



Interplay between Professional Identity and Emotional Quotient of Iranian Female EFL University Teachers in the Habitual Burnout Phase

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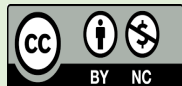
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Abstract

Following an explanatory sequential design, this study explored the possible association between the Professional Identity (PI) of Iranian female EFL university teachers in the Habitual Burnout (HB) phase and their Emotional Quotient (EQ). In the quantitative phase, a Structural Equation Model (SEM) was developed to investigate the promising relationships. In the subsequent qualitative phase, their comments regarding the associations determined were analyzed to evaluate the model and seek remedies to help female EFL university teachers in the HB phase. To collect the required data from 67 conveniently selected Iranian female EFL university teachers in the HB phase, the Burnout Assessment Tool, Emotional Intelligence Scale, and PI Scale for Iranian English Teachers were employed. The results showed a significant causal relationship between the PI and EQ of the participants, and the findings of the interviews confirmed the causal association, providing some suggestions for female EFL university teachers to help them handle their severe burnout levels. The findings may provide implications for university EFL teachers, curriculum designers of TEFL education, and educational psychologists.

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Introduction

Professional Identity (PI) is a complicated concept that includes a combination of an individual's skills, values, attitudes, and knowledge regarding a specific profession (Linder, 2018). According to Wang (2021), among different professions, EFL teachers face too many issues while forming their PI mainly because of the dynamic, interdisciplinary, and complex multi-layered aspects of teaching a foreign non-native language that influence their teaching commitment and job satisfaction (Ostad et al., 2019); professional autonomy (Dilek & Atlas, 2022); goal orientation (Kalali Sani et al., 2021); self-esteem (Motallebzadeh & Kazemi, 2018), and most importantly their teaching performances (Fallah et al., 2021; Zohrabi & Khalili, 2024).

One of the most significant constraints in developing an appropriate PI among EFL teachers is the burnout level (Gracia et al., 2022). Burnout is a state of emotional or physical exhaustion, primarily reflected through low performance in accomplishments and loss of professional identity at certain levels (Jennings, 2020). It should be mentioned that the difference between burnout and stress is that burnout is a consequence of prolonged occupational stress. According to Rankin (2016), there are five main stages of burnout, including the honeymoon phase (the lowest level of burnout), onset of stress phase, chronic stress phase, burnout phase, and habitual burnout phase (the highest level of burn out).

In the honeymoon phase, the individual predicts a confrontation to stress as s/he undertakes a new job. It is believed that in this stage if the individual selects the appropriate coping strategy, s/he may not enter the next stage. In the second stage, the onset of stress, the individual faces common symptoms of stress, primarily mental or emotional ones such as anxiety and forgetfulness rather than the physical signs like fatigue. In the next stage, the chronic stress phase, the individual is exposed to consistent stress that influences his or her performance, like not completing the tasks on time and avoiding being engaged in work-related conversations and issues. In the burnout phase-the occupational function of the individual is not normal, and he or she is almost like a “work zombie” that observe his or her tasks instead of taking care of them. Extreme self-doubt, chronic headaches, and gastrointestinal problems are the most significant symptoms of this phase, noticeable by family members or friends.

In the last stage, the Habitual Burnout (HB) phase, burnout becomes a component of the individual's everyday life, leading to severe depression, anxiety, stress, and low Emotional Quotient (EQ). According to Malesic (2022), females have a significantly higher chance in comparison to males to arrive at the habitual burnout phase due to their particular gender-based mental and emotional differences. He has mentioned that while males are able to use various coping strategies to avoid reaching the last stage of burnout, females fail to do so. As for EQ, Oliveira et al. (2021) stated that emotional interventions play a critical role in the burnout levels of female teachers. Moreover, in a comprehensive systematic review, Puertas Molero et al. (2019) argued that there is an in-depth association between teachers' PI and their EQ, particularly among female teachers, that may provide beneficial insights into reducing the burnout levels among such teachers.

Apart from what discussed so far, Leonova et al. (2021) proved that making the female teachers aware of their EQ levels and how to enhance them or to use the right coping strategies affects their professional identity, which not only helps them to avoid reaching the last stage of the burnout but also significantly increases their teaching performance. Furthermore, Lawrence and Nagashima (2020) determined that the female teachers, as a disregarded community in terms of investigating their professional identity, especially in high levels of education, face severe challenges and problems in developing their professional identity concerning their emotional states and burnout levels.

In a similar vein, within the EFL context of Iran, Rezai et al. (2022) introduced Iranian female EFL teachers as an ignored group in terms of investigating their job satisfaction and burnout levels at university levels which may potentially result in an appropriate way of developing their PI. Consequently, the present study attempted to investigate the possible association between EQ and PI of the Iranian female EFL university teachers in the HB phase to help these teachers hopefully. From the theoretical aspects, this study is based on teaching performance, EQ theory (Stein & Book, 2011), and PI theory (Davey, 2013), in which the teaching performance of the instructors has a direct association with their EQ levels and better conceptualization and understanding of the EQ might help teachers develop their professional identity, especially the female ones without facing serious problems. Thus, the present study is informed by the aforementioned theories which set the rationale behind its first objective. The second purpose of this study is to contribute to the related literature by shedding light on how understanding the EQ levels helps teachers develop an appropriate professional identity, particularly those who suffer from critical physical and mental problems in the HB phase. Despite traditional theories, this study is supported by the results of some recently conducted studies (i.e., Keskin & Zaimoglu, 2021; Khoshnoodfar & Pahlavani, 2018; Zhao et al., 2020) in the literature, which has contributed to helping the EFL teachers who suffer from different levels of burnout by strengthening their PI.

The related studies in the EFL contexts including Iran will be reviewed across three themes in this part. The first theme includes studies investigating the possible relationships among EFL teachers' PI, EQ, and burnout. The second theme consisted of the studies that examined the potential associations between PI and EQ of female EFL teachers. Finally, the third group refers to the studies that provide insights into how familiarity with EQ possibly benefits the process of developing professional identity among EFL teachers. Considering the first theme, Diasti (2021) investigated the PI of the EFL teachers with their stress factors as a component of occupational burnout. Following a qualitative study, he found that the male and female Indonesian EFL teachers who experienced different stress factors showed critical burnout, making them face significant issues in developing their PI, such as low self-esteem. In a similar study in the Chinese EFL context, Zhao et al. (2020) examined the potential association between the PI of the male and female EFL teachers and their burnout levels. They reported that there was a negative relationship between PI and burnout of the Chinese EFL teachers. The results of these studies make it clear that by helping the EFL teachers decrease their burnout level, they will develop their PI properly and in a less-challenged way. Regarding the EQ and PI of EFL teachers, Karakas (2016) found that Turkish ELT teachers' EQ levels significantly impacted their PI construction. It was revealed that this positive association was

significantly higher among female EFL teachers. Likewise, Alharbi and Ahmad (2020) found a direct relationship between Arab female EFL teachers' emotions and professional identity. Their study measured the participants' emotions based on their EQ. In addition, while there was an association between these two variables among male participants, it was not significant. Besides the significant association between PI and EQ in the reviewed studies, Bagheri Nevisi and Alasadi (2022) recently examined the EQ of Iraqi EFL teachers as the predictor of their burnout level. The findings revealed that their EQ and levels of burnout were significantly correlated. Furthermore, their gender and burnout levels had a significant association as the female participants were exposed to higher levels of burnout.

With the second theme in focus, concerning the potential interplay between the female EFL teachers' EQ and their PI, Lee et al. (2013) studied the possible relationship between PI and burnout-related emotions of Chinese EFL teachers. The most potent contributing factor to these emotions significantly affecting PI of the female EFL teachers was helplessness. In a similar study, Kang (2022) investigated Korean EFL teachers' EQ and emotional labor and their possible effects on teaching performance, including identity, work engagement, and motivation. In the qualitative phase of this study, he found that different EFL teachers, particularly the females with different levels of EQ, had different types of teaching professional identities. While these studies confirmed the existence of a relationship between EQ levels and PI of female EFL teachers, Ahmad (2019) rejected the significant difference between male and female teachers regarding the potential differences between these variables.

The third group of studies in the literature includes the one that provided insights into how familiarity with EQ possibly helps the process of developing professional identity among EFL teachers. Dolev and Leshem (2016) reported that regulating emotions and appropriately using them as two components of EQ significantly influenced the PI of the target EFL teachers. They mentioned that regulating negative emotions in the academic context and how to show positive emotions appropriately reflected EFL teachers' PI differently in the eyes of their colleagues. Completing the outcomes of the previous study, Nagar (2017) mentioned that other emotional and self-emotional appraisal as the critical parts of a female teacher's EQ impact their process of developing PI. The results shed light on the fact that evaluating the emotions before expressing them helps the teachers, particularly the female ones, develop their PI appropriately and to an acceptable degree. In a review study, Olson et al. (2019) explored the role of gender in emotion management and appraisal among different teachers in different academic grades. They found that not only do the levels of these two variables as the EQ components affect the performance, identity, and roles of teachers in their classes, but also this association was found to be significant among female teachers.

Various recently-conducted systematic reviews on EFL teachers PI (Labfaf et al., 2019), their EQ (Puertas Molero et al., 2019), and on their burnout (Mohammadi & Amiri, 2022), all showed the lack of studies on a specific gender-differentiated variable such as EQ of the female EFL university teachers and their PI to possibly help them by reducing burn out, a widespread and complex annoying experience, which occurs among female teachers more than the male ones. Despite the gap in the literature in terms of developing a model of PI and EQ among female EFL university teachers to decrease their teaching burnout potentially, Djahimo (2021)

stated that female EFL teachers, in comparison to male ones, experience burnout in a higher and significant way, especially in contexts with developing or less-developed systems of modern education which has its roots in the conceptualizations of their gender-specific emotions. Accordingly, this study attempted to explore the possible association between PI and EQ of the female EFL university teachers in the HB phase. Besides, it studied the comments of the female EFL teachers to determine the reasons behind the possible association between these variables. The research questions addressed in the present study were as below:

1. Is there any potential interplay between professional identity and emotional quotient of Iranian female EFL university teachers in the habitual burnout phase?
2. What are the potential reasons behind the possible association between the professional identity and emotional quotient among the targeted participants?

Method

Research Design

Due to its nature and the objectives, this study was based on an explanatory sequential design with two phases: a quantitative phase in which the questionnaire results were investigated, followed by a qualitative phase to explore the reasons behind the results of the quantitative phase. In the quantitative phase, three different questionnaires were administered; in the qualitative phase, a series of structured interviews were utilized. This study was conducted in Isfahan, Iran, the researchers' hometown, from January to June 2024.

Participants

In the first step of choosing the participants, 149 Iranian female EFL teachers were selected from different Islamic Azad University (IAU) branches in Isfahan, Iran, using the convenience sampling procedure. Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) (Schaufeli et al., 2020) was used to select the female EFL teachers who were in the HB phase as the last stage of burnout. In the second step, considering the dropout rate, 67 Iranian female EFL university teachers in the HB phase were identified. It should be noted that various female EFL teachers of different ages (27-44), academic degrees, and backgrounds were selected to avoid sample selection bias. Besides, the attrition bias was checked by categorizing the dropped-out participants into different groups to check their excuses for leaving the study, which were classified into voluntary and involuntary groups. The excuses in the involuntary group were mostly centered around personal issues that were kept confidential, and most of the excuses expressed in the voluntary group were referred to as having time budget problems in filling out the questionnaires. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants of the study:

Table 1. *Demographic Background of the Participants*

Number of Participants	76 University EFL Teachers
Gender	Females Only
Native Language	Persian
Degree	PhD Holders and PhD Candidates in TEFL
Teaching Experience	At least 3 years
Age Range	27-44
Institutes	Different Branches of IAU in Isfahan Province

Instruments

The first instrument used in this study was the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT), developed and validated by Schaufeli et al. (2020) to measure Iranian female university EFL teachers' levels of burnout. The BAT evaluates six critical core dimensions across 33 items (on a Likert-scale): mental distance (5 items), exhaustion (8 items), psychosomatic syndromes (5 items), psychological distress (5 items), and cognitive and emotional impairments (10 items). The response anchor ranges from never (1 point), rarely (2 points), sometimes (3 points), often (4 points), and always (5 points). The reliability index of the BAT was reported to be 0.91, which, according to the Cronbach's Alpha range, shows excellent reliability (Schaufeli et al., 2020). Most recently, in the Iranian EFL context, Safari (2022) measured the reliability of the BAT based on Cronbach's Alpha, which showed 0.88, very high reliability for a Likert-scale-based questionnaire.

The second instrument was Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), developed and validated by Wong and Law (2002), in which there are 16 items across four primary dimensions, including use of emotion (4 items), regulation of emotion (4 items), self-emotional appraisal (4 items), and other emotional appraisals (4 items). Its response anchor is consisted of strongly disagree (1 point), disagree (2 points), slightly disagree (3 points), neither agree nor disagree (4 points), slightly agree (5 points), agree (6 points), strongly agree (7 points). As it is one of the well-known questionnaires to measure EQ, its psychometric properties have been checked in various contexts. The Cronbach's alpha as the reliability index was reported as 0.93 in the Iranian EFL context (Taherkhani & Moradi, 2022), confirming its high reliability.

The other instrument required in the present study was a valid scale to measure the PI of the EFL university teachers. The Kao and Lin's (2015) Teacher Professional Identity (TPIS) Scale with 22 items across six major categories was supposed to be used for this purpose. However, as the PI is a critical concept that differs from one teaching context to another, the researchers attempted to develop a PI Scale for Iranian EFL Teachers (PISIET) based on the TPIS. In a time-consuming effort, PISIET was developed based on a pilot study conducted for 121 Iranian EFL teachers in the virtual context of Google Forms. After Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and based on Kaiser-Varimax Rotation (KVR) method, three dominant themes with 12 items were extracted, and seemed to match the Iranian EFL context regarding measuring Iranian EFL teachers' PI level. A unit-polar 5-point Likert-

scale-based response anchor that included slightly agree (1 point), somehow agree (2 points), mostly agree (3 points), strongly agree (4 points), and completely agree (5 points) was selected for the PISIET.

The fourth instrument was a structured interview with two questions the interviewers asked after describing to them the central components of the EQ and PI in the developed model. The two questions were as follow:

1. What is your opinion about the association between PI and EQ regarding their components?
2. How does this association probably help you, as a female EFL university teacher, manage their burnout?

The validity of the questions was checked by asking the feedback of three experts in educational psychology and three more holding a Ph.D. in TEFL. The duration of each interview was about 10-15 minutes.

Data Collection Procedure

In the first step of collecting the required data, the necessary permissions were obtained from the heads of English departments in the IAU branches. Based on convenience sampling, 149 Iranian female EFL university teachers participated in the second step. In the next step, the BAT was administered to all the participants to recognize the female EFL teachers in the HB phase regarding their burnout levels. It should be noted that the departments' heads were asked about the most appropriate times for the administration of the BAT. Sixty-seven Iranian female EFL university teachers (27-44 years old) in the HB phase were identified. The duration of filling out each questionnaire was about 25 minutes. In the third step, the WLEIS and the PISIET were administered to the participants in-person to gather information about their professional identity and EQ levels. The estimated time to answer all the items in both questionnaires was about 20-30 minutes. In the last step, 12 randomly chosen participants were asked to provide suggestions about how familiarity with EQ levels could benefit their PI based on a series of structured interviews conducted in their free time at their universities.

Data Analysis Procedure

Prior to the primary analysis of the research data, the PISIET questionnaire was developed by the researchers. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were utilized to develop the PISIET. The reliability of the PISIET was checked based on Cronbach's alpha value. Face validity was established according to certain qualities, including style, clarity, and reliability of the items, and the construct validity was examined by factor analysis. Concerning Research Question One, first, the necessary assumptions of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), including multivariate normality, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and missing cases were checked. Then the EFA was used based on component analysis and Kaiser-varimax rotation. Besides, CFA was utilized to check the fitness of the developed SEM model. Regarding Research Question Two, the thematic analysis was used to explore the participants' suggestions. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 26 was used to analyze the data. In processing the collected data, the researchers followed the guidelines suggested by Ary et al. (2019, Ch. 16).

Results

According to the two-phase design of the study, first the results of the quantitative analyses in Phase One are reported followed by those of the qualitative analyses in Phase Two. In the first step of data analysis and to develop PISIET, to evaluate the appropriate number of constructs in the PISIET, EFA was conducted according to the Varimax method with Kaiser normalization. The results revealed a three-component solution as a perfect categorization for grouping the items. It should be mentioned that all of the reliability indexes for the items in the rotated component matrix were higher than 0.931 that confirming the appropriateness of the grouped items across three primary constructs of collaboration, value, and career progression.

In the second step, to answer Research Question One, according to the studies and scales in the literature, the researchers proposed a model for the causal associations between PI and EQ of the female EFL university teachers. Figures 1 and 2 illustrates the hypothesized and the developed models:

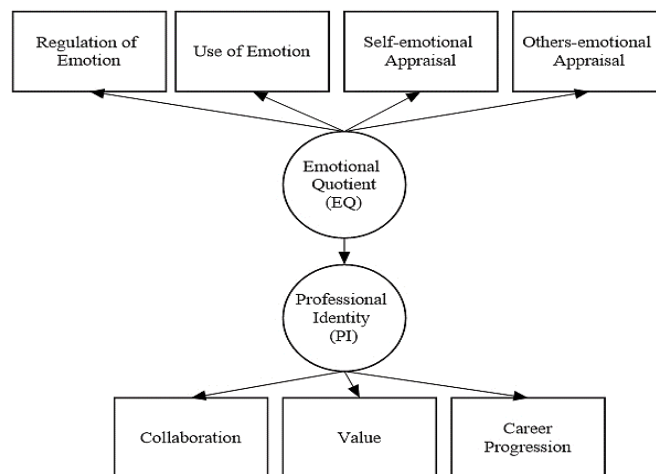


Figure 1. Hypothesized Model of PI and EQ for Female EFL University Teachers

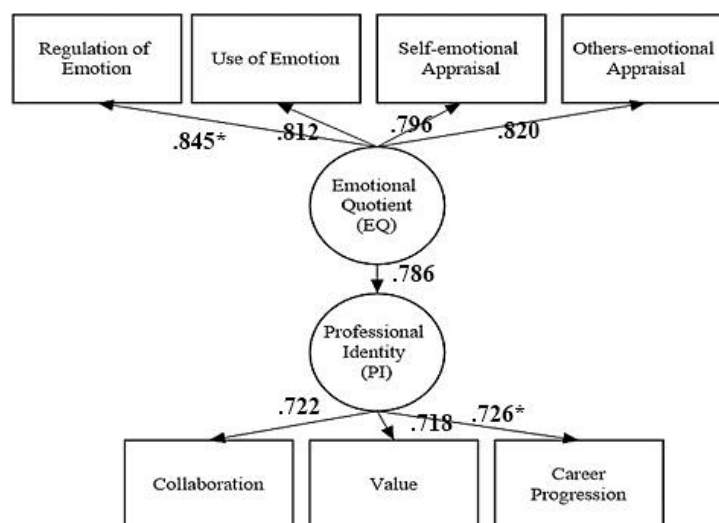


Figure 2. Developed Model of PI and EQ for Female EFL University Teachers

EFA was conducted for each sub-construct in the EQ, including regulation of emotion (EQ1), use of emotion (EQ2), self-emotional appraisal (EQ3), and others-emotional appraisal (EQ4). A four-factor solution was identified as an appropriate structure to measure the EQ of the participants. Table 1 summarizes the solution:

Table 2. Rotated Component Matrix for the EQ

Name	Components			
	1	2	3	4
EQ1-1	.975			
EQ1-2	.964			
EQ1-3	.922			
EQ1-4	.932			
EQ2-1		.993		
EQ2-2		.926		
EQ2-3		.914		
EQ2-4		.936		
EQ3-1			.941	
EQ3-2			.931	
EQ3-3			.901	
EQ3-4			.996	
EQ4-1				.926
EQ4-2				.987
EQ4-3				.967
EQ4-4				.924

Extraction method: principal component analysis 2. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization.

According to the results, all of the alpha coefficients were higher than 0.9, confirming the high internal reliability of the factors. The same analysis was performed for the sub-constructs of the PI that showed a three-factor solution as an appropriate one. As the results indicated, all the coefficients were above 0.8, confirming good internal reliability among factors. Table 2 summarizes the results:

Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix for the PI

Name	Components		
	1	2	3
PI1-1	.896		
PI1-2	.924		
PI1-3	.889		
PI2-1		.914	
PI2-2		.913	
PI2-3		.884	
PI3-1			.967
PI3-2			.893
PI3-3			.947

Extraction method: principal component analysis 2. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization.

In the third step, a CFA was performed to check the fitness of the model across absolute, incremental, and parsimonious fit indices. Absolute fit indices included the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Incremental fit indices consisted of Normed Fit Index (NFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) or Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI). Finally, parsimonious fit indices, including Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI), and Parsimony Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI), were calculated (Table 3). As the results showed all fit indices were in the recommended range; thus, supporting the model. In the fourth stage, the output of the SEM confirmed the significant causal association between PI and EQ. Table 3 depicts the results of the fitness of the model:

Table 4. *Fit Indices for Every Distinct Construct*

	Absolute		Incremental			Parsimonious	
	GFI	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	TLI	PNFI	PGFI
EQ	.987	0.41	.965	.988	.958	.648	.746
PI	.990	0.46	.971	.986	.969	.785	.749
Model	.973	0.42	.964	.993	.967	.743	.782

In the fourth step, to identify the potential reasons behind the discovered causal association between PI and EQ among the targeted participants, 12 randomly selected female EFL university teachers were selected to participate in a series of structured interviews. A thematic analysis was conducted to extract the participants' main ideas from their comments. For example, some participants believed that familiarity with the appropriate way of regulating emotions and how to express them had significant effects on their professional identity and could decrease their burnout levels. For instance, participant No. 8 stated that:

The way a teacher, especially a female one, shows her emotions definitely impacts her PI among her colleagues and students. Most of the time, I have witnessed some inappropriate expressions of emotions, particularly among my female peers, which not only, in my view, lowered the levels of their PI among their colleagues but also made a bad reputation in the eyes of their peers. In my opinion, the knowledge or intelligence of how to regulate emotion and properly show them help female EFL university teachers by enhancing their PI and reducing their burnout.

In another instance, a participant confirmed the ideas of participant No. 8 by highlighting being intelligent in managing and showing emotions. Participant No. 11 commented that:

It is crucial for university teachers, particularly the female ones in most Asian countries, with their unique culture-specific and decency-prioritized context, to behave and express their emotions professionally and competently. Apart from inequalities in the university environments against female teachers, helping the female teachers be familiar with how their EQ could benefit them to improve their PI and eliminate their critical burnout levels. I think there should be an EQ-related module or in-service course for teachers' education, especially for females.

In another example, a participant 's comments centered on helping her similar peers reduce their burnout by making them familiar with EQ and PI concepts and their association. Participant No. 2 said that:

As a female EFL teacher in the university who is facing a high level of burnout, I recommend the authority to help particularly female EFL teachers avoid reaching critical levels of burnout by considering adding a certain number of necessary credits to be passed by the university teachers making them aware of how higher EQ leads to well-established PI and significant reputation which in general help them fight with their burnout and employ appropriate strategies dealing with it. I believe having a well-established PI and fewer worries about employing practical strategies against burnout are worth the time and effort to learn how EQ could potentially help female university teachers.

In comparison to the previous comments, some participants emphasized evaluating one's emotions as a critical component of EQ that affects the PI among university teachers. For example, participant No. 9 mentioned that:

In my opinion, the best way to develop an acknowledged PI is to reflect on your emotion by evaluating them and making them better according to the academic context of the universities over time. These assessments should be based on setting-specific qualities which differ from one context to another. I mean, you should prioritize some qualities over others if you want to reach your favorite PI. Thus, I think the best way to enhance your EQ and reach your desired PI is to focus on your own emotions, how to manage them, how to show them, and assess them over some standard and related qualities.

In contrast to what was mentioned by the previous interviewee, another participant mentioned the role of assessing others' emotions, such as peers and colleagues, instead of evaluating your emotion to reach acceptable levels of EQ that leads to reaching the desired PI. For instance, participant No. 5 stated that:

When your job is teaching at the university level, you can grasp different amounts and types of experiences from your colleagues. Some of these experiences may be worthless, and some are so valuable that they help you become a better teacher. One of the most valuable experiences is assessing others' emotions and behavior regarding different naturally occurring scenarios at the university. It enhances your EQ and helps you build a different, excellent type of PI. I am not biased, but in my view, female university teachers are more exposed to experience some sort of burnout. So, improving EQ help them to develop acknowledged PI that benefits them in fighting their burnout.

While the previous participants had viewed the causal association between EQ and PI from the lens of components of the EQ, some of them addressed the prominent role of EQ as a single

component on different constituents of the PI and how developing a well-established PI could help them to be ready when facing burnout. As an example, participant No.1 described that:

I believe the levels of EQ positively correlate with the value and confidence of teachers, making them develop acknowledged and respected PIs. This issue particularly gains attention among female university teachers as they face many career inequalities. Besides, when you have confidence in your teaching performance, you may never face critical phases of burnout or end up in the rudimentary stages. In my view, university teachers, especially the female ones, need to be instructed about the possible associations between their EQ and PI to avoid getting stuck in the last phase of burnout for a long time like me. Furthermore, having a well-established PI is more significant in helping female university teachers implement the right strategies against their burnout than getting familiar with the EQ and how it develops.

Apart from the value and career progression as the main component of the PI, which the previous participant mentioned, some interviewees highlighted the effects of EQ on collaboration with others as a primary sub-construct of the PI. For instance, participant No. 7 mentioned that:

In my view, having appropriate levels of EQ helps female EFL teachers to analyze their emotions and others' emotions and behaviors which eases the process of getting to know their peers and cooperating with their colleagues, which in general, leads to developing an entrenched PI. If a university teacher does have enough EQ, she can quickly analyze others' emotions and behaviors and considers them in her communication and collaboration with her colleagues. I believe this benefit is more beneficial for females as they are considered the ones who are not familiar with appropriate strategies in dealing with others, especially in the working environment.

The interviews of seven participants were explored based on thematic analysis, and the other five had the same opinions.

Discussion

Regarding the main objectives of investigating the causal association between PI and EQ of the female EFL university teachers in the HB phase of burnout and exploring their comments about the potential reasons behind the possible relationships between PI and EQ, this study was conducted based on the a explanatory sequential mixed-methods design that was consisted of a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative one. The results of the SEM indicated a significant causal association between PI and EQ of the female EFL university teachers in the HB phase of burnout. Further, the interviews confirmed the associations between the PI and EQ and revealed some possible ways to help the participants with their high levels of burnout.

The results of the data analyses for Question One, which was posited as “Is there any causal relationship between PI and EQ of the Iranian female EFL university teachers in the HB phase?” showed a significant causal association between PI and EQ of the Iranian female EFL university teachers in the HB phase. The results are in agreement with those of similar studies

(e.g., Alharbi & Ahmad, 2020; Karakas, 2016) in which EQ significantly influenced the PI of the female EFL teachers. It can be interpreted that the levels of EQ among female EFL teachers in different EFL contexts had significantly impacted their PI. The researchers expected the results obtained as they believe that the concept of EQ is a critical factor in manipulating the levels of PI, especially among the female ones. Furthermore, some studies (e.g., Diasti, 2021; Zhao et al., 2020) showed that the PI levels are negatively associated with burnout, which shows the beneficiary of the results for female EFL university teachers in the HB phase of burnout.

Concerning Question Two, “What are the potential reasons behind the possible causal association between PI and EQ among the targeted participants?”, the findings revealed the rational reasons behind the determined association in the SEM model developed in the first research question which not only confirmed the model but also provided some remedies to reduce the burn out levels of the female EFL university teachers who face the highest levels of burnout or the HB phase. The results are in line with those of other similar studies (i.e., Dolev & Leshem, 2016; Nagar, 2017) that have confirmed the outcomes of the first question by shedding light on how different components of EQ, including regulation of emotion, use of them, self and others’ emotional appraisal impacted the components of PI respectively. To better understand the findings regarding Research Question Two, the thematic analyses are reported in brief here.

According to results of the thematic analysis, most of the interviewees (Participants 8, 11, & 2) mentioned that enhancing emotion regulation and the appropriate ways of expressing them as the components of the EQ helps university EFL teachers, particularly the female ones, to not only develop a well-established PI but also to reduce their burnout levels. As the next most-mentioned theme, some interviewees (Participants 9 & 5) reported the assessment of self-emotions and others' emotions as the appropriate strategies to increase the EQ levels, which leads to an acknowledged PI that again helps the female university EFL teachers handle their HB situation or avoid reaching this stage. While the mentioned interviewees provided their comments through the lens of EQ components, others (Participants 1 & 7) described their points of view regarding the EQ construct and its components. They mentioned the significant role of EQ on value or confidence, collaboration, and career progression as components of the PI and the critical impacts of a well-structured PI on decreasing burnout levels.

Conclusion

Through an MMR design, this study shed light on the causal association between EQ and PI of the Iranian female EFL university teachers in the HB phase based on the results obtained from its quantitative phase and confirmed the association between these two variables by exploring the comments of the participants in a series of interviews based on the results obtained from its qualitative phase. The outcomes of this study may benefit university EFL teachers, particularly the female ones, to be aware of how EQ and PI associate with each other and how this relationship contributes to managing the levels of burnout among them. Besides, curriculum designers of EFL teacher education can design a module about EQ or PI to be taught according to a certain number of credits or add these courses for current EFL teachers at universities in the shape of a series of in-service training courses. Moreover, educational psychologists may

use different EQ assessment instruments to evaluate the PI of female EFL teachers and help them implement proper strategies to avoid or fight certain levels of burnout. It should be mentioned that this study faced limited restrictions, including the number of participants and the sampling procedure. Regarding the suggestions for further research, future studies may use male and female EFL teachers, utilize an experimental or quasi-experimental design in research, consider more multifaceted sub-constructs in their models, and select participants with different levels of burnout.

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