of teaching stress had lower job satisfaction. Veronica (2011) probed into the level of job satisfaction among university teachers. In her study with 70 teachers, stress was indicated by the level of depression and anxiety, and the level of job satisfaction was estimated using Warr Job Satisfaction Scale. The results revealed that there was a negative correlation between stress and job satisfaction. In addition, male teachers reported a low level of stress and high level of satisfaction. Suspecting teachers' dissatisfaction to be a major reason for a decline in job commitment in Nigeria, Popoola (2009) found that salary and recognition constitute two major sources of teachers' dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction can affect the quality of performance or may even result in a loss in the population of the teachers while teachers with greater satisfaction can work on the course objectives more effectively and may work with students with enthusiasm since the work is perceived challenging and rewarding. Baghbani and Dehghan Neishabory (2012) investigating the effect of teachers' tense feelings on job performance in the context of Iran observed that job stress was a contributing factor to the level of job satisfaction.

### *Stress and effectiveness of teachers*

Teachers are major role-players in an effective system of education (including EFL education) and their proper performance is the key to the successful running of the system and student learning. Indeed, job-related stress perceived by teachers can adversely affect their performance. Further, teachers with a higher level of stress depict a lower level of occupational commitment (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). In a context such as Iran where teachers are compared to religious leaders and the Saints, the expectations from teachers are really high, which by itself trigger stress. Accordingly, teachers find themselves in a situation in which they cannot meet the expectations and fail to perform in the desired way. Teacher stress may have psychological and social effects and these effects may be expressed in a variety of different ways, of which poor performance is only one adverse result (Friedman, 1999; Stansfeld, Fuhrer, Shipley & Marmot, 1999).

Soodmand Afshar and Doosti (2016) studied the impact of job satisfaction on Iranian EFL teachers' performance in the profession. The data was collected from 64 English language teachers and 1774 students. The results revealed that teachers with higher levels of satisfaction were better performers in their job. In a comparable study conducted in North Cyprus, Göker (2012) probed into the impact of EFL teachers' collective efficacy on job stress and job satisfaction and found that happy teachers are more likely to perform properly. Presumably, any single factor contributing to the existence of stress is an impediment by itself and brings some hardships for learners and teachers in approaching their learning and teaching objectives effectively. Many studies have revealed the negative impact of stress which can undermine the quality of teaching and, as it is stated earlier, there seems to be a negative significant relationship either direct or through mediator factors between the level of teachers' stress, job satisfaction and job performance.

Khan, Shah, Khan and Gul (2012) carried out a non-systematic narrative overview of the teachers' stress, performance and resources by conceptualizing them for understating the phenomenon of the moderating effect of teachers' resources on the teachers' stress and performance. They found that teaching stress negatively affects teachers' performance and that teachers' performance was adversely affected by factors which exist either within or outside the educational institution, resulting in a lower individual as well as institutional productivity. Teachers with greater stress, defined as the experience of negative emotions resulting from teacher's work (Kyriacou, 2001), have lower self-efficacy (Betoret, 2006; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007), poorer teacher-pupil rapport, and lower levels of effectiveness. Teachers play crucial roles in the educational system of any given country and contribute a lot to the success of educational institutions educating the most invaluable assets of a country, i.e. students. They "play an integral role in fulfilling the goals of educational systems upon whom the success or failure of educational programs depend" (Soodmand Afshar & Doosti, 2016, p. 98). Understanding what impedes their success and effectiveness in teaching is crucial for educational systems, policy-makers and other

stakeholders. The diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds among EFL students in addition to the lack of a comprehensive curriculum has made English classes more challenging for EFL/ESL teachers (Weinstein & Trickett, 2016). Caring about teachers' performance is a fundamental concern for all educational institutions and more research is needed to delve into factors adversely affecting teacher effectiveness the most important of which are stress and job dissatisfaction. Diagnosing the type of stressors and their origins can allow scholars and authorities to know the real nature of the problem and help them to seek ways to minimize their impact and best manage them. To fill in the relevant gaps in this area in an Iranian EFL context, the following research questions were formulated for further scrutiny.

1. Do Iranian EFL teachers experience any job-related stress?
2. Are EFL teachers in Iran satisfied with their job?
3. Does marital status affect job-related stress perceived by EFL teachers?
4. Is there any relationship between the age of EFL teachers and job-related stress perceived by them?
5. Does tenure affect job-related stress perceived by EFL teachers?

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants contributing to the present study were 149 practicing EFL teachers among whom 65 (43.6%) were single and 75 (50.3%) were married. 9 (6%) teachers did not report their marital status. In terms of age, the majority, i.e., 78 (52.3%) of the participants were under 30; 29 (19.5%), 19 (12.8%) and 23 (15.4%) of them were within the age ranges of 31-40, 41-50 and over 50, respectively. In addition, 77 (51.7%) teachers were tenured whereas 72 (48.3%) did not have a tenure status.

### *Instruments*

The data elicitation technique used to investigate the existence of job satisfaction, teaching-related stress and its relationship with age, marital status and tenure was a tailor-made questionnaire. The base factors and design of the questionnaire (which included 46 items measuring the main sources of stress) were adapted from Ferguson, Frost, and Hall (2012). Consulting other similar studies, the researchers developed a list of 100 stressors. However, following advice from experts, ambiguous and odd items were discarded and the total number of items was reduced to 68. For piloting purposes, 38 EFL teachers who shared almost the same characteristics as those in the main study were asked to answer the questionnaire items. Based on the feedback from the pilot study, the questionnaire was finally reduced to 48 items (in 5 sections). Section A elicited a self-report level of teachers' stress; section B asked about their satisfaction in regard to the teaching profession; section C was about teachers' willingness to remain a teacher; section D examined whether teachers would choose teaching as a career in the future; and section E consisted of main stress provoking factors. Items B, C and D collectively examined the level of teachers' job satisfaction. The factors in the questionnaire (section E) were grouped into five main categories: *1- Interpersonal Relations, 2- Language Proficiency and Knowledge, 3- Facilities and Resources, 4- Employment Structure, and 5- Other Factors*. The questionnaire was accompanied with a cover page which explained the purpose of the questionnaire and asked for demographic information of the respondents. The questionnaire has not been included in the appendix for space issues but is available from researchers upon request.

### *Procedure*

Using a convenience sampling procedure, the final questionnaire was administered in person to 165 practicing EFL teachers from universities, high schools and language centers in Urmia, Iran. No time limit was set for answering the questions; however, most participants finished answering the items in about 20 minutes. Some questionnaires seemed not to have been answered with enough attention so they were excluded from the analysis not to pollute the results. Final data was therefore based on the information coming from 149 questionnaires. Using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Ver21), first, descriptive statistics were calculated to show the spread of scores with regard to frequencies and percentages. Then, Spearman correlation and *t*-test analyses were conducted to provide relevant statistics to answer the research questions.

## **Results**

### *Descriptive statistics*

Firstly, the reliability of the questionnaire used in the present study was checked. Table 1 shows the results for reliability estimation applying Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 1  
*Reliability Results for Job Satisfaction Items (B, C, and D), Stress Items (E1 - E48) and Full Questionnaire Items (A, B, C, D, and E1-E48).*

Reliability statistics for Job Satisfaction items	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.881	3

  

Reliability statistics for Stress items	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.952	48

  

Reliability statistics for Full Questionnaire items	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.950	52

As can be seen in Table 1, the estimated reliability indices are all highly acceptable values.

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics relating to item A of the questionnaire.



Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics for Item A*

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Not at all	30	20.1
	A little	44	29.5
	Moderately	42	28.2
	Very stressed	22	14.8
	Extremely stressed	11	7.4
	Total	149	100.0
Missing	System	0	
Total		149	

As it is demonstrated in Table 2, over half the participants (50.3%) reported feelings of stress in response to item A of the questionnaire (In general, how stressful do you find being a teacher?) among whom 28.2% were moderately stressed and 22.2% were very or extremely stressed. Based on these statistics, the answer to the first question of the study seems to be positive, that is, a significant number of Iranian EFL teachers examined in this study suffer from job-related stress.

Table 3 represents descriptive statistics for item B of the questionnaire.

Table 3  
*Descriptive Statistics for Item B*

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Very Satisfied	23	15.4
	Fairly satisfied	54	36.2
	Neither-Nor	21	14.1
	Somewhat Dissatisfied	36	24.2
	Very Dissatisfied	15	10.1
	Total	149	100.0
Missing	System	0	
Total		149	

As it can be understood from Table 3, well above one third of the teachers under study (34.3%) reported to be somewhat or very dissatisfied with their job as an EFL teacher in response to the question: "In general, how satisfied are you with your job as a teacher?" whereas 51.6% of the participants reported to be fairly or very satisfied with their job. Accordingly, in response to research question 2, it can be stated that although half of the surveyed teachers felt satisfied with their job, a significant number (above one-third) did not have the desired level of satisfaction.

Table 4 provides information about descriptive statistics for item C of the questionnaire.

Table 4  
*Descriptive Statistics for Item C*

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Very likely	35	23.5
	Fairly likely	32	21.5
	Neither-Nor	50	33.6
	Somewhat unlikely	27	18.1
	Very unlikely	5	3.4
	Total	149	100.0
Missing	System	0	
Total		149	

As for item C of the questionnaire: "In general, how likely it is that you will remain a teacher in 10 years' time?", more than one fifth of the teachers (21.5%) reported that they are willing to change their job in the years to come whereas 45% of the respondents were very likely or fairly likely to remain in their job as an English teacher.

Table 5 provides necessary data relating to descriptive statistics for item D of the questionnaire which asked whether they would choose teaching again as a profession in the future.

Table 5  
*Descriptive Statistics for Item D*

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Very likely	32	21.5
	Fairly likely	34	22.8
	Neither-Nor	35	23.5
	Somewhat unlikely	36	24.2
	Very unlikely	12	8.1
	Total	149	100.0
Missing	System	0	
Total		149	

As the table 5 demonstrates, 32.3% of the sample population reported they would somewhat or very unlikely choose teaching again as their career opposed to 44.3% who reported they would fairly or very likely choose the same job as their career.

Table 6 below shows descriptive statistics for three items to do with job satisfaction (B, C and D) and table 7 does the same for 48 stress-related items included in section E (main stressors).

Table 6  
*Descriptive Statistics for Item B, C and D Collectively*

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Very Satisfied	90	20.13
	Fairly satisfied	120	26.85
	Neither-Nor	106	23.71
	Somewhat Dissatisfied	99	22.15
	Very Dissatisfied	32	7.16
	Total	447	100.0
Missing	System	0	
Total		447	

Based on table 6, considering the overall construct for job satisfaction encompassing items B, C and D, 29.31% of the sample population reported feelings of dissatisfaction with their profession as an English teacher whereas nearly half the population (46.98%) reported to be fairly or very satisfied with their job. These statistics too confirm the above observation that about one-third of the respondents felt dissatisfied with their jobs, offering negative answer to research question 2.

Table 7  
*Overall Stress for 48 Items of the Questionnaire*

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Not at all	1053	14.72
	A little	1823	25.49
	Moderately	2136	29.86
	Very stressed	1539	21.52
	Extremely stressed	601	8.41
	Total	7152	100

According to table 7, around one third of the population (29.93%) under study reported to be very or extremely stressed in their job as a teacher. In contrast, 40.21% of the participants reported a little or no feelings of stress stemming from their occupation. Data for these 48 items taken together as the measure of overall stress support the general observation above in response to item A that nearly one third of the examined teachers experience feelings of job-related stress. This information can also be inferred from table 8 which reveals that respondents reported a 'moderate' level of stress (2.8) on average.

Table 8  
*Descriptive Statistics for Stress Items (48 items)*

Stress		
N	Valid	148
	Missing	1
Mean		2.8339
Std. Deviation		.62843
Minimum		1.46
Maximum		4.19

The participants expressed their feeling of stress for any stressor in a five-point scale '1= not at all, 2= a little, 3= moderate, 4= very and 5= extremely stressed'. The relative means regarding the most and least influential factors are presented in the following tables (9 and 10). Items are arranged in a descending order from the most to the least contributing factors to teaching stress.

Table 9  
*Descriptive Statistics for the Most Influential Stressors*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Inadequate salary	149	3.56	1.326
Your job security	149	3.40	1.287
Teaching those who do not value education	149	3.29	1.179
Attitudes of the principal	149	3.23	1.050
Behavior of the principal	149	3.19	1.096
Poorly motivated students	149	3.19	1.121
Poor working conditions	149	3.16	1.107
Increase in workload	149	3.15	1.115
limitations regulated by authorities	149	3.11	1.152
Lack of time to assist individual students	149	3.11	1.126

Table 10  
*Descriptive Statistics for the Least Influential Stressors*

	N	Mean	St. Deviation
Teaching the students who are too old to learn a foreign language	149	2.53	1.186
Behavior of other teachers	149	2.52	1.072
Students' social class	149	2.37	1.045
Relationship with other teachers	149	2.33	.999
Teaching the opposite sex	149	2.23	1.240
Teaching co-ed classes	149	2.13	1.071

As it is seen in tables 9 and 10, *inadequate salary*, *job security*, and *attitudes of the principals* were among the most influential stressors whereas *teaching co-ed classes*, *teaching the opposite sex* and *relationship with other teachers* were the least influential factors affecting the level of job stress. Table 11 presents data for the remaining stressors with an average impact on job-related stress.

Table 11  
*Descriptive Statistics for the Stressors with an Average Impact*

	N	Mean	St. Deviation
High demands from the parents for good results	149	2.83	1.145
shortages of materials	149	2.82	1.119
extra-curricular responsibilities	149	2.81	1.115
Intra staff rivalry academic pressure within the school	149	2.81	1.103
The move towards a national curricula	149	2.80	1.056
inappropriate class size	149	2.79	1.120
Lack of teacher training curricula	149	2.78	1.194
balancing home and school responsibilities	149	2.78	1.104
changes in the curriculum	149	2.78	1.055
The physical size of the class.	149	2.77	1.251
relationship with principal or vice principal	148	2.75	1.106
When pupils try to test you all the time	149	2.74	1.155
When someone criticizes your knowledge or method	149	2.74	1.103
Having to teach in too many classes	149	2.73	1.210
administrative paperwork	149	2.72	1.049
poor physical condition	149	2.72	1.188
To be asked a question you don't know the answer	149	2.72	1.167
lack of communication with administration	149	2.71	1.038
lack of time for marking	149	2.66	1.129
Commuting between different schools in the city	149	2.66	1.259
Paperwork	149	2.65	1.100
Teaching topics you are not allowed to (sex, politics, etc.)	149	2.64	1.267
Teaching in one on one classes	149	2.53	1.006

Table 12  
*Descriptive Statistics for Stress Constructs*

	Mean	S.D	Min	Max
Employment Structure	2.96	0.65	1.57	4.29
Facilities & Resources	2.87	0.73	1.18	4.36
Language Proficiency & knowledge	2.82	0.87	1.00	5
Other factors	2.77	0.71	1.33	4.50
Interpersonal Relations	2.68	0.66	1.25	4.17

Table 12 shows the mean score and standard deviation of items as regards with the constructs of stress: *Interpersonal Relations*, *Employment Structure*, *Language Proficiency and Knowledge*, *Facilities and Resources* and *Other Factors*. As it is evident from the table, *Employment Structure* (M = 2.96) is the construct with the highest effect on teaching stress and *Interpersonal Relations* (M = 2.68) is the construct with the lowest impact on teaching stress. More detailed information appears in table 13.

Table 13  
*Item Ratings for Stress Constructs*

	Not at all	A little	Moderate	A lot	Extreme
	F (P)	F (P)	F (P)	F (P)	F (P)
Interpersonal relations <sup>1</sup>	342 (19.12)	462 (25.84)	522 (29.20)	346 (19.35)	116 (6.49)
Employment Structure <sup>2</sup>	256 (12.27)	503 (24.11)	615 (29.48)	487 (23.35)	225 (10.79)
Language Proficiency & Knowledge <sup>3</sup>	111 (14.90)	184 (24.70)	234 (31.41)	155 (20.80)	61 (8.19)
Facilities and Resources <sup>4</sup>	213 (13.00)	420 (25.62)	511 (31.18)	353 (21.54)	142 (8.66)
Other Factors <sup>5</sup>	131 (14.66)	254 (28.41)	254 (28.41)	198 (22.15)	57 (6.37)

F: Frequency; P: Percentage

Table 13 represents data regarding frequencies and percentage of five main structures of the questionnaire on the scale. Further, the relevant item number included in each construct is provided below.

1. Interpersonal relations construct includes items 5, 8, 10, 14, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, and 48
2. Job structure construct includes items 1,2, 6, 9, 16, 18, 19, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 33, and 34
3. Knowledge construct includes items 12, 35, 36, 37, 38
4. Facilities construct includes items 3, 7, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 30, 31, 39 and 40
5. Other factors construct includes items 4, 11, 13, 21, 26 and 32

### Inferential statistics

In order to provide an answer to the third research question on the effect of marital status on EFL teachers' job-related stress, an independent samples *t*-test was run, the results of which are reported in tables 14 and 15.

Table 14  
*Group Statistics for Marital Status*

	Marital status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
stress	single	73	2.37	1.20
	married	76	2.82	1.11

Table 15  
*t-test for Equality of Means*

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
stress	2.33	147	0.02	0.44

The figures in tables 14 and 15 indicate that there is statistically significant difference ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) between married and single EFL teachers on the level of occupational stress with married teachers being more stressful than singles.

In order to provide an answer to the fourth research question as to the relationship between job related stress and teachers' age, a Spearman's rho correlation was run, the results of which are represented in tables 16.

Table 16  
*Correlation Results for Age*

		Age
stress	Spearman Correlation	0.21
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.01
	N	149

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results show that, although weak, there is a positive significant correlation ( $\rho = 0.21$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ) between the age of teachers and level of stress among EFL teachers, implying that the age of the teachers is an affective factor in the level of stress experienced by teachers working in the field of EFL such that the younger the teacher, the less stressful he/she is.

In order to provide an answer to the fifth research question concerning the effect of employment status (with/without tenure) on job related stress, another independent samples *t*-test was run, the results of which are depicted below in table 17 and 18.

Table 17  
*Group Statistics for Tenure*

	employment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
stress	with tenure	77	2.28	1.01
	without tenure	72	2.83	1.30

Table 18  
*t-test for Equality of Means*

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
stress	2.40	147	0.01	0.457

Table 18 demonstrates that there is a significant difference ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) between tenured and untenured teachers in the perception of job related stress. To be more precise, tenured instructors benefiting from long term contracts and insurance policies seem to be less stressed than their untenured colleagues. Accordingly, as an answer to the 5<sup>th</sup> research question, it can be concluded that tenure plays a significant role in the level of job related stress among EFL teachers in Iran.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study revealed that a big population of teachers working in the field of EFL in an Iranian context suffer from high levels of job-related stress in one way or another. In general, the results of the study seem to be in line with findings of other scholars (Aslrasouli & Saadatpourvahid, 2014; Borg & Riding, 1991; Ferguson, et al. 2012; Göker, 2012; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978) and indicated that EFL teachers found teaching profession to be highly stressful to make a living. A comparison between our findings and those of some other similar studies reveals that EFL teachers in the Iranian context, more or less, suffer from the same level of job related stress as teachers in other disciplines, a warning sign calling for further practical measures. Research in the U.K. has typically found that around 25 percent of school teachers reported being a teacher either very stressful or extremely stressful (Kyriacou 2011). Putter (2003), investigating the level of stress among teachers (with a sample size of 106) in the School of Industry and mainstream schools of Free State Province of South Africa, reported 37.5% of teachers to be stressed. In our study, 22.2% of the teachers reported to be very or extremely stressed when answering a general self-reported question on the amount of their stress; however, considering all individual stressors contained in section E of the questionnaire, the figure stands much higher, and about one-third (29.93%) of the population under study reported the profession to be tense and demanding.

Besides, more than one-third (34.3%) of the sample group reported feelings of dissatisfaction in relation to their profession. This can result in burnout and a big loss in the number of teachers which may, accordingly, adversely affect the educational system of the country. As Sadeghi and Khezlou (2016) observe, teachers' burnout associated with stress, can unfavorably affect the quality of instruction in addition to teachers' psychological, mental and physical health. It should be noted that the responses elicited from the population under study revealed that more than one-fifth of the sample (21.5%) reported that they would somewhat unlikely or very unlikely remain a teacher in 10 years-time, and 32.3% claimed that they would unlikely choose teaching as their job to make a living. These figures are danger alarms to educational authorities that a large proportion of teachers who are invaluable assets of the nation may be lost in the years to come. These shocking figures on job dissatisfaction and stress can lead the field of TESOL to eat its (young) members as Farrell (2016, this issue) is cautioning against. In line with Farrell's belief, we hold that part of the problem can be solved by properly planned teacher education and support programmes. Some of the stress teachers experience are related to lack of educational and moral support by authorities. It is particularly with these and other sources of stress that we argue tailor-made teacher education programmes can best benefit the suffering teachers. Although primarily intended to offer practical advice for teachers on how to survive teaching and improve the current practice, teacher education programmes can also be extended in scope to include authorities and students and teach them how to value education, get motivated and exercise more humane relationships.

A quantitative study conducted by Popoola (2009) found that a large number of teachers had tried leaving their job at some point in their career and a majority of them preferred other jobs to teaching. Accordingly, teaching profession in general, and EFL teachers in particular, seem to suffer from teaching stress, and it is up to researchers in the field to take the challenge and seek remedies and strategies to tackle the issue. Regarding assistance that teachers would like to receive



most commonly, Ameen, Guffey and Jackson (2002) suggested the most useful strategies would include training in different teaching methodologies, classroom management skills, handling students with different learning styles, organizing lectures, developing syllabi and mentoring by senior faculty. The proposed remedies are, no doubt, context-specific and further practical advice requires research in a variety of contexts.

As far as stressors are concerned, the obtained data also revealed that among 48 potential sources of stress, *inadequate salary* and *Job Security* with mean scores of 3.56 and 3.40 respectively were the factors with the highest impact on the level of stress adding support to the findings of some past research (e.g. Kaur et al., 2013). The above-mentioned stressors were followed by *teaching those who do not value education* (M = 3.29), *attitudes of the principals* (M = 3.23), *behavior of the principal* and *poorly motivated students* (M = 3.19), and *poor working conditions* (M = 3.16). It should be noted that most language teachers, especially the ones working in language schools, are not paid well compared to those doing other jobs. Further, a big proportion of such teachers suffers from the lack of job security and is even not offered any insurance policy for health problems, etc.

A good number of studies (e.g. Ameen, Guffey & Jackson, 2002; Duyilemi, 1995; Coates & Thoresen, 1976; Greenglass & Burke, 2003; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979; Powell & Ferraro, 1960; Putter, 2003; Travers, 2001; Veronica, 2011; Wanberg, 1984) have sought to discover the relationship between the level of teaching stress and demographic factors. The findings of our study were in line with the outcome of some previous studies (e.g. Coates & Thoresen, 1976; Duyilemi, 1995; Nagra & Arora, 2013) and the results demonstrated variances on the level of stress in connection with investigated demographic features. More specifically, we found married and non-tenured teachers to be more stressed. This can be in part due to the fact that married educators face more challenges keeping the balance between family affairs and their profession. Further, tenured educators seem to be more secure and feel comfortable having long term contracts. Tenured teachers, generally, receive a higher amount of salary and financial benefits whereas untenured English teachers who mostly work in language schools are overworked and underpaid. Hence, they are continuously involved in financial issues in covering life expenditures. We also found the age of the teachers to be positively correlated with the amount of stress experienced by teachers. This can be due to the fact that younger teachers are more motivated and energetic in dealing with stressful situations and, accordingly, they can easily adjust to the new situations and can cope with the demands more effectively.

The results of the present study offer insights to a better understanding of the problems EFL teachers encounter, allowing us to reflect on processes and procedures that can induce more effective and stress-free learning and teaching environments in our language classes. The findings may be of interest to educational policy makers and teacher educators whose responsibility is to ensure that effective teaching and learning is taking place. Since dissatisfaction may result in poor performance on the part of teachers and the required effort or commitment can be lost, it is crucial that its existence among teachers be identified and remedied before the situation gets worse. Stress and dissatisfaction among teachers can have immediate and long-term consequences affecting teachers themselves, their families, their clients (students), educational institutions and almost any other member of the society in the long run, and that is why appropriate measures need to be taken to reduce these adverse impacts by attending to teachers' financial, educational, moral, social and other needs.

It is also important to diagnose as many stressors as possible so that they can be dealt to level down the amount of tension. Salary and job security can be tackled by making a balance between the teacher's income and living costs. In addition, teachers should be provided with proper insurance policies in order to support them in the occurrence of job loss and health problems. Moreover, authorities can have a friendly rapport with teachers and minimize the sense of

superiority among the principals to make the classes a challenging environment for the workers. The owners of language institutes and other organizations may be encouraged to improve the working environment and physical conditions by renewing the buildings and equipping new and modern facilities to assist learners and teachers. Of course allocating the proper amount of loans and mortgages with low or no interest can be a good option for dealing with some of the economic problem leading to teacher stress or dissatisfaction with the job. Further, in order to decrease the amount of workload, some responsibilities marginal to teaching like marking can be assigned to teacher assistants, which is the case in some developed countries. Additionally, student numbers can be reduced to a reasonable size to both pave the way for teachers to spare enough time for all students and reduce the stressful nature of crowded classes for especially novice teachers. Also, limitations regulated by the government and authorities should be addressed in a realistic manner not idealistically. Accordingly, policy makers are recommended to establish fair regulations in accordance with social and technical developments that teacher can easily understand and follow.

### Limitations and suggestions for further studies

Among the main limitations of this work, we find the exclusive use of self-reporting techniques to collect information to be problematic. Since the use of questionnaires has some shortcomings, it is recommended that this type of measuring instrument be combined with other more qualitative tools as the responses to the questionnaire items may be influenced by personal or social values. Dunham (1992) claims that researchers attempting to obtain information about the extent of the problem (such as stress) have faced difficulties as respondent have feared that reporting stress may be taken as a sign of their weakness. The second main limitation of the current is to do with the sample recruited. The teachers who participated in this study did so voluntarily, so there was no random selection involved to ensure that the sample was representative of the population (i.e. all EFL teachers working in Iran's ELT industry). Therefore, caution needs to be taken when generalizing these results, and future studies may include all EFL teachers working in a certain context as in X language school to address this shortcoming. We also propose that a better picture of the reality can be depicted by taking a comprehensive cross-cultural perspective to the situation of EFL teachers in different countries where a variety of other variables can also be included in the study including teachers' language proficiency, teaching experience, and university education among others.

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