

# The Relationship between Self-Regulated Strategies and Burnout: A Teacher Analysis in the EFL Context of Iran

Mojgan Karamooz<sup>1</sup> & Mehry Haddad Narafshan<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Foreign Languages, Kerman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kerman, Iran

\* Mehry Haddad Narafshan, E-mail: mehri.narafshan@yahoo.com

Received: September 21, 2017 Accepted: October 14, 2017 Online Published: November 24, 2017

doi:10.22158/sll.v1n2p186

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/sll.v1n2p186>

## **Abstract**

*The deleterious effects of teacher burnout (academic-related stress) on academic outcomes have been previously established. However, teacher burnout's relationship with self-regulated strategies as well as underlying factors contributing to their potential relationship is less understood. Consequently, the present study examined the link between Iranian EFL teachers' self-regulation and burnout at Kerman English language institutes. For this aim, a total of 101 English language teachers teaching in fifteen language institutes in Kerman took part in this study. The research participant selection was according to the convenience sampling. They completed two questionnaires: Teachers' Self-Regulation Questionnaire (TSRQ) designed by Yesim et al. (2009), based on the model proposed by Zimmerman's self-regulation (2000), and Teachers' Burnout Questionnaire (TBQ) extracted from Pines et al. (1981) Burnout Scale. This study was a quantitative correlation survey of issue in which the relationship between predictor variable (self-regulation) and criterion variable (burnout) was analyzed. The findings yielded via correlation analysis documented that there was a significant negative relationship between applying self-regulated strategies and burnout. Subsequent data analyses showed that among the components of self-regulated strategies, goal setting was the best predictor of burnout. It means that EFL teachers who establish goals for their teaching and attempt to accomplish them will be rarely at the risk of burnout.*

## **Keyword**

*EFL teachers, burn out, self-regulation*

## **1. Introduction**

Regarding the significant role teachers play in the field of language learning, their emotions and feelings have been the subject of many studies (Borg, Riding, & Falzon, 1991; Chan, 2004; Swanson & Koonce, 1986). In effect, decreasing of educational effectiveness can be the result of teachers' feelings and performance and the development of the teacher concept could improve the climate of education. Owing to the fact that teachers' implementation in the educational process ensures the quality of human

and social resources of society, consideration of their role is significant (Zlatkovic & Petrovic, 2011). Undoubtedly, teaching is among those occupations with the highest levels of job stress (Johnson et al., 2005; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977). Equally, many factors contribute to teacher burnout including emotional, mental and physical exhaustion. Burnout is defined as a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that stems from job stress, attrition, and frustration (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). As in physical and mental burnout, this fatigue is often accompanied by physical fatigue, illnesses, and disorders which develop towards a psychosomatic syndrome (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). It can be realized that many teachers experience high levels of stress from their work, but not all of them suffer from burnout. Therefore, teachers should be helped to manage occupational stress to avoid burnout. Apropos of this issue, a question may be raised as to why some teachers succeed in surmounting high levels of occupational stress, while others cannot meet expectations imposed on them and tend to collapse under the burden of everyday stress, the chronic level of which may render burnout. The reason might be teacher self-regulation. In this case, Cardelle-Elwer, Irwin and Lizarraga (2007, cited in Monshi Toussi et al., 2011) maintain successful teachers are self-regulated individuals who understand themselves as teachers and sustain their motivation encountering difficult tasks and changing circumstances. It can plausibly be hypothesized that teachers' beliefs and perceptions of the causes of success or failure represent a construct associated with teacher self-regulation.

Regrettably, burnout is widespread among teachers and has been recognized as a major problem in educational organizations especially EFL settings. More recently, teacher self-regulation has found its way to EFL contexts since Teachers' lack of self-regulating behaviors would negatively influence the teacher and students' performance. Accordingly, in the present study self-regulation and the ability to maintain perspective with regard to daily events have been described as "burnout-buffers". It means that self-regulation efforts at primary prevention are preferable over secondary or tertiary interventions that occur after burnout symptoms have surfaced. It is hoped that the findings from the present study will contribute to the field of teacher education sectors to better prepare future teachers by fostering a greater understanding of and respect for self-regulation and its process to empower teachers to make more informed decisions about their pedagogical approaches. In detail the present study attempts to investigate the following research question:

Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' self-regulation and burnout?

## **2. Theoretical Framework of the Study**

Several frameworks have been proposed that outline the necessary skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed among teachers to work successfully. The underlying theoretical framework involved in this study is associated with the concept of attribution theory. Weiner (1986) argues that attribution theory is a pivotal cognitive theory of motivation that explains the underlying causes of one's success or failure. Weiner focused his attribution theory on achievement (Weiner, 1974). Attributions are classified along three causal dimensions: locus of control, stability, and controllability. The locus of control dimension

has two poles: internal versus external locus of control. The stability dimension captures whether causes change over time or not. For instance, ability can be classified as a stable, internal cause, and effort classified as unstable and internal. Controllability contrasts causes one can control, such as skill/efficacy, from causes one cannot control, such as aptitude, mood, others' actions, and luck. Weiner (1980) states causal attributions determine affective reactions to success and failure. In the present study, self-regulation, a self-control of internal and external factors, is believed to decrease teachers' burnout.

### 3. Review of Literature

The review of literature revealed the fact that teachers affect the education system and society as a whole so developing a better understanding of the beliefs they hold in terms of teaching, and specifically the way that they feel can be beneficial owing to the fact that what they do and how they feel is directly linked to the quality of education. In this regard, Pines et al. (1981) analyzed and classified burn out as physical, emotional, or mental ones. Emotional burn out is the way teachers experience a sense of failure and self-doubt. They feel helpless, trapped, and defeated. As a result of this, there is loss of motivation and satisfaction. Physical burn out accompanies feeling tired and drained most of the time. Consequently, teachers feel sick a lot and most of the time suffer from frequent headaches, back pain, and muscle aches. Mental burn out makes teachers confused so they cannot think clearly or concentrate at class when they are teaching.

The term "burn out" became popular when Freudenberg (1974) used it to describe his personal experience from too much work. The notion continued to exist by vast body of studies carried out by Maslach and her colleagues (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, 1984). Their findings revealed a tridimensional construct comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to feeling of fatigue resulting from daily conflict in work. Accordingly, teachers having signs of emotional exhaustion perceive themselves unable to spend much energy as they did earlier. Emotional exhaustion occurs when teachers feel their emotional resources being depleted and overextended by contact with other people, particularly their students. Depersonalization indicates one's negative attitude toward others and feeling of being detached from students, parents and colleagues. Depersonalization refers to impersonal and even dehumanized perception of others. Reduced Personal Accomplishment is lacking the feeling of success and efficiency in class environment, so teachers consider themselves incompetent to make student learn. In addition, reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in professional competence and effectiveness (Bibou Nakou et al., 1999).

Four factors relating to institution which are determined to foster burnout include pupil misbehavior, time pressures and lack of facilities, not having chance for promotion and poor relationships with colleagues or parents (Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1995). Equally important, to create opportunities for insightful instruction, teachers not only need a solid base of content area knowledge

along with classroom management skills, but also have to scrutinize their beliefs, motivation, and self-regulatory factors associated with teaching and learning (Dembo, 2001).

Self-regulation is defined as “self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 14). Zeidner, Boekaerts and Pintrich (2000, p. 751) assert that self-regulation involves “cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioural components that provide the individual with the capacity to adjust his or her actions and goals to achieve desired results in light of changing environmental conditions”. According to Schraw et al. (2006), self-regulation encompasses three main components—cognition, metacognition, and motivation—which can be further subdivided into several subcomponents. The cognitive component includes simple strategies, problem solving, and critical thinking. The metacognitive component consists of two general components—knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition, each including several subcomponents such as declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge and planning, monitoring, and evaluation, respectively. Finally, the motivation component comprises two subcomponents: beliefs and perceptions. And to compare intrinsic motivation with extrinsic one, intrinsic motivation is important as the natural human construct; however, extrinsic motivation is argued to vary considerably in its relative autonomy and thus can either act as external control or as true self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In effect, it is plausible that the teachers’ use of self-regulatory behaviors would positively influence teacher practices. According to Delfino, Dettori and Persico (2010), learning to be self-regulated is crucial for teachers in order to deal with the complexity of the teaching role, which encompasses individual and social aspects. From personal perspective, teachers should equip themselves with self-regulation skills in order to not only follow various goals and tasks, but also sustain and foster their motivation, commitment and effectiveness. From social perspective, self-regulation assists teachers to construct instructional strategies based on students’ specific goals, and “to adjust to the ever more frequent curricular revisions required by the fast pace of technological and cultural change” (Delfino, Dettori, & Persico, 2010, p. 300). The importance of applying self-regulated strategies in educational field is to the point that many scholars note that it is a fundamental part of effective teaching (Randi, 2004; Ghanizadeh, 2011; Ghonsooly & Ghanizadeh, 2013).

As can be seen, self-regulation plays an important role in the success of teachers and teachers’ burnout acts as an influential factor in mainstream education. On the contrary, review of the related literature shows that no study has addressed the potential relationship between teachers’ self-regulation and their feeling of burnout. For this reason, the aim of the current study is to find the relationship between teachers’ self-regulation and burnout in the EFL context of Iran.

## **4. Methodology**

### *4.1 Participants*

The participants of this quantitative survey consisted of 101 English language teachers, 32 males and

69 females. All the participants were EFL teachers and their mother language was Persian. The teachers' age range varied from 21 to over 41 years old. Their teaching experience ranged from 1 to over 16 years. Their academic degree varied from Diploma to PhD. The research participant selection was according to the convenience sampling. The teachers in this study were from fifteen private English language institutes located in Kerman, and most of them were eligible to participate in the program.

#### *4.2 Instruments*

In line with the proposed conceptualisation, the questionnaire consists of two parts: one focusing on teachers' burnout and one assessing teachers' level of self-regulation. To measure teachers' self-regulation, Teacher Self-Regulation Questionnaire (TSRQ) designed by Yesim et al. (2009) was applied. It was based on the model proposed by Zimmerman's self-regulation (2000). Teacher Self-Regulation Questionnaire was comprised of 18 items using a 5-point Likert scale with the following labels: 1 Never, 2 Rarely, 3 Sometimes, 4 Often, and 5 Always. Scores on this test represented teachers' degree of self-regulation. The questionnaire included 3 strategies of Goal Setting, Emotional control, and Self-evaluation. In this study, the total reliability of the scale (.90) was estimated via Cronbach's Alpha formula.

To assess teachers' level of burnout, Teachers' Burnout Questionnaire (TBQ) extracted from Pines et al. (1981) Burnout Scale was applied. The questionnaire consisted of 23 items of three scales of Emotional, Physical, and Mental Burnout. The items were scored according to the frequency in which the participants' burnout levels were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Always". The higher values of frequency show that the teachers experience burnout. The total reliability of this scale (.93) was estimated via Cronbach's Alpha formula.

#### *4.3 Design and Procedure of the Study*

In order to shed light on the complex and dynamic processes of the study, we employed a quantitative correlation survey of issue in which the relationship between variables was analyzed. The present study was conducted at 15 private English language institutes, and the general assumption was the belief that teachers' self-regulation and burnout affect each other, so it was both a theoretical and a practical view. The questionnaires were given to the teachers with the permission of the institute administrator. The teachers completed the questionnaires during their regularly scheduled break time.

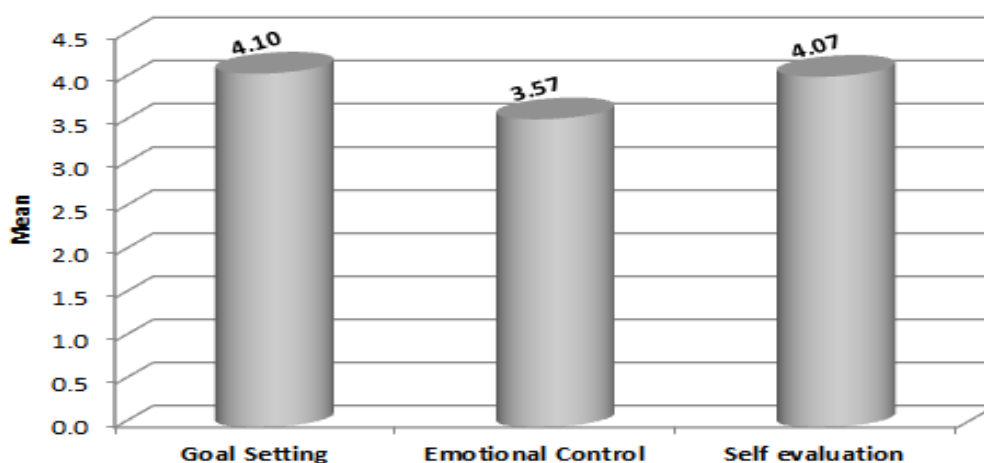
### **5. Results**

A systematic quantitative interpretive approach was employed in data analysis. In total, 101 questionnaires were received, and the descriptive statistics presented below reveal the participants' perspectives on the four categories of self-regulation, i.e., concepts associated with self-regulation strategies; Goal Setting, Emotional control, and Self-evaluation. Statistics showed that the means of Goal Setting, Emotional control, and Self-evaluation among EFL teachers of the present study were 4.10, 3.57 and 4.07, respectively. The highest mean score was for Goal Setting ( $M=4.10$ ) and the lowest

mean score was for Emotional control ( $M=3.57$ ) (Table1 & Figure1). The total mean and standard deviation of self-regulation variable among the teachers were 3.92 and 0.60, respectively.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Self-Regulation and Its Components among EFL Teachers**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Goal Setting	101	1.67	5	4.10	0.67	-1.65	3.22
Emotional Control	101	1.83	5	3.57	0.69	-0.19	-0.44
Self-Evaluation	101	1.83	5	4.07	0.69	-1.07	0.59
Self-Regulation	101	1.83	5	3.92	0.60	-1.18	1.72

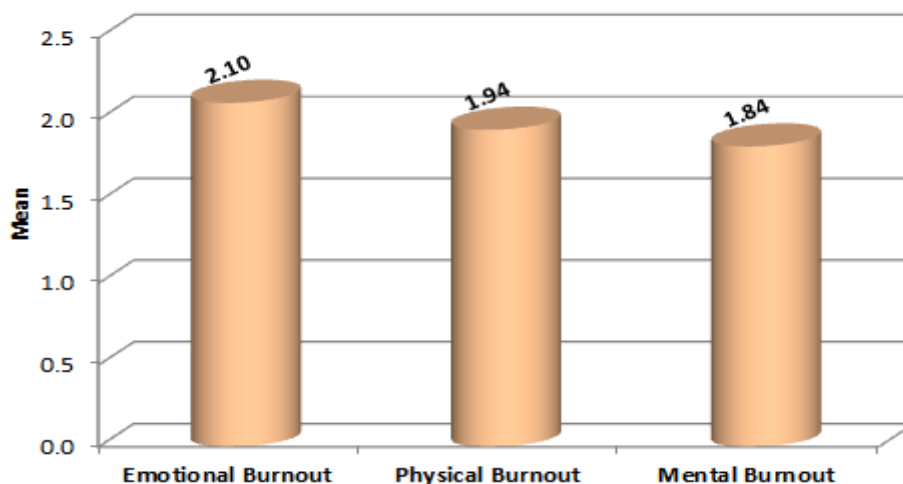


**Figure 1. Self-Regulation among EFL Teachers**

In this study, teachers' burnout as the criterion variable was comprised of 3 components: Emotional Burnout, Physical Burnout, and Mental Burnout. Statistics showed that the means of Emotional Burnout, Physical Burnout, and Mental Burnout among EFL teachers of the present study were 2.10, 1.94 and 1.84, respectively. The highest mean score was for Emotional Burnout ( $M=2.10$ ) and the lowest mean score was for Mental Burnout ( $M=1.84$ ) (Table2 & Figure2). The mean and standard deviation of teachers' burnout variable among the teachers were 1.97 and 0.61, respectively.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Burnout and Its Components among EFL Teachers**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional Burnout	101	1	3.88	2.10	0.64	0.37	-0.04
Physical Burnout	101	1	4.13	1.94	0.71	0.85	0.50
Mental Burnout	101	1	3.86	1.84	0.71	0.93	0.49
Teachers Burnout	101	1	3.83	1.97	0.61	0.79	0.64

**Figure 2. Teachers' Burnout Components among EFL Teachers**

To answer the research question, the Pearson Correlation was run. Based on the results in Table 3, regarding the P-Value that is lower than 0.01 (P-Value=0.0005), it can be said with more than 99% confidence that there is a meaningful negative relationship between teachers' self-regulation and burnout ( $r=-0.72$ ,  $n=110$ ). Therefore, by increasing the teachers' self-regulation, their burnout will decrease and vice versa, too. With regard to R Square ( $R^2=0.52$ ), it means that teachers' self-regulation predicts 52% of teachers' burnout variance (Figure 3).

**Table 3. Pearson Correlation to Investigate the Relationship between Teachers' Self-Regulation and Burnout**

Variables	Pearson Correlation	P-Value	N	R Square
Self-Regulation	-0.72	0.0005	101	0.52
Teachers Burnout				



**Figure 3. Scatter Plot of the Relationship between Teachers' Self-Regulation and Burnout**

## 6. Discussion

The research question concerning the relationship between teachers' self-regulation and burnout was answered negatively. As hypothesized, self-regulated teachers experienced less burnout. Self-regulation, self-control of internal and external factors, is believed to decrease teachers' burnout. As a result, teachers should be helped to manage and control occupational stress to avoid burnout. The results revealed that there is a meaningful negative relationship between teachers' self-regulation and burnout among EFL Teachers. The present study in line with several other studies (Pietarinen, Pyhältö, Soini, & Salmela-Aro, 2013; Doménech-Betoret & Gómez Artiga, 2010; Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014; Ghanizadeh et al., 2014; Ghonsooly et al., 2015) found that by increasing the teachers' self-regulation, teachers' burnout will decrease. It is obvious that self-regulation plays an important role in success of teachers and teachers' burnout acts as an influential factor in mainstream education.

## 7. Conclusion

The present study developed from our interest in examining the relationship between teachers' self-regulated strategies and burn out in an EFL context. It demonstrates that the educational context is increasingly characterised by both a push and a pull towards creating a self-regulated culture. While the increasingly complex nature of teachers' job and the workload included herein push towards a need to self-regulate, the aforementioned variety of benefits resulting from self-regulation act as pull factors. This evolution challenges the deep interpretations of burnout, too. In line with the hypothesis, the findings documented statistically that there was a negative relationship between these two constructs. In other words, teachers who were more self-regulated in their professional setting confronted with burnout less than teachers who were not self-regulated. It can be stated that self-regulated teachers are



proactive. This proactivity allows them to anticipate which factors prevent their professional development and as a consequence, they can manage the problematic situations. Although this study successfully investigated the demanded topic, there were some limitations through the path that must be considered before assessing its contributions. The primary limitation of this study was related to the feasibility considerations. The participants were chosen according to convenience sampling. Second, the participants of the present study comprised EFL teachers in language institutes. This can also set the groundwork for a cross comparison of findings. The present study was delimited in the way, teachers' demographic variables (age and level) were not controlled. If the sample had been restricted to any specific age ranges or level group, the sample size would not have sufficed for a standard analysis. Above all mentioned limitations, this study provides insights into the functions and consequences of the relationship between teachers' self-regulation and burnout which can contribute to major advances in the field and have direct pedagogical implications for classroom teachers, educators, researchers, and book writers, helping them create appropriate effective strategies to avoid burnout.

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