

The Relationship between English Language Teacher Perfectionism, Efficacy, and Burnout

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Abstract

The present study attempted to investigate the relationship between English language teacher perfectionism, teacher burnout, and teacher efficacy. For the purpose of the study, 114 teachers in Tabadkan District, Mashhad, were chosen. Eighty-Three of the participants were female and thirty-one were male with different majors in English language. Three questionnaires, namely the Scale on English Language Teacher Perfectionism (SELTP), Maslach Burnout Inventory, and Teacher Efficacy Scale, were used to collect data on the variables under investigation. The data were analyzed using correlational statistics and *t* test procedure. The obtained results indicated that there was a high positive correlation between perfectionism, teacher burnout, and efficacy, that female teachers were more efficacious than male ones, and that the magnitude of correlation coefficients was higher for the male participants.

Keywords: English Language Teacher, Perfectionism, Burnout, Efficacy

Introduction

Teaching, a face-to-face profession, is among the most stressful jobs in the world. Studies show that teachers experience stress and burnout like other workers in face-to-face professions due to individual and situational factors (Friedman, 2000). People working in face-to-face professions have to interact more than people working in other professions, and this requires spending more time and being more involved with their clients. They have to solve their clients' problems and while doing that, they may experience "feelings of anger, embarrassment, fear, or despair" (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 99). Burnout is defined as a response to chronic difficulty in managing stress (Cherniss, 1980). Cherniss believed that professionals who are burned out are not capable of effectively dealing with stress and at the same time are not able to avoid stress. As a result, these individuals become physically and emotionally tired. In fact, burnout is a phenomenon originating in workers' lack of ability to control increasing pressure to succeed professionally (Farber, 1991).

The effect of the stress experienced by language teachers might be intensified or attenuated by some other personality factors including perfections and self-efficacy. Perfectionism relates to a set of behaviors and thoughts. These behaviors and thoughts are realized as reaching excessively unrealistic goals, even in areas in which high performance does not matter that much. Perfectionists often engage in critical self-evaluations. Failure experiences are often overgeneralized, and they will often focus on their failures at the expense of their successes.

Perfectionism

Throughout the past years, researchers have explored the structure and nature of perfectionism which can be considered as a personality construct dissimilar to the others (Rice & Slaney, 2002; Slaney & Ashby, 1996). The earlier literature described perfectionism as a feature of personality that entails debilitating propensity to set extremely high standards for oneself and to make personal satisfaction and self-esteem dependent upon meeting these high standards (Burns, 1980; Pacht, 1984). According to Burns (1980), perfectionists are individuals who "strain compulsively and unremittingly toward impossible goals and who measure their own worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishment" (p. 36). While an exclusive agreed-upon definition does not exist in the present literature, on the basis of common definitions of perfectionism, earlier ones in particular, there is often an emphasis on the negative dimensions of the attribute (Slaney & Ashby, 1996).

Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990) considered perfectionism as a five-dimensional construct. Concern over mistakes, as the first dimension, is believed to be the main dimension. This reflects an inclination toward interpreting mistakes as equal to failure, and the belief that after a failure one will lose the respect of others. The second dimension is setting extremely high personal standards, which at most of the times cannot be met satisfactorily. Parental expectations, as the third dimension, involve the extent to which the parents of the individual are perceived as setting high standards. The fourth and fifth dimensions include parental criticism and doubts about actions.

According to Frost et al. (1990) the measurements of perfectionism represented by Frost and colleagues and by Hewitt and Flett (1991), which are on the basis of their own conceptualizations of the construct, are strongly related. They believed that the personal standards, organization, self-oriented perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism subscales came together to form a factor representing the more positive dimension of perfectionism. The fear of flaws, parental criticism, parental expectations, distrust to actions and socially-prescribed perfectionism subscales gathered together to form a factor representing the more negative aspects of perfectionism.

According to Flett, Hewitt, and Hallett (1995), socially prescribed perfectionism is related to lots of indices of stress among teachers. Making use of the Teacher Stress Inventory, they discovered that socially prescribed perfectionism is associated with frequency and intensity of professional distress in addition to the emotional and physiological demonstrations. Furthermore, socially prescribed perfectionism is negatively associated with job satisfaction.

Self-Efficacy

Associating with social learning theory, Bandura (1997) presented the concept of self-efficacy as the main motivational power behind an individual's actions. Bandura proposed that an individual's behavior in a certain situation is affected by the person's beliefs that certain behaviors will cause a desired result. Two beliefs, outcome expectations and efficacy expectations, can be distinguished by the probability of an individual believing that specific actions will cause certain outcomes. High-efficacy teachers are willing to take risks, believe more in their capabilities, and put additional effort on teaching tasks, while low-efficacy teachers believe that they cannot change anything or produce positive learning outcomes, and they question their own instructional capabilities.

Cubukcu's (2008) defines self-efficacy as " a person's judgment of his or her capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 149). In other words, self-efficacy is what a person says in response to the question, "Can I do

this task well?” Research demonstrates that people who are highly efficient are able to show higher levels of effort and are flexible in their efforts, even in hard and challenging situations (George & Aronson, 2003; Ross, & Altmaier, 1994; Scharlach, 2008). According to Henson’s (2001) definition of teacher self-efficacy, it is a teacher’s “judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (p. 7).

According to Bandura (1997), there are four sources of self-efficacy information: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective experiences. Bandura described that the differential effect of each of these sources is based on what cognitive processes are involved, what is attended to in comparison with what is remembered, and how one views different experiences. Bandura (1997) assumed that those efficacy perceptions, whether accurate or inaccurate, are on the basis of these four sources of information. These four sources are outlined and discussed briefly regarding their likely contributions to self-efficacy in general.

Mastery Experiences

Mastery experiences, also called performance accomplishments, are related to the occasions in which individuals actually carry out the act under question. These performance achievements have been demonstrated to be the most significant source of information, and a strong sense of self-efficacy may be developed throughout repeated successes. Once established, occasional failures are not likely to have many threatening effects, and self-efficacy tends to generalize to other circumstances (Bandura, 1997).

Vicarious Experiences

While past performance experience is a significant source of self-efficacy, it is not the only source. Explicit experiences, for example, may have a powerful impact on self-efficacy evaluations under certain circumstances, specifically doubts about one’s capabilities. Bandura (1997) stated that when a person is doubtful or has had few prior experiences, his or her self-perceptions can be willingly changed by explicit experiences. Moreover, certain types of activities do not readily present factual evidence for appraising one’s performance and personal efficacy must be judged with regard to others’ performances. These explicit experiences can cause significant, permanent changes which can weaken the effect of direct experiences.

Verbal Persuasion

A third source of self-efficacy, which is also called social persuasion, is about trying to persuade people to believe that they have certain kinds of capabilities. Bandura (1986) warned that unrealistically raising beliefs can result in failure and weakens self-efficacy further, whereas realistic verbal persuasion can activate greater constant effort facing difficulty. Therefore, realistic verbal persuasion can lead to successful performance which, as a consequence, makes permanent changes in perceived self-efficacy. Bandura reminded that it may be more difficult to create long-term increases in perceived efficacy by persuasion than to reduce it. He stated that this is because of the human tendency of self-doubters to avoid challenging activities and to quit soon after encountering difficulties.

Affective Experiences

Affective experience or psychological state is the fourth source of self-efficacy. As well as external criteria, people make judgments about their capabilities partially on the basis of the information about their (internal) signs of tiredness, pain, somatic complaints, and stress

reactions that include performance nervousness. These physiological symptoms can be considered as signs of physical or emotional inefficacy.

Moreover, fear reactions engender more fear and produce a vicious cycle of inspiring distress. Perceived self-efficacy may be elevated by lessening the emotional provocation to subjective threats and in that way letting performance improve (Bandura, 1997).

Burnout

Cherniss (1980) defined the concept of burnout as a response to chronic difficulty in managing stress. Cherniss believed that professionals who are burned out are not capable of effectively dealing with stress and at the same time are not able to avoid stress. As a result, these individuals become physically and emotionally tired.

Similarly, Maslach and Jackson (1981) argued that the burnout syndrome can bring about emotional and physical exhaustion, depersonalization, depression, low self-esteem, and withdrawal. The authors considered burnout as a multidimensional concept with three different dimensions: *emotional exhaustion*, *depersonalization*, and *feelings of low personal accomplishment*.

Emotional exhaustion is related to emotional and physical weakening. Generally, someone who is emotionally and physically exhausted will feel tired, overextended, unable to relax, weary, and weak. *Depersonalization* happens when individuals hold a cold, distant attitude concerning work and the population they serve. Their work involvement is negligible and their ideals are neglected. These individuals become depersonalized from their work by assuming an unsympathetic and impersonal response toward who receives their service. *Reduced personal accomplishment* refers to the feelings of lack of efficacy in doing one's duties. Ineffectiveness can be described as an increasing sense of failure. Individuals lose confidence in their abilities to make a difference and do not have feelings of successful accomplishment in their work.

Research on experienced teachers has shown that burned out teachers are apt to have impaired performance, low confidence, high non-attendance, and high turnover (Friesen et al., 1988). In addition, Farber (1991) introduced lowered sympathy towards students, less frequency and care in lesson planning, a lower frustration level in coping with students, and a general irritable, depressed and nervous manner as effects of teacher burnout.

Teacher Efficacy and Teacher Burnout as Related Concepts

The mixed characteristics of low teacher efficacy and teacher burnout influence the confidence teachers have in their capability to accomplish effective interventions, their willingness to execute new interventions, and the situations in which teachers will look for consultation for help in dealing with problematic student behaviors over alternative student placement (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2002; Han & Weiss, 2005; Sparks, 1988). Teachers who have low expectations that an intervention will bring about a desired result may not accept or use behavior change interventions with close adherence to the procedure, nor will they carry on if progress is found to be slow (Evers, et al., 2002; Han & Weiss, 2005).

Rational

Over the span of the previous couple of decades, teachers have progressively turned into being the center of consideration in education. All things considered, this has not been the case in the English Language Teaching (ELT) field. As indicated by Wright, Hom and Sanders (1997), "more can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than by any other single factor" (p. 63). More studies, particularly in the Iranian context, are needed to gain a

comprehensive understanding of factors that might affect teacher performance. As a result, the present study contributes to the field by exploring teachers' burnout experiences, perfectionism, and their perceptions of efficacy as well as the relationships among them. The investigation of these variables may provide valuable insight for EFL teachers and administrators on teacher related variables. Moreover, it could form a baseline for further research on how teacher efficacy, perfectionism, and burnout are related in different educational settings.

Research Questions

1. Is there a significant relationship between teacher perfectionism, efficacy, and burnout?
2. Do female and male teachers differ in terms of their levels of teacher perfectionism, efficacy, and burnout?
3. Is there a significant relationship between teacher perfectionism, efficacy, and burnout in female teachers?
4. Is there a significant relationship between teacher perfectionism, efficacy, and burnout in male teachers?

Methodology

Participants

A hundred and fourteen high school teachers participated in the study. They were all from Khorasan-e-Razavi, Mashhad, and officially working for the Ministry of Education. Of these one hundred and fourteen participants, eighty-three were female and thirty-one were male with different majors in English language (English literature, English Translation, English Teaching).

Instrumentation

Each of the variables was measured through a separate questionnaire. Teacher perfectionism was measured through the Scale on English Language Teacher Perfectionism (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). This questionnaire consists of thirty Likert type items and is reported to have the reliability index of 0.89. To measure burnout in teachers, the Maslach Burnout Inventory Questionnaire (Maslach, 1981) was used. It is the most widely accepted measurement tool of stress and burnout. It consists of 22 items with the reliability coefficient of 0.92. Teacher efficacy was operationalized using Teacher Efficacy Scale adopted from Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001). The scale was reported to have a construct validity established by factor analysis and reliability was found to be 0.94.

Analysis and results

To examine the relationship between each of the variables, the researchers used correlational and *t* test analyses. The tests were run for all the participants as whole and for females and males separately.

The first research question was aimed at investigating the relationship between perfectionism, efficacy, and burnout in language teachers. Regarding this question, the data were analyzed using Pearson Correlation. As presented in Table 1, the correlation coefficient for all the possible pairs, perfectionism-burnout ($r=0.89$, $p = 0.00$), perfectionism-efficacy ($r=0.65$, $P=0.00$), and burnout-efficacy ($r=0.61$, $P=0.00$) were significantly high. This indicates that all these three concepts are positively related with each other.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficients for Perfectionism, Burnout, and Efficacy

		Perfectionism	Burnout	Efficacy
Perfectionism	Pearson Correlation	1	.89**	.65**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00	.00
	N	114	114	114
Burnout	Pearson Correlation	.89**	1	.61**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00		.00
	N	114	114	114
Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.65**	.61**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	
	N	114	114	114

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The second research question asked whether female and male teachers experienced different levels of perfectionism, efficacy, and burnout. For this purpose, data were analyzed using independent-samples *t* test along with descriptive statistics. As Table 2 depicts, the perfectionism mean for the females (65.57) was higher than that of males (63.9). This suggests that female teachers were more perfectionist than male teachers. Similar results were obtained in relation to efficacy and burnout across genders. The mean scores for females were higher.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Males and Females Concerning Perfectionism, Efficacy, and Burnout

Groups		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perfectionism	Female	83	65.57	19.45	2.13
	Male	31	63.09	18.96	3.40
Efficacy	Female	83	51.59	13.53	1.48
	Male	31	37.61	12.26	2.20
Burnout	Female	83	79.20	19.86	2.18
	Male	31	71.93	23.54	4.22

The statistical significance of the mean differences was examined through three separate *t* test analyses (Table 3). The results indicate that, despite the mean differences, females did not significantly differ from male teachers in relation to perfectionism ($t=0.61$, $P=0.54$) and burnout

($t=1.65$, $P=0.10$). Concerning efficacy, however, the difference was found to be statistically significant. Females ($t=5.02$, $P=0.00$) were significantly more efficacious than males. This shows that female teachers think that they can do more with what they have.

Table 3. Independent Samples *t* Test for Perfectionism, Efficacy, Burnout

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>
Perfectionism	.00	.97	.61	112	.54	2.48	4.06
Efficacy	.32	.57	5.02	112	.00	13.97	2.78
Burnout	4.49	.03	1.65	112	.10	7.26	4.40

Table 4. Correlations for Perfectionism, Efficacy, and Burnout in Female Teachers

		Perfectionism	Burnout	Efficacy
Perfectionism	Pearson Correlation	1	.90**	.63**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00	.00
	N	83	83	83
Burnout	Pearson Correlation	.90**	1	.55**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00		.00
	N	83	83	83
Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.63**	.55**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	
	N	83	83	83

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between perfectionism, efficacy, and burnout was further analyzed for female and male teachers. Based on the results obtained for the third research question (Table 4), again it can be concluded that all these variables have significant positive correlation with each

other. The correlation coefficient in relation to efficacy-burnout ($r=0.55$), however, is moderate, suggesting that higher levels of efficacy will predict lower levels of burnout.

Regarding the fourth research question (Table 5), the correlation between teacher perfectionism and teacher efficacy ($r=0.90$, $P=0.00$) as well as perfectionism and burnout ($r=0.90$, $P=0.00$) in males was significantly high. The correlation concerning the relationship between efficacy and burnout was also significant, with the magnitude being a little lower ($r=0.77$) compared with the other two variables. The similarity of the results for perfectionism-burnout in both males and females suggest that perfectionism is a better predictor of burnout compared with efficacy.

Table 5. Correlations for Perfectionism, Burnout, and Efficacy in Males

	Perfectionism	Burnout	Efficacy
Perfectionism	Pearson Correlation	1	.90**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00
	N	31	31
Burnout	Pearson Correlation	.90**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00
	N	31	31
Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.77**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00
	N	31	31

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion and Concluding remarks

Based on the results of this study, there were significant correlations between the three variables of teacher perfectionism, teacher efficacy, and teacher burnout. The findings concerning the relationship between efficacy and burnout, however, indicated that these two variables are not highly correlated compared with perfectionism and burnout. These findings are only partially compatible with those of Cagle (1998), who found a strong negative relationship between efficacy and burnout. The absence of negative correlation between efficacy and burnout in the present study might be explained with reference to the fact that some other factors like socioeconomic and instructional factors might cancel out the effect of efficacy. That is, teachers with high levels of efficacy might experience burnout due to some other important factors. This deserves new investigation.

The findings of this study are illuminating in that they shed more light on the issue of burnout. With respect to this, decision makers may realize that perfectionism is an element that assumes a part in teacher's burnout (Flett et al., 1995). Those who attempt to be flawless in their career might feel burnout at long last.

The highest correlations coefficient in this study belonged to the correlations between teacher perfectionism and the other two variables whereas the correlation between teacher efficacy and burnout was relatively low. This may indirectly pinpoint the importance of efficacy in preventing teacher burnout. Thus, the current study can add to the literature on teacher perfectionism, efficacy and burnout. Given the fact that female teachers experienced higher levels of efficacy which moderately correlated with burnout, it can also be concluded that gender might play some role in teacher efficacy and burnout.

The results indicated that there is a meaningful relationship between the three variables of this study. Thus, the current study can add to the literature on teacher perfectionism, efficacy and burnout. Furthermore, this study has another promising perspective in that its findings indicated teachers' gender has to some extent plays a mediating factor concerning the relationship between the three variables.

The findings of this study can be useful if we want to help teachers develop and improve their efficacy and their perfectionism and they can help them to lessen their burnout. The present study can, therefore, help researchers and teacher educators recognize the relationship in their classes. Consideration of individual differences, like gender, is of course important for teacher educators. It is hoped that some contribution is made to the development of language learning and teaching. Besides, other researchers and interested students are recommended to carry out related studies to push the frontiers of knowledge in this regard.

One of the major limitations of the present study was that the focus was only on the correlation between the variables. The results cannot be interpreted as showing cause and effect relationship. Given the important of these variables in language teaching, future studies may investigate the causal relationship between them. The empirical identification of the sources of teacher burnout, as an important disruptive factor in language teaching, is highly recommended.

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