



Etiological determinants of burnout in Iranian secondary EFL teaching faculty: A qualitative and comparative analysis between public and private schools

Sareh Eslami

Department of Literature and Foreign Languages, Faculty of Theology and Foreign Languages, University of Shahid Madani Azarbayjan, Tabriz, Iran; dr.r.eslami1986@gmail.com

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Abstract

Burnout in teachers is a serious condition that arises from prolonged work-related stress, leading to emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and a sense of detachment from students, all of which can significantly impair their mental, physical, and emotional well-being. This study examined why English teachers in Iran feel burned out in both public and private schools, comparing the two settings. Purposive sampling resulted in 10 teachers participating in the study, with 5 men and 5 women from both public and private schools. Their age ranged from 22 to 45. Data were gathered through interviews. The interview questions were developed by the researcher and were evaluated based on expert views. They were based on three parts of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (1980): emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Thematic analysis with MAXQDA software was used to analyze the interview responses of teachers in order to identify related factors that lead to burnout. The findings showed clear main themes based on the type of school. For private school teachers, financial problems and job uncertainty were the biggest issues, indicating that these topics are very important. On the other hand, public school teachers mainly reported feeling burned out because of a lack of recognition for their work. There were suggested differences in reports of tiredness, feeling emotionally distant, and being worn out, highlighting different situations. The findings of the study may help teachers, school leaders, parents, and students. It suggests that making changes in schools, such as adjusting teaching methods and paying attention to teachers' needs, could reduce the negative effects of burnout. By addressing financial insecurity and job stability in private schools, as well as enhancing recognition and appreciation for teachers' efforts in public schools, could significantly improve teacher well-being, foster a more supportive educational environment, and ultimately enhance student learning outcomes.

Keywords: emotional exhaustion, mental disengagement, physical fatigue, private and public schools, teacher burnout

1. Introduction

In EFL classrooms around the world, teachers play a key role in helping students learn. They create interesting learning spaces using various methods that focus on each student's needs and cultural

backgrounds (Alinejad et al., 2021). However, increasing work demands—like large workloads, constant pressure from paperwork, and the emotional effort of handling different types of students—often result in burnout. This serious condition is clearly explained by Maslach's three-part model. It includes feeling very tired and emotionally drained (emotional exhaustion), becoming distant or unfeeling towards students and coworkers (depersonalization), and feeling less capable and successful at work (reduced personal accomplishment) (Edú-Valsania et al., 2020; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 2001; Smith & Thompson, 2025). Burnout affects teachers in many ways. It hurts their mental health, lowers the quality of teaching, makes students less interested, and prevents language learning from being effective. Recent studies have shown this (Preechawong, 2023; Rezai, 2024).

This situation is especially clear among Iranian English teachers, who face a mix of special social, cultural, economic, and school-related challenges. These challenges include a constant lack of resources, changing government policies, and cultural beliefs that teachers should be strong and resilient (Askarpour et al. 2024). Recent studies show that many teachers are feeling very burned out, with a lot of them experiencing deep emotional tiredness after only a few years on the job. Many are also thinking about leaving teaching altogether (Ahmadi & Rezaei, 2025; Haseli Songhori et al., 2018). There is an important missing piece in the research: we don't know how the differences between public and private schools affect the three types of burnout described by Maslach. Public schools in Iran teach more than 80% of students and have strict national teaching plans. Classrooms are often too crowded, with about 30 to 40 students in each. There is also a lot of red tape and rules, which limits teachers' freedom to teach. This situation causes a lot of stress and can lead to teachers feeling tired and disconnected from their work (Ghoreishi, 2021; Askarpour et al. 2024). On the other hand, private schools focus on making money because of competition. They do this through heavy advertising, temporary job contracts, and strict evaluations based on performance. These practices create job insecurity and emotional stress, which can lead to feelings of less personal achievement (Ghazanfari & Faraji, 2025; Razmjoo et al. 2024). Iran has two different types of schools, which makes the problems worse. Public schools don't get enough money and have too many students, while private schools are often focused on making money. This situation leads to a shortage of English teachers in the country. Using the same solutions for everyone doesn't work well.

This study improved the understanding of burnout in teaching English as a foreign language by applying Maslach's three-part model to less-researched differences in schools in non-Western and politically complex areas. It directly addressed the urgent need for research that looks at burnout differently. Instead of seeing it as just an individual problem, it views burnout as something shaped by social issues and inequalities (Rezai et al., 2024). By comparing English teachers in public and private schools in Iran, the study showed how different challenges affect their emotional exhaustion, feelings of detachment, and sense of achievement. This helps to better understand teacher stress in different countries around the world.

Based on the above-mentioned issues, the present study was an attempt to consider the factors contributing to teacher burnout within Iran's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, employing a comparative lens between the public and private education sectors. It tried to identify and contrast the specific determinants of burnout prevalent in each school type. The study specifically sought to determine the key reasons behind burnout among public and private high school EFL teacher

2. Literature Review

Teacher burnout within the EFL profession is a critical psychological syndrome arising from chronic workplace stress, necessitating a strong theoretical foundation to qualitatively examine educators' lived experiences. Maslach's multidimensional model provides this essential framework, while also highlighting areas where its application in specific EFL contexts requires further exploration.

2.1. Theoretical Underpinnings: The MBI Model

Understanding the profound impact of burnout on EFL educators necessitates a theoretical model that captures its complex, lived reality. For this purpose, the present study adopts the conceptual framework established by Maslach and Jackson (1981), which defines burnout through three co-occurring dimensions: overwhelming emotional exhaustion, a detached, cynical stance towards one's work known as depersonalization, and a diminished sense of professional efficacy and accomplishment. Originally developed within human-service professions, this tripartite model, operationalized by the MBI, reframes burnout as a psychological process shaped by an individual's ongoing transactions with their work environment, rather than a personal failing.

While this framework has been productively applied in diverse educational settings, including EFL contexts in Western and East Asia (Zhao & Wang, 2024), its cross-cultural application invites careful scrutiny. In particular, the unique socio-professional landscapes of certain Middle Eastern educational systems, such as Iran's, present conditions that may intensify or alter the manifestation of burnout. Factors including sociopolitical dynamics and the specific emotional labor required in bilingual instruction suggest that standard diagnostic tools might not fully encapsulate local educators' experiences, potentially oversimplifying rich narratives into decontextualized metrics. Thus, while the MBI provides an indispensable foundation, it simultaneously highlights a critical need for research methodologies—specifically, qualitative inquiry—that can delve into the subjective and contextually embedded nature of burnout in these settings.

2.2. Empirical Investigations in the EFL Context

Empirical investigations using the MBI have yielded significant insights while also revealing methodological tendencies that shape the current knowledge base. A prominent theme in the literature is the institutional contrast between public and private educational sectors. Research within Iran consistently indicates that EFL teachers in public schools report higher levels of burnout, with scholars attributing this disparity to challenging conditions such as overcrowded classrooms, limited access to teaching resources, and perceived deficiencies in administrative support when compared to private institutions (Rezaei, 2024; Zohrabi & Paydar, 2025). Ghoreishi's (2021) research, which incorporated insights from teachers working across both sectors, further substantiates that systemic pressures in public schools, like excessive bureaucratic loads, act as significant amplifiers of individual stress. A key observation, however, is that these studies predominantly depend on quantitative MBI data. While such data effectively highlight comparative disparities, they offer less depth regarding how teachers themselves perceive, interpret, and navigate these stressors over the course of their careers.

A second, robust line of inquiry focuses on identifying correlates and antecedents of burnout. Studies have established that higher levels of professional autonomy (Nalbat, 2025) and intrinsic motivation (Roohani & Dayeri, 2019) are associated with lower burnout among EFL teachers in Iran

and Turkey. Research in China has modeled these relationships more intricately; Li (2025) found that a supportive school climate can lessen burnout, in part by fostering healthier emotion regulation strategies, whereas excessively high job demands directly increase burnout risk. Parallel work in Italy has utilized cluster analysis to categorize teachers into distinct burnout profiles based on interconnected factors like job satisfaction and self-efficacy (Buonomo et al., 2017). Although this body of work effectively charts the landscape of relevant variables, a common limitation is the aggregation of data from different school types, which may mask the distinct operational logics of resource-rich versus resource-constrained environments.

Furthermore, scholars have examined the role of individual resources in mitigating burnout. Karanfil (2019) discusses how the state of emotional exhaustion directly drains the internal reserves teachers need for creative and responsive pedagogy. In contrast, personal capacities like emotional intelligence and resilience are frequently studied as potential buffers. For example, Fauzan et al. (2024) emphasize how resilience and collegial support can protect against depersonalization. The connection, however, is not always straightforward; research with Iranian EFL teachers has shown a complex relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout (Mahmoodi & Ghaslani, 2013). A significant methodological shortcoming across this sub-field is the scarcity of longitudinal studies capable of tracing how these personal resources fluctuate or erode in response to the sustained, specific demands of EFL instruction.

2.3. Identified Gaps and the Present Study

Synthesizing the extant literature clarified the established prevalence of burnout and its links to both environmental and personal factors. It also brought several consequential gaps into focus, which the current study is designed to address. First, there remained a shortage of in-depth qualitative research dedicated to foregrounding the nuanced, first-person experiences of EFL teachers grappling with burnout, particularly within the Iranian EFL context. The prevailing reliance on quantitative measures, though valuable for establishing patterns, can marginalize the subjective meanings educators attach to feelings of exhaustion, detachment, and professional inadequacy (Ilyar, 2023). Second, while comparisons between public and private sectors are common, they have seldom been pursued through a dedicated, comparative qualitative design. Previous studies tend to contrast statistical aggregates, leaving a need for narrative-rich analysis that can illuminate the underlying processes and lived reasons behind the quantitative disparities identified by researchers like Zohrabi and Paydar (2025). Finally, the intricate interaction between external institutional pressures and teachers' internal psychological worlds—including the unique cognitive-emotional demands of mediating culture and managing foreign language instruction—warrants closer inspection through methods suited to capturing lived experience.

3. Research Questions

To bridge these gaps, this study was conceived as a qualitative, comparative investigation. It utilizes Maslach's model not as a rigid taxonomy but as a sensitizing framework to guide a thematic exploration of how burnout is subjectively experienced and understood by EFL teachers in Iranian public and private high schools. Consequently, this research is guided by the following questions. Therefore, the following research question was raised by the researcher:

What are the reasons behind public and private high school teachers' burnout?

4. Method

4.1. Research Design

This qualitative study was an attempt to explore why Iranian EFL teachers experience burnout. To meet the objectives of the study, purposive sampling was used and participants from public and private schools were selected to illuminate contextual contrasts in Iran's EFL teaching environment. The study was conducted in Tabriz, in May, 2024.

4.2. Participants

This study involved 10 Iranian EFL teachers, comprising both males and females. The participants were selected based on the purposive sampling. This sampling strategy was used so as to provide a focused yet diverse perspective on the research problem, based on the following specific criteria: (1) current employment as a full-time EFL teacher at the secondary level; (2) a minimum of three years. They were selected from public and private schools in Tabriz. Public schools were Amin school, Dekhoda school, Ferdosi school, Shahid Tond Gooyan school, and Danesh school. In addition, Private schools were Armaghan school, Hekmat school, Shahid Akrami school, and Shahed school. Five of the participants were male, and five of them were female teachers. The age range of the teachers was from 22 to 45. The participants came from both public and private schools in Tabriz. Half of the participants were from public high schools, while the other half were from private high schools. The sampling procedure utilized was purposive sampling. The participants were native speakers of the Azari and Persian languages. Purposive sampling was used to choose the participants in this study

4.3. Instruments

In order to meet the objectives of the study, the interviews were conducted with ten teachers. It involved preparing and asking twelve interview questions that were based on the ideas in the MBI (1980) and then were finalized by expert views. Two experts in the EFL context of Iran reviewed the questions and validated them so that these questions become reliable, valid, and credible. To ensure the instrument's validity and credibility, the interview protocol underwent a formal expert review. Two qualified TEFL specialists with deep experience in Iran's school system independently evaluated the draft. Their iterative feedback over two rounds led to some revisions—rephrasing, merging, and reordering questions—which strengthened the tool's construct validity and overall rigor. In order to encourage introspection and a better comprehension of EFL teachers' experiences, the questions were created to elicit in-depth information about the intricate factors that contribute to teacher motivation and burnout.

4.4. Procedure

This qualitative study was conducted in Tabriz, Iran, in May 2024. Participants comprised 10 experienced Iranian EFL teachers (5 males, 5 females) from 10 distinct schools—five public and five private—to ensure institutional variability and gender balance. Teachers' ages ranged from 22 to 45 years, with teaching experience spanning 2–20 years. All were native speakers of Azerbaijani Turkish (Azari) and Persian, and held BA or MA degrees in English Language Teaching or related fields.

Inclusion criteria emphasized teachers actively delivering EFL instruction at the secondary level, with at least two years' experience in their current school type, to capture contextualized burnout dynamics.

Non-probability purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants embodying maximum variation in institutional context (public vs. private), gender, and career stage, aligning with the study's focus on comparative burnout experiences. Initial contacts were established via the researcher's professional networks in Tabriz's EFL community, followed by snowball referrals to mitigate access biases. Recruitment ceased upon achieving thematic saturation, confirmed when no novel insights emerged across the final three interviews (Guest et al., 2006). This approach ensured information-rich cases, enhancing transferability to similar EFL settings.

Ethical approval was secured from the institutional review board. Before data collection, school administrators granted formal permission via written consent forms, verifying teacher participation voluntariness. Participants received comprehensive briefings on study aims, procedures, risks (e.g., emotional recall), and benefits (e.g., institutional insights), with assurances of anonymity (pseudonyms used), confidentiality (data stored securely on password-protected servers), and withdrawal rights without repercussions. All provided written informed consent; verbal reaffirmation occurred at interview outset. The researcher, a female EFL lecturer with 10 years' experience in Iranian contexts, reflexively noted her insider positionality, bracketing preconceptions through pre-study journaling to minimize bias.

Semi-structured interviews, ideal for exploring nuanced burnout experiences in EFL, were conducted by the researcher on May 23–24, 2024, in quiet school offices. An interview guide, piloted with two non-sample teachers for clarity and relevance, probed Maslach's tripartite dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment), institutional causes (e.g., workload, autonomy), coping strategies, and support perceptions. Interviews averaged 35 minutes (range: 28–40), audio-recorded via smartphone with participant permission. The researcher balanced group representation by alternating public/private and gender pairings, fostering equitable depth.

Data underwent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021), implemented in six recursive phases: (1) familiarization via repeated transcriptions; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining/naming themes; and (6) producing the report. Cross-case comparison between public/private groups yielded meaningful contrasts grounded in illustrative extracts.

4.5. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used along with MAXQDA software to identify and manage the repeated themes from the qualitative data. MAXQDA is a useful software that eases data arrangement, coding, short memorandum writing, and visualization by charts and word clouds. It was inductive thematic analysis, where themes emerged naturally from the data without preconceived codes, emphasizing researcher-driven pattern identification post-familiarization. The process began by importing all data files, followed by thorough familiarization. A coding scheme was developed to label key themes, and coded data were retrieved for pattern analysis. Reflective notes enriched interpretation. By using this inductive approach, themes are allowed to appear naturally from the data. It enables a detailed consideration and examination of their meanings and relationships for important

results. To do so, deep familiarization with the data was achieved through repeated, immersive readings of the interview transcripts. Initial line-by-line coding was conducted, which was then followed by an iterative process of theme development. To ensure analytical fairness and trustworthiness, a subset of transcripts was independently coded by a peer researcher. A collaborative debriefing session was subsequently held to align interpretations and refine the emerging thematic structure. Finally, a structured cross-case comparison between public and private school teachers was undertaken, with all resultant themes being grounded in and illustrated by key participant extracts.

5. Results

In order to consider burnout among public school teachers and private school teachers, the answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed in details making use of content analysis. It was revealed that burnout was a very serious problem among public school teachers due to several linked and connected themes. Table 1 presents these reasons alongside direct quotations from the participants.

Table 1

Prevalent Burnout Contributors among Public High School EFL Teachers (n = 5)

Maslach's Component	Extracted Theme	Frequency	Illustrative Quotation
Emotional Exhaustion	Heavy administrative workload	4	"The number of administrative tasks and meetings that sap my energy and enthusiasm is endless... it is causing me to become frustrated and exhausted."
	Managing student behavior and emotions	3	"Every day is a struggle to help my students remain motivated and engaged, and also guide them to be well-behaved."
	Poor working environment	3	"My day becomes needlessly stressful when I run out of simple things like paper and markers... difficult to stay focused when everything feels claustrophobic."
	Pressure from standardized assessments	2	"I find it difficult to enjoy teaching because of the tension that comes from the pressure on children to pass these assessments."
Depersonalization	Repetitive instructional methods	3	"Teaching identical material throughout multiple years becomes tiring. I'm drawn to fresh challenges and variety."
	Shift from teaching	3	"Maintaining a

	to controlling		positive atmosphere is very difficult in this condition."
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	Lack of motivation/feeling undervalued	4	"Maintaining a positive atmosphere is very difficult in this condition."
	Ineffective teaching outcomes	2	"Losing sight of true learning is discouraging."

Low motivation

Public school teachers reported the lack of motivation as a main issue, feeling undervalued, overwhelmed by heavy workloads, and unsupported by administrators. When their efforts seem ineffective, their motivation declines, leading to lower engagement with both students and the teaching profession.

Excerpt

The number of administrative tasks and meetings that sap my energy and enthusiasm is endless, and it is causing me to become frustrated and exhausted. I feel overwhelmed and incapable of energizing and engaging with my own students during what should be a passionate teaching experience, and it just becomes a tiring process.

Limited diversity and involvement in instructional methods

Whenever the methods of teaching are repetitive, and there are problems in engaging the learners, not only teachers but also students face a lack of motivation and stimulation. Moreover, insufficient resources and a severe curriculum hinder instructors' capability to use creative strategies that lead to tedious classroom conditions. It finally leads to dissatisfaction and insufficient learning outcomes.

Excerpt

Teaching identical material throughout multiple years becomes tiring. I'm drawn to fresh challenges and variety.

Handling student behavior and maintaining classroom order

There are usually problems and challenges with respect to controlling those students who have disruptive behavior. In some strict conditions, the focus of teaching attention shifts to managing these problems. In such cases, the emotional and physical energies of teachers become affected, and it leads to fatigue. If there is no appropriate support and correct strategies, the above-mentioned situation increases the teachers' stress and the risk of their burnout.

Excerpt

Every day is a struggle to help my students remain motivated and engaged, and also guide them to be well-behaved. Not having appropriate behavior may influence both the student and the entire class as well. Maintaining a positive atmosphere is very difficult in this condition.

Working environment and physical setting

A supportive and well-maintained work environment is crucial for teacher satisfaction and well-being. Poor conditions—like inadequate heating or cooling, noise, overcrowding, and lack of resources—cause frustration and stress, undermining effective teaching and increasing the risk of burnout.

Excerpt

My day becomes needlessly stressful when I run out of simple things like paper and markers. It's difficult to stay focused when everything feels claustrophobic and dilapidated, therefore I wish my school had more resources to create a nice learning atmosphere.

Managing emotions and building student rapport

The instructors usually try to increase their positive emotions in the classroom context so as to keep encouraging relations with their students through regulating their affections during the day. It may lead to tiredness and emotional exhaustion. The situation becomes more serious when the teacher faces those learners who have their own emotional and affective challenges. This effort can lead to compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion, especially when connecting with students facing emotional difficulties. In such cases, the teachers make use of different strategies such as deep acting (authentically feeling emotions) and surface acting (faking or suppressing emotions).

Excerpt

On some days, I feel like a therapist more than a teacher. I am tired of managing my own emotions. But when they bring their personal baggage into the classroom, it becomes too much.

The effect of standardized assessment

Teachers believe that standardized assessment pressures them to designate high scores over comprehensive education. This perspective limits curriculum diversity and novelty. It also presses teachers toward test preparation. The stress of being able to do all these tasks leads them to overwhelming conditions, reduced enthusiasm, and reduced teaching effectiveness.

Excerpt

Test results seem to be the only thing that counts. Losing sight of true learning is discouraging. I find it difficult to enjoy teaching because of the tension that comes from the pressure on children to pass these assessments.

There are various reasons for teacher burnout, including feelings of being undervalued, managing a wide range of activities simultaneously, tolerating tedious teaching environments, handling students with difficult personalities, and the inability to cope with inadequate physical resources. The emotional effort involved in supporting students can lead to feelings of exhaustion, while pressure from standardized testing shifts focus away from holistic education. All these factors combine to result in discouragement, exhaustion, and burnout. Table 2 lists the burnout reasons reported by private high school teachers.

Table 2*Prevalent Burnout Contributors among Private High School EFL Teachers (n = 5)*

Maslach's Component	Theme	Frequency	Illustrative Quotation
Emotional Exhaustion	Work-life imbalance	3	"Whether it's lesson planning or grading, I never seem to stop taking work home. I don't have much time to relax..."
	Parental expectations	2	"The ability to meet the parents' demands is... very overwhelming. Sometimes I feel being more important to them than their children's outcomes."
	Job insecurity	3	"Every year... not knowing whether my contract will be renewed... robs you of concentration when you are supposed to be teaching."
Depersonalization	Pressure to maintain image	3	"Teaching is prestigious, but it puts so much on me to keep it looking very good in performing well always."
	Lack of acknowledgment	2	"There's frequently the feeling that no one appreciates the endless hours one puts into writing their lessons..."
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	Financial stress	4	"While I do enjoy my job as a teacher, I can't make ends meet. It's hard to keep going..."
	Decline in enthusiasm	3	"Sometimes it makes me feel like I'm just going through the motions... tough to stay motivated when you feel like no one supports you."
	Inadequate tech training	2	"Although many of us have little training, we have to use the latest technologies... it can be severely taxing to keep pace."

Here's an elaborated account of the various interconnected elements contributing to burnout, specifically among private high school teachers, highlighting the distinctive challenges they face compared to their public school counterparts.

Financial environment and economic influences

Private schools' financial struggles often mean teachers get low pay, fewer benefits, and limited resources, which harms their well-being. This economic pressure makes teachers feel overworked and undervalued, leading to burnout and increased stress about their school's stability.

Excerpt

While I do enjoy my job as a teacher, I can't make ends meet. It's hard to keep going when I know that one paycheck away means bankruptcy.

Employment stability and assurance

Many private school teachers work on unstable yearly contracts, causing anxiety and insecurity. This ongoing stress can lead to burnout, lower commitment, and reduced job performance.

Excerpt

Every year, I can ruminate longer, not knowing whether my contract will be renewed. It is an endless thought that you may have to lose your job any time, which robs you of concentration when you are supposed to be teaching, knowing that you are on replacement orders should a school get in some financial jam.

Societal regard and professional self-concept

Many teachers value working at elite schools for the social prestige, but the pressure to maintain a flawless image can be overwhelming. Constantly needing to prove their worth leads to stress and identity-related burnout, harming their well-being.

Excerpt

Teaching is a very prestigious thing to do, but it also puts so much on me to keep it looking very good in performing well always.

Decline in enthusiasm and drive

Teachers often feel undervalued and disconnected from school policies, with little administrative support or recognition. This erodes their motivation and commitment, which can spiral into burnout over time.

Excerpt

Sometimes it makes me feel like I'm just going through the motions, and it is hard to rouse enthusiasm for the teaching. Unfortunately, it's tough to stay motivated when you feel like no one supports you, especially if your administration doesn't support you properly.

Imbalance between work duties and personal life

Private school teachers often work long hours, staying late to prepare lessons or attend meetings, which disrupts their work-life balance. This ongoing overload leads to burnout, fatigue, and less time for self-care.

Excerpt

Whether it's lesson planning or grading, I never seem to stop taking work home. I don't have much time to relax and appreciate other facets of life, while school takes up all of my time.

Parental engagement and pressure from expectations

Those teachers who teach at private schools usually encounter a great amount of pressure from the parents due to their high expectations. They have a lot of responsibilities. Not only should they control their duties with respect to the parents' expectations, but they also should be very cautious and professional in their career that leads to heavy, exhausting, and affective problems.

Excerpt

The ability to meet the parents' demands is very encouraging and at the same time very overwhelming. Sometimes I have the feeling of being more important to them than their children's actual outcomes.

Availability of digital tools and teaching materials

Those teachers who work at private schools usually have resource and technological-related problems. They are asked to utilize high technologies, whereas maybe they are not trained enough in this regard. It leads to frustration and stress among them. The situation becomes worse when they cannot complete the related duties correctly.

Excerpt

Although many of us have little training, we have to use the latest technologies in our classrooms. I already feel overwhelmed; it can be severely taxing to keep pace with such regular demands of change.

Acknowledgment and valuing of teacher contributions

One very important factor that affects teachers' motivation is getting respect from others; however, most teachers in private schools do not receive this positive feedback and appreciation from other stakeholders. In case there is not a lot of positive support and appreciation after spending a lot of time and effort, the rate of burnout among teachers increase. There's frequently the feeling that no one appreciates the endless hours one puts into writing their lessons; a little appreciation goes a long way.

As stated earlier, money-related support can be considered as a very influential factor in teacher burnout. Along with financial issues, in private school, the heavy pressure from parents adds to the strictness of the situation. On the other hand, job insecurity can be another very crucial element in this regard. Public school teachers face burnout mainly from feeling unappreciated and overwhelmed by administrative tasks, compounded by difficult classroom management and student behavior, all of which heighten stress and fatigue.

Overcrowded classrooms and the lack of supplies add stress, while the emotional effort teachers put into caring for students can cause compassion fatigue.

When there are different pressures such as standard evaluations, job security, having high demands and expectations in private schools, the long work time, and pressure from parents, the motivation of teachers decreases heavily, and it would be very difficult to keep the situation balanced. These challenges can leave teachers feeling frustrated, overwhelmed, and disconnected from their passion for teaching.

Even though in private schools, some technological equipment and also better resources are more available, it doesn't have a noticeable effect on the teachers' affectionate and professional problems. As mentioned previously, when there is an overwhelming pressure to use advanced

technological tools in case there isn't sufficient training, and also when the teachers are undervalued, their motivation and eagerness to achieve the best educational outcomes noticeably disappear. All these conditions, along with economic challenges, lead to burnout. Private school teachers often face a resource and technology gap compared to public schools.

6. Discussions

This qualitative study explored context-specific contributors to burnout among Iranian EFL teachers in Tabriz high schools, framing experiences through Maslach's tripartite model (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment). Contrary to expectations of uniform burnout drivers across institutional contexts, findings reveal distinct stressor profiles despite shared manifestations of fatigue: public school teachers described structural overload (e.g., rigid curricula, overcrowded classrooms, administrative burdens), while private school teachers highlighted market-driven precarity (e.g., financial pressures, short-term contracts, parental expectations). Both groups reported diminished motivation and emotional depletion, yet public teachers articulated more pervasive exhaustion, aligning with Zohrabi and Paydar's (2025) quantitative findings from 60 Tabriz EFL teachers, where public school MBI scores significantly exceeded private counterparts.

Public school teachers' burnout centered on systemic constraints eroding pedagogical autonomy and amplifying emotional exhaustion—rigid national curricula limited instructional diversity, overcrowded classes fueled behavioral management stress, and bureaucratic paperwork fostered depersonalization. These align with Rezaei (2024), who linked large classes and resource scarcity to heightened exhaustion/depersonalization in Iranian public EFL contexts, and Ghoreishi (2021), documenting workload disparities as universal predictors moderated by institutional rigidity.

Private school teachers, conversely, faced precarious professional ecologies: financial insecurity and annual contracts bred chronic anxiety, compounded by parental performance demands and marketing duties that disrupted work-life balance. Paradoxically, these "more acute" stressors coexisted with relatively lower burnout, potentially explained by greater perceived accomplishment from smaller classes, technological access (despite complaints), and selective student cohorts that fostered efficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). This nuance extends Edú-Valsania et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis, which found that job insecurity predicts exhaustion only when coupled with low autonomy/control, conditions more acute in public settings.

The counterintuitive finding—private teachers reporting more serious existential threats (job loss, income volatility) yet less burnout illuminates burnout's transactional nature (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Public teachers' burnout may reflect chronic, inescapable overload with minimal coping agency, whereas private teachers exercise selective agency (e.g., contract negotiation, parental management) and derive accomplishment from performance incentives. Roohani and Dayeri (2019) corroborate this: extrinsic pressures exacerbate burnout primarily among low-intrinsic-motivation teachers, a buffer potentially stronger in private contexts offering professional development unavailable publicly. Buonomo et al. (2017) further contextualize this divergence, showing institutional resources moderate stressor impact—private schools' relative material advantages may mitigate precarity's emotional toll.

Findings advocate institutionally-tailored interventions over generic programs. Public schools require structural reforms, workload caps, curricular flexibility, and classroom aides to restore

autonomy and reduce exhaustion. Private schools need stability mechanisms, multi-year contracts, mental health stipends to buffer insecurity without compromising accomplishment. Both benefit from motivation-enhancing training (Zohrabi & Paydar, 2025), integrating coping skills, self-efficacy building, and Maslach-aligned monitoring. By linking context-specific burnout to EFL pedagogy, this study underscores teacher well-being as a proximal determinant of instructional quality and retention in resource-constrained settings (Askarpour, 2025).

Overall, the results of the study may suggest that the road to burnout varies by whether a teacher works in a public or private school, with the core feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment experienced in distinct ways. The public school teachers who participated in the study described a work life filled with systemic hurdles. Their stories painted a picture of being swamped by paperwork, managing very large classes, and having to follow a set curriculum without much room for their own ideas. This relentless pressure seems to be a direct line to emotional exhaustion. When someone feels they lack control and is constantly overrun, they experience burnout. Furthermore, the need to focus on controlling student behavior in crowded rooms, rather than on creative teaching, can make the job feel impersonal. This could indicate a slide into depersonalization, where teachers might put up an emotional wall to protect themselves. This connection supports what other researchers have noted in similar settings.

The picture from private school teachers was more layered. They certainly shared heavy stresses that led to emotional exhaustion, like the constant worry over yearly contracts and the high pressure from parents. Yet, their stories also contained glimpses of professional satisfaction—working with smaller groups of students, for instance, or seeing quicker results from their efforts. These factors could support their sense of personal accomplishment. This creates an interesting dynamic: the job’s intense pressures exist alongside rewards that help maintain a teacher’s feeling of being effective. It shows how the three parts of burnout don’t always rise and fall together; a sense of achievement can act as a buffer, even when stress is high. This idea fits with the understanding that stress is a transaction between a person and their environment.

Putting these two perspectives side by side, a key difference emerges. For the public school teachers in our study, the main issue seemed to be an overwhelming environment with little support, leading strongly to exhaustion and detachment. For the private school teachers, the environment might reflect a trade-off: high stress from job insecurity, but more rewarding conditions for actual teaching, which helps preserve their sense of accomplishment.

7. Conclusion and Implications

This small-scale investigation sheds light on the unique burnout patterns experienced by a select group of English teachers in Tabriz high schools. It reveals how the specific culture and conditions of their workplaces—whether public or private—impact the classic three-part model of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Although teachers in both settings spoke of feeling drained and disengaged, our conversations hint that the main reasons behind these feelings are not the same. Teachers in public schools talked most about being overwhelmed by systemic pressures and a lack of freedom. On the other hand, private school teachers emphasized the anxiety that comes with job insecurity, though they also noted some positive aspects of their work that seemed to keep their sense of achievement afloat. This tells us that burnout is not a

one-way street; it's a complex reaction between a teacher and their specific environment, which means a single, standard solution, is unlikely to work for everyone.

Because this study is a preliminary look based on in-depth conversations rather than widespread surveys, its takeaways are presented with care. The focus was on practical steps that school leaders can take right now in their own buildings and on questions that should guide the next wave of research. The goal here was not to propose sweeping national reforms, but to offer grounded insights that can make a difference on the ground and point researchers toward fruitful future studies.

These insights, though preliminary, point toward the need for solutions that fit the specific reality of each school type. In public schools, where emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are central, changes need to address the root causes: lightening the administrative load, providing support in classrooms, and trusting teachers with more professional freedom. In private schools, the focus should be on creating stability—through longer contracts and better support systems—to safeguard the personal accomplishment that their teachers clearly value. In both cases, training that helps teachers build resilience and a stronger sense of their own efficacy would be beneficial. To wrap up, this small exploratory study used Maslach's model to show how the specific challenges of Iran's public and private schools may shape very different experiences of burnout for English teachers. It tells us that where a teacher works significantly influences whether they struggle most with sheer exhaustion, with cynicism, or with feeling ineffective. While we need more extensive research to confirm these patterns, this work makes a compelling case that supporting our teachers is not a one-size-fits-all task. It is a nuanced, critical investment in the heart of language education itself.

This study faced the limitation of the number of the participants with only 10 English teachers from high schools in Tabriz. While their experiences were rich and revealing, 10 people are not enough to speak for every teacher in Iran. This work is a first look—an exploratory step—meant to uncover themes and possible patterns that deserve a closer, broader look in the future with more participants from different places.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have conducted the study, collected data, analyzed and interpreted the data, and written up the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

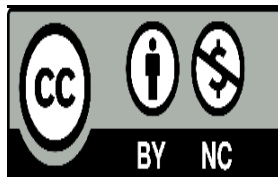
1. What are the main factors that diminish your motivation to teach, such as experiencing a lack of appreciation or feeling overwhelmed by your workload?
2. In what ways do teaching repetitive lessons and having access to limited instructional materials influence your enthusiasm and active engagement in the classroom?
3. Can you describe how difficulties with classroom management affect your level of stress and your overall sense of well-being?
4. How do the physical condition of your classroom and the availability of teaching resources shape your capacity to deliver effective instruction?
5. In what ways do your emotional relationships with students, as well as assisting them with personal issues, affect your energy levels and emotional health?
6. What impact do standardized assessments and the associated pressure have on your instructional practices and your feelings about your teaching profession?
7. Have administrative responsibilities or insufficient institutional support played a role in your experience of burnout? If so, in what ways?
8. How do expectations from parents, students, and school administrators influence your stress and motivation as a teacher?
9. What coping strategies or approaches do you utilize when you feel overwhelmed or fatigued by your work?
10. Do you observe a connection between your physical or emotional health and the demands placed upon you by your teaching position?
11. Would receiving consistent and timely compensation and benefits help alleviate your stress or reduce your risk of burnout? Please explain your reasoning.
12. In your view, how does experiencing burnout influence your sense of professional identity and your passion for education?

Appendix 2: Interview Questions Categorized by Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) Dimensions**Table 3**

Mapping of Semi-Structured Interview Questions to the Three Core Dimensions of Maslach's Burnout Model

Maslach Dimension (Core Construct)	Interview Question Number	Interview Question (Abbreviated)
Emotional Exhaustion (Feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted)	1	Factors diminishing motivation (e.g., lack of appreciation, feeling overwhelmed).
	3	How classroom management difficulties affect stress and well-being.
	5	How emotional relationships with and support for students affect energy/health.
	7	Role of administrative responsibilities or insufficient support in burnout.
	8	Influence of expectations from parents, students, administrators on stress.
	10	Connection between physical/emotional health and job demands.
Depersonalization (Development of a cynical, detached attitude toward one's work/recipients)	11	Whether consistent compensation/benefits would alleviate stress.
	4	How physical classroom conditions and resource

		availability shape instruction.
	6	Impact of standardized assessments and pressure on instructional practices.
Reduced Personal Accomplishment (Feelings of incompetence and lack of achievement in one's work)	1	Factors diminishing motivation (e.g., lack of appreciation).
	9	Coping strategies are used when feeling overwhelmed or fatigued.
	12	How burnout influences professional identity and passion for education.



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