Modelling EFL Teachers' Emotion Regulation in Relation to the Ecological Framework of Agency and Autonomy

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Abstract: Teaching has recently received extensive attention as an emotionally charged profession, necessitating a deeper exploration of the psychological mechanisms underlying teachers' practices. However, despite the evidence supporting the role of teachers' emotion regulation (ER) in their autonomous control over both their practices and their ecological environment, the interplay between EFL teachers' ER, agency, and autonomy is not yet fully clear. Grounded in positive psychology and ecological theories of agency, the present study tried to contribute to our understanding of this relationship. Accordingly, 232 EFL teachers in Iranian schools, targeted via snowball sampling, responded to an online survey, containing Emotion Regulation, Agency Related to Planning Teaching and Learning Activities, and Teaching Autonomy questionnaires. The results of Multiple Linear Regression and SEM confirmed a positive relationship between ER and agency ($r = .724$) as well as ER and autonomy ($r = .713$), while predicting 58% and 48% of changes in them, respectively, which demonstrates strong predictive power. The results support an integrated theoretical model, linking ER to teachers' agentic and autonomous behaviors, and indicating that emotionally-regulated teachers are more likely to exercise control over their professional practices and environment. These findings offer implications for educational administrators and psychologists, as well as ELT practitioners who wish to improve educational practices by empowering teachers to foster sustained well-being and deal with burnout. Finally, the possibility of an updated construct of Agentic Autonomy is proposed to bridge ER with teachers' ecological agency.

Keywords: Teacher Psychology, Positive Psychology, Teacher Well-being, Language Teacher Education.

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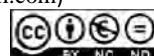
Introduction

Teaching, as an emotionally-charged profession, exerts heightened demand on its practitioners' emotional repertoire, as teachers are constantly dealing with an intricate web of individuals' emotionality, diverse classroom ecologies, identity-formation dynamics, decision-making challenges, contesting authoritative forces, and autonomy struggles (Aldrup et al., 2024; Cross & Hong, 2012; Smith et al., 2025). Teaching, as a job, is now known to involve emotional labor, commanding "intense interpersonal interactions, strong emotional commitment and deliberate emotional management" (Yin, 2015, p. 789). Teachers' emotion regulation capabilities are frequently linked to their well-being, teaching effectiveness, professionalism, reflectivity, and identity formation (Wang et al., 2023; Zembylas, 2014). Therefore, training teachers in the 21st century seems deficient without equipping them with the necessary social/emotional literacies and competencies to deal with the emotional labor (Kassem, 2002). However, despite the growing interest in the subject, emotions and their link to other teacher variables as well as their career success are still "elephants in the room" in need of more rigorous investigation (Prior, 2019) in order to inform teacher development programs and ensure pedagogical and occupational success.

Informed by the contributions of Positive Psychology (PP) to education, emotion regulation (ER) is defined as a combination of conscious and non-conscious strategies that facilitate the process of shaping responses to emotional experiences (Gross, 2001; Wang et al., 2021). ER consists of a series of actions individuals employ to manage their spontaneous affective variables (Koole, 2009) and improve their control over the immediate internal and external situations. ER has been shown to be associated with work performance, mental health, development of healthy social connections, and teachers' well-being (Gross & Muñoz, 1995; Morris & King, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). However, teachers' emotions do not just occur or operate in isolation; rather, such emotions and urges for regulating them are integral components of a broader curricular context and school ecology. Adopting a post-structural perspective, Nazari et al. (2023) demonstrated how ecological and institutional factors, such as power, can affect Iranian EFL teachers' agency and autonomy. Therefore, ER can be hypothesized to interact with teacher agency, particularly in its ecological sense. Teachers' agentic mindset and behavior can be directly linked to their choices of ER strategies and the degree to which they are willing to acknowledge and exercise their autonomy in dealing with emotionally intriguing situations. Furthermore, both agency and autonomy can easily turn to sites of emotional and authoritative struggle, demanding effective ER strategies. Namaziandost et al. (2024) found ER to be among the predictors of

Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity and autonomy. Hence, teachers' lack of expertise and competence in efficiently handling and appropriately channeling their emotions in relation to such external forces poses educational challenges and occupational hazards worth further investigation.

Teacher agency is defined as the ability to manipulate behaviors in response to critical teaching situations and the capacity of behaving intentionally as a responsible source of change, resulting in empowerment (Biesta et al., 2015). The significance of the agentic role of teachers is emphasized by its effect on elevating pedagogical standards and improving teachers' practice (Tao & Gao, 2017, 2021). In congruence with the prominent role of professional agency, teacher autonomy is associated with teachers' readiness, capability, and decisiveness to take responsibility for their own teaching and learning (Little, 1995). In other words, it is interpreted as empowered teachers' active roles in curriculum design and teaching practices (Benson & Huang, 2008; Dierking & Fox, 2013). Autonomy is claimed to have a central role in social and collective aspects of teachers' career paths, decision-making, and professional growth (Helgøy & Homme, 2007). While agency is defined as teachers' ability to control and regulate their emotions, behaviors, and (re)actions by making informed choices (Nazari et al., 2024), teacher autonomy mostly comes into play when teachers intend to transfer their professional development into their practice and determines the extent to which teachers are empowered to efficiently deal with various classroom dynamics and educational needs (Choi & Mao, 2021).

Particularly, ELT practitioners, including EFL teachers, are not only susceptible to similar emotional incidents as other teachers in schools, but also may experience heightened degrees of emotional crisis and identity tensions (See Hajmalek & Basiri, 2022, for examples of EFL teachers' identity tensions and their coping strategies). This can be attributed to the nature of EFL instruction, where other than content knowledge, identity, culture, policies, and even ideologies collide. Gao (2008) eloquently offers an example of how cultural and educational traditions can influence teachers' vulnerability in forming their professional identity. Furthermore, agency has been found to be rather context-sensitive, influenced by educational policies and structures (Nazari et al., 2023; Priestley et al., 2015). This is especially true in contexts with centralized and authoritative educational policies, where teachers are granted little liberty in exercising their agentic and autonomous selves. While most research in this area has focused on Western educational contexts, it is important to acknowledge the role of contextual and cultural factors in the relationship between such teacher variables and include data from a wider range of contexts to bring broader insights to the field.

Given the role of the aforementioned variables in teachers' quality of practice and well-being, the present study adopted an ecological framework and set out to model the relationship between the elements of EFL teachers' emotion regulation, including cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Gross & John, 2003), in relation to their agency and autonomy. The study was conducted in the hope of contributing to the ongoing discussion of positive psychology in EFL teacher education by quantifying the interplay among these variables and offering a different understanding of the issue, offering insights for teacher training and enhanced classroom practice in the Iranian EFL context.

Literature Review

Positive Psychology

The study of positive psychology was popularized at the beginning of the 21st century by pioneers such as Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). The first wave of PP, known as positivity (1990s-mid 2000s), was concerned with studying positive strengths of humans which result in personal fulfillment and well-being. The scope of the second wave, polarity (mid-2000s-early 2010s), expanded to consider positive and negative emotions in relation to each other and their entangled interaction. The third wave, known as complexity (2010s-present), is a more balanced approach focusing on humans' virtues in collaboration with society. In other words, it is concerned with the impact of social structures and cultural norms, as well as institutional practices, on flourishing individuals in a broader societal level (Lomas et al., 2021).

The analysis of PP is paramount in various domains, including physiology, sociology, philosophy, and education. In the area of L2 acquisition, PP is believed to foster more engaging environments and assist both educators and learners in overcoming challenges during the process of acquisition (Gregersen, 2013). This notion consists of at least seven potential factors in SLA, including enjoyment, resilience, emotion regulation, well-being, grit, academic engagement, and loving pedagogy (Wang et al., 2021). Studying emotions in educational contexts within the PP framework, with a focus on both teachers and learners, can inform improved practice, learning, self-regulation, well-being, and organizational behavior.

Emotion Regulation: Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression

One of the most widely studied factors of PP in education in general, and EFL teaching in particular, is emotion regulation. Numerous studies have been carried out on the role of ER in

L2 teacher education, such as work engagement (e.g., Greenier et al., 2021; Zhang & Fathi, 2024), stress (e.g., Yousefi et al., 2023), self-efficacy and reflection (e.g., Fathi et al., 2021), burnout (e.g., Bing et al., 2022), foreign language teaching enjoyment (e.g., Heydarnejad et al., 2021), and teaching effectiveness (e.g., Aldrup et al., 2024). Theoretical studies have introduced several models of ER, the most important of which is Gross's (1998) process model, comprising five stages: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. The first four modules are classified as antecedent-focused, while the fifth is a response-focused strategy. In the local context of this study, Akbari et al. (2017), who qualitatively explored EFL teachers' ER strategies, confirmed the applicability of Gross's model to the Iranian context.

Gross and John (2003) introduced the ER strategies of reappraisal and suppression. Based on their classification, Cognitive Reappraisal (CR) is regarded as an antecedent-focused strategy which refers to the alteration in perceiving emotional stimuli and modifying their subsequent impacts. Studies depicted that CR is positively associated with subjective well-being (Taxer & Gross, 2018), occupational success (Heydarnejad et al., 2021), life satisfaction and psychological flourishing (Lin & Datu, 2023), and emotional intelligence (Schutte et al., 2009). Gibbons and Newberry (2023) suggested that, in order to overcome teachers' emotional distress and burnout, we can scrutinize teachers' appraisal behavior and help them overcome negative feelings by encouraging positive ER and self-compassion.

Expressive Suppression (ES), on the other hand, refers to the process of repression or non-expression of emotions when exposed to emotional triggers. This is a response-focused strategy that concentrates on decreasing behavioral reactions while intensifying physiological responses (Gross, 2002; Gross & John, 2003). ES was proven to positively correlate with stress levels and negatively affect teachers' well-being (Taxer & Gross, 2018; Yin, 2015).

Teacher Agency: Ecological Model

Psychological traditions view agency as an innate characteristic of individuals in performing effectively within organizational constraints (Bandura, 2009). However, the socio-cultural tradition emphasizes the role of cultural and contextual resources and their impacts on forming personal attitudes and behaviors, while the pragmatist approach considers the environment in relation to an individual's set of actions (Biesta et al., 2015). Therefore, teacher agency can be seen as influenced by a combination of individual practice, cultural and structural tools, and the available resources in the environment (Leijen et al., 2022; Leijen et al., 2024). Some rather recent propositions underline a view of teachers as "agents

of change", whose agentic behavior could expand beyond the territories of their classrooms in order to bring about positive changes in their environment and their students' well-being (see Pantić, 2021, for more details).

In line with the abovementioned theories, the ecological model of teacher agency classifies this concept into three dimensions (Priestley et al., 2015). *Iterational dimension* is concerned with personal and professional expertise and teachers' experience, which create their professional identities. *Projective dimension* considers teachers' behaviors based on short-term and long-term purposes of the education. *Practical-evaluative*, on the other hand, highlights the importance of cultural issues, including beliefs, discourses, language, and social structures, which are affected by relationships, roles, trust, and power, as well as physical environment and resources that assist teachers to take actions. Several studies on teacher agency have adopted the ecological model of agency to study a variety of teacher variables (for more examples, see Leijen et al., 2020; Leijen et al., 2022; Oosterhoff et al., 2020).

A longitudinal study in the Finnish context has shown that professional recognition perceived by school teachers is significantly related to their sense of agency by fostering their self-efficacy, motivation, and learning skills (Sullanmaa et al., 2023). Rajala and Kumpulainen's (2017) findings revealed that practical-evaluative, reproductive, critical-projective, and creative-projective are the main agentic orientations to educational change. Comparing the sense of agency in novice teachers and their experienced counterparts indicated that experience does not make a key contribution to the cultivation of agency (Liyuan et al., 2022).

Ahmad and Shah (2022) investigated the effect of professional development based on the Cambridge English Teacher Program in the EFL context of Saudi Arabian public university teachers. The results of this quantitative inquiry depicted that teachers' independence in curriculum design, methodology, and materials determines the extent to which agency is practiced. Also, pre-planned curricular activities enacted by institutional policies were discovered to make a major contribution to diminishing the opportunity of developing agentic behaviors of British teachers in the UK (Rushton & Bird, 2024).

Teacher Autonomy

As the third variable of the present inquiry, the autonomous behavior of teachers is evaluated based on their abilities in terms of decision-making in classroom contexts and the bigger scope of organizational environments (Evers et al., 2017). Professional autonomy, in general,

denotes the practitioners' liberty to be in control of their professional practices and environment based on their knowledge and principles; hence, an autonomous teacher freely modifies and fine-tunes the instruction and adapts the curriculum in a way that benefits the individuals involved (Gülşen & Atay, 2022). In this regard, curriculum and general teaching autonomy (Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2006) are two prominent branches of teaching autonomy. Teachers practice general autonomy by establishing standards of behavior, use of time and space, selecting methods, strategies, and evaluation and assessment modules. Curriculum autonomy on the other hand, focuses on freedom to choose content, guidelines, procedures, and materials used in pedagogical contexts.

Autonomy has been widely studied in relation to other teacher-driven variables. Examining its relation to teachers' stress, empowerment, work satisfaction, and professionalism pointed to a significant reverse association between curriculum autonomy and occupational stress in addition to a favorable connection among general autonomy, empowerment, and professionalism (Dierking & Fox, 2013; Evers et al., 2017; Helgøy & Homme, 2007; Pearson & Moomaw, 2006). Çolak (2025) concluded that all aspects of teacher autonomy are positively correlated with organizational trust and feelings of self-efficacy. Thus, promoting teacher autonomy seems to be crucial for educators who seek a positive organizational atmosphere and teachers' psychological well-being, while the fact that teacher autonomy could be firmly context-bound must not be ignored.

Overall, since autonomy is significantly related to various teacher variables, including job satisfaction, success, and their immunity, the role of this variable in studying teacher success and planning teacher training requires more investigation.

The Intersection of Agency and Autonomy

The entangled connection between agency and autonomy as two components of teachers' development has been receiving increased theoretical and empirical attention recently. Accordingly, although the distinction between these two notions is often blurred (Teng, 2019), they are often considered as two different variables. Agency refers to a set of purposeful actions with the goal of making changes to one's professional context (Priestley et al., 2015), while autonomy concerns the ability to control one's pedagogical decisions and professional conditions (Huang & Benson, 2013). Additionally, Benson (2007) considers agency as a departure point for the development of autonomy, while Menezes (2011) views autonomy as a base for the promotion of agency. Hence, it could be argued that the interrelation between these two variables is nonlinear and multifaceted. Empirical studies

highlight the confining role of curricular pre-planned activities in teachers' freedom to exercise creativity and take initiative in the classroom (Teng, 2019), hence threatening both their agency and autonomy.

As evident in this brief theoretical and empirical overview of previous research, positive psychology has received noticeable attention within the realm of educational psychology; yet, there are more dimensions of EFL teachers' emotion, as a nuanced phenomenon, to be explored. This includes the interconnection among ER and its subcomponents (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression), with the ecological model of agency (including iterational, projective, and practical evaluative) and teacher autonomy (curriculum and general teaching autonomy) in order to contribute to the ongoing discussion of PP in EFL teacher education with hopes of finding concrete quantifiable results, readily applicable to policy making and teacher training decisions. For this purpose, the following two research questions were formed:

1. Is there a significant relationship among emotion regulation (with cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression strategies) and the components of professional teacher agency and autonomy?

2. Does emotion regulation significantly predict EFL teachers' professional agency and autonomy?

Methods

Participants

For the purpose of this study, 232 participants, including 68 (29.3%) male and 164 female (70.7%) English teachers within an age range of 20-65 (Mean = 33) and an average experience of nine years, were recruited via convenience and snowball sampling. The participants came from 28 different provinces, out of a total of 31 provinces (as of this date) in Iran, ensuring a widespread and nationwide sampling. The participants were all teachers of English as a foreign language, as a standard and mandatory subject in local high schools. The online survey form was accompanied by a brief explanation of the purpose of the research and the potential application of the collected data. To conduct snowball sampling, the survey was initially shared with headteachers and teachers on their social media networks and they were asked to share the link with their colleagues. It was clearly communicated to the respondents that their submission of the form is synonymous with their consent to provide anonymous and confidential data, usable for research purposes and they were free to refrain from participation at any stage before the submission.

Instruments

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) by Gross and John (2003) was administered to measure two underlying components of cognitive reappraisal (six items) and expressive suppression (four items). It is a 10-item questionnaire, comprising a 7-point Likert scale, varying from one (Strongly disagree) to seven (Strongly agree). The reliability as estimated through Cronbach's alpha in this study was .88, including .78 for cognitive reappraisal and .79 for expressive suppression.

Teacher agency was assessed by employing the scale of Agency Related to Planning Teaching and Learning Activities (Leijen, et al., 2022). This scale consists of 20 items measuring three underlying components of teacher agency, including Iterational (five items), Projective (eight items), and Practical-evaluative (seven items), using a 7-point Likert scale varying from 1 (Do not agree) to 7 (Fully agree). The internal consistency of this questionnaire in the present study was .91 for the total scale, .76 for Iterational, .80 for projective, and .86 for practical-evaluative components.

To assess autonomy, the 18-item scale of Teaching Autonomy, introduced by Pearson and Moomaw (2006), featuring a four-point Likert scale from 1 (Definitely True) to 4 (Definitely False), was deployed. The scale, comprising six items to assess curriculum autonomy and 12 measuring general teaching autonomy, demonstrated an internal consistency of .87 in total, .77 for the curriculum autonomy subcomponent, and .78 for general teaching autonomy (See Appendix for the instruments of the study).

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

The three questionnaires were electronically formatted on Google Forms and the link was sent to as many EFL teachers as available through occupational networks on different social platforms, including LinkedIn. Teachers and head teachers in public schools from a variety of cities were targeted and asked to share the link with their colleagues in order to ensure maximum variation sampling. Data collection procedure lasted for approximately two months and it is estimated that a minimum of 800 teachers were targeted in this process, from which 232 viable responses were returned. Incomplete response forms or those filled by EFL teachers not currently employed in Iranian school settings were eliminated.

IBM SPSS 27 and AMOS 24 were employed for data analysis. Cronbach's alpha and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were deployed to determine the reliability and goodness of fit of the instruments, while Multiple Linear Regression and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were used to identify the power of the predictor variable on the outcome variables.

The fit indices employed to evaluate the structural model of the research included the maximum discrepancy function by degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN-DF), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), and Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI).

Results

As previously discussed, Cronbach's Alpha and CFA were used to determine the reliability and validity of the instruments. The models demonstrated acceptable reliability and goodness of fit, as summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaires and Their Subscales

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Emotion Regulation	0.88	10
Cognitive Reappraisal	0.78	6
Expressive Suppression	0.79	4
Teacher Agency	0.91	20
Iterational	0.76	5
Projective	0.80	8
Practical-Evaluative	0.86	7
Teaching Autonomy	0.87	18
Curriculum Autonomy	0.77	6
General Teaching Autonomy	0.78	12

Table 2. Evaluation of the CFA Goodness of Fit

Criteria		Threshold			
		Terrible	Acceptable	Excellent	Evaluation
CMIN	6948.539				
DF	1987				
CMIN/DF	3.497	> 5	> 3	> 1	Acceptable
RMSEA	.071	> 0.08	< 0.08	< 0.06	Acceptable
GFI	.922	< 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable
CFI	.920	< 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable
PNFI	.713	< 0.5	> 0.5	> 0.95	Acceptable
TLI	.925	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable

Subsequently, the correlations between the variables and their underlying components were analyzed, which are indicated in Table 3 and Figure 1. Figure 2 also depicts the interconnection between the subscales of ER, autonomy, and agency. As evident in Table 3, the relationship between the latent variables of the study was significant and positive. Teachers' emotion regualtion was significantly correlated with teacher agency ($r = 0.724$, $p = .000$) and autonomy ($r = 0.713$, $p = .000$). Agency and autonomy of teachers were also strongly and positively correlated with each other ($r = 0.851$, $p = .000$). A strong association was also observed between cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression as two subscales of emotion regulation ($r = .89$). In other words, emotional self-regulation was positively associated with teacher agency including .61 for iterational dimension, .55 for projective, and .73 for practical-evaluative dimensions. As Figure 2 illustrates, emotional self-regulation had a stronger relationship with the practical-evaluative aspect of teacher agency. When it comes to teacher autonomy, ER was positively associated with curriculum autonomy ($r = .82$) and with general autonomy ($r = .87$). Based on the results, it is concluded that general teaching autonomy shows a slightly stronger association with emotional self-regulation than curriculum autonomy. Cognitive reappraisal, an adaptive strategy in emotional self-regulation, was found to have a stronger relationship with other variables than expressive suppression, which is a maladaptive strategy to regulate emotions.

The relationships between CR and curriculum autonomy, as well as general teaching autonomy, were reported as $r = .52$ and $.61$, respectively. The antecedent-focused strategy of emotion regulation also showed a significant positive relationship with the components of teacher agency, including practical-evaluative with $r = .74$, iterational with $r = .66$, and projective agency with $r = .55$. Similarly, ES, another subscale of ER, was discovered to have a significant positive relationship with the components of teaching autonomy scale, indicating $r = .49$, and $.78$ with curriculum and general teaching autonomy respectively. This response-focused strategy was found to be significantly and positively related to practical-evaluative agency ($r = .53$, iterational $r = .69$, and projective agency $r = .75$).

Table 3. Reliability, Validity, and Correlation of the Main Variables

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	ER	AG	AU
ER	0.88	0.92	0.945	0.986	**0.964**		
AG	0.91	0.88	0.935	0.981	0.724***	**0.943**	
AU	0.87	0.81	0.933	0.971	0.713***	0.851***	**0.902**

ER: Emotional Regulation; AG: Agency; AU: Autonomy

*** Significant at .000 level
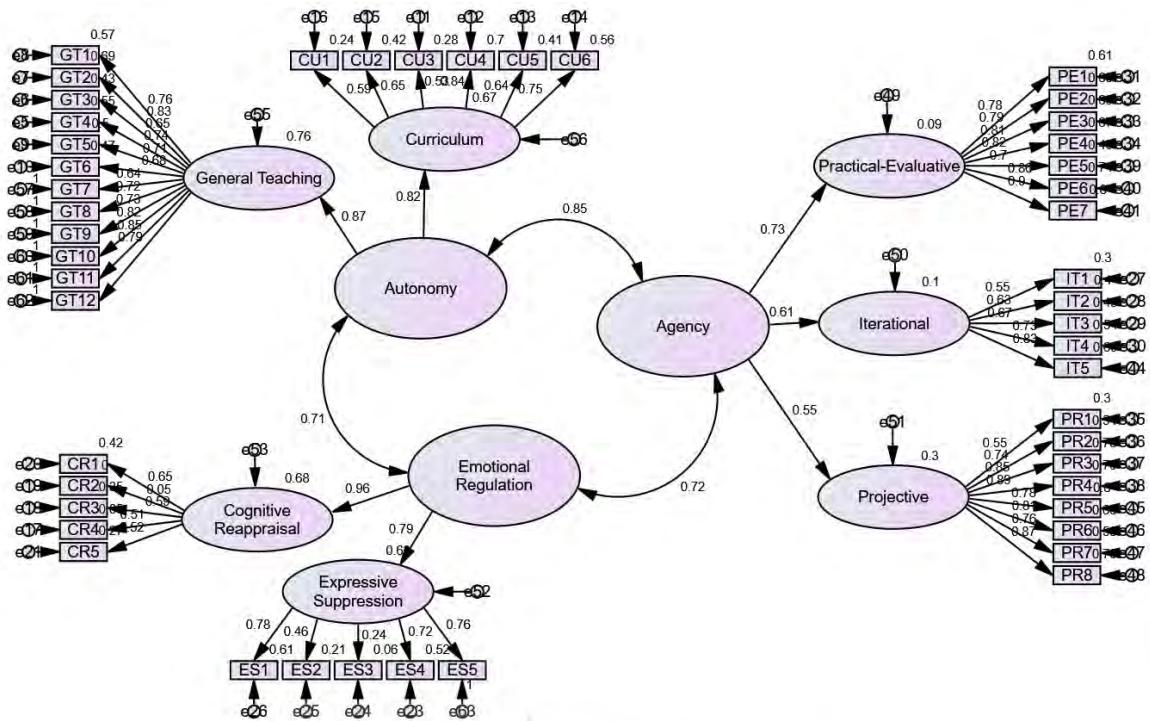
**Figure 1.** The Final Measurement Model with Standardized Estimates
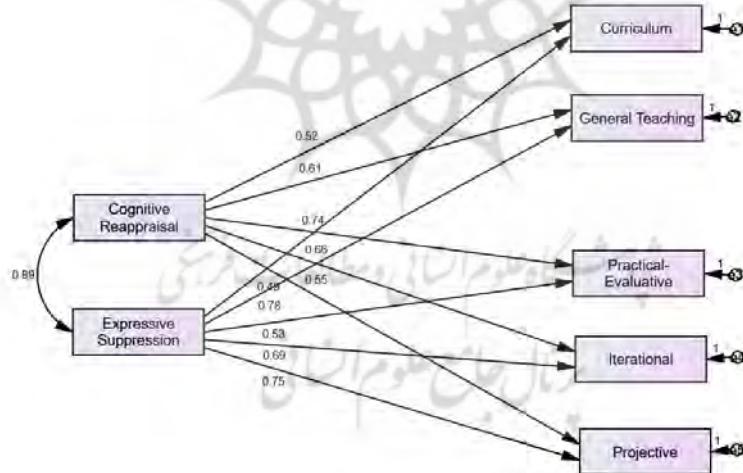
Figure 2. Relationships Among the Subscales of the Questionnaires

The results of testing the direct relationships in the conditional model, as shown in Table 4 and Figure 3 below, revealed that emotion regulation had a significant positive predictive power on teachers' autonomy (β = .691, *p* <.001), and professional agency (β = .764, *p* <.001). In other words, about 48 percent of changes in teachers' autonomy and

around 58 percent of changes in their agency can be predicted by their emotion regulation, which is considerably high.

Table 4. Results of Linear Regression Analysis with SEM

|			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
AU	<---	ER	0.691	0.356	3.015	.002
AG	<---	ER	0.764	0.342	3.767	.001
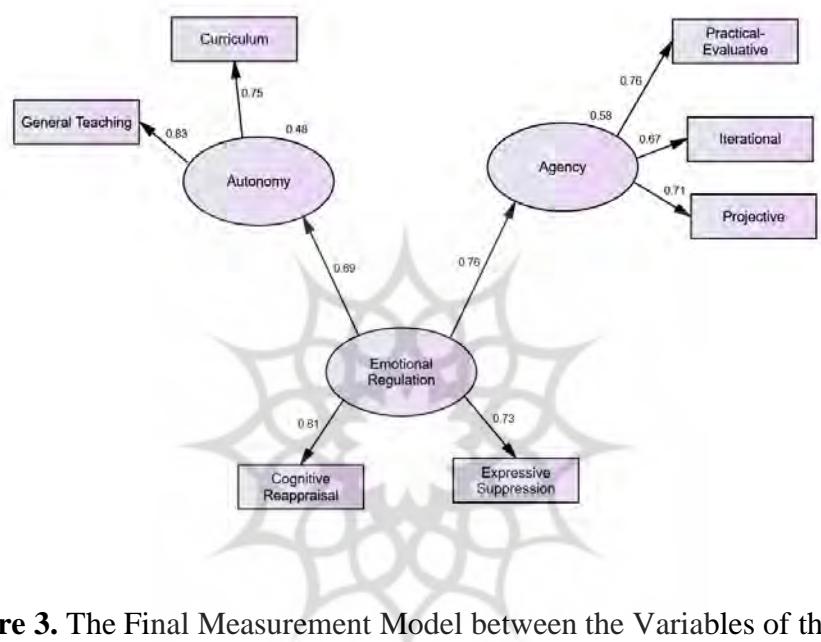
Figure 3. The Final Measurement Model between the Variables of the Study

According to Figure 3, ER had a significant positive influence on the subscales of autonomy, with $\beta = .75$ for curriculum autonomy and $\beta = .83$ for general teaching autonomy. Furthermore, a significant positive influence on the subscales of agency was also reported with $\beta = .76, .67,$ and $.71$ for practical-evaluative, iterational, and projective dimensions, respectively.

Discussion

The present inquiry aimed to scrutinize the significance of emotion regulation as a predictor of teacher agency and autonomy. Based on the results, it is inferred that ER has a high predictive power on both teacher agency and autonomy with a slightly stronger impact on the former. Therefore, it is concluded that teachers' emotions and their capability of managing affective variables have a direct relationship with the extent to which they feel or exercise

agency and autonomy. Moreover, since agency and autonomy were found to be strongly correlated ($r = 0.85$), they can be hypothesized to resonate and enhance one another. These findings provide more detailed information about the interconnection between the two variables and their susceptibility towards ER, which calls for an update to the notions of teacher agency and autonomy.

The fact that both regulatory strategies of emotion regulation were revealed to be favorably related to the underlying components of agency and autonomy emphasizes the significance of self-regulation in teachers' professional practices. Accordingly, CR was discovered to have a slightly stronger association with the practical-evaluative dimension of agency, which refers to the evaluation of professional situations and is cultivated as a result of the combination of iterational and projective aspects of agency (Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley et al., 2015). Thus, it may be concluded that the more the instructors are capable of deploying reappraisal techniques to encounter their affectivity, the more proficient they become in taking agentic actions based on cultural, structural, and material resources. ES, on the other hand, was found to have a stronger connection with the projective domain of agency. This may indicate that the use of suppression equips teachers with more tolerance for qualification, socialization, and subjectification in order to determine professional purposes. In the area of autonomy, both regulatory strategies showed a stronger relationship with general teaching autonomy. This may support the idea that general autonomy is a more personally-controlled variable while curriculum autonomy tends to be mostly restricted by pre-determined curricula.

The findings of the present study support those of several previous empirical inquiries (e.g., Aldrup et al., 2024; Koole, 2009; Taxer & Gross, 2018), which found a significant association among ER and several teacher variables such as well-being, stress, teaching effectiveness, and professional success. The entangled relationship between agency and autonomy also confirms the findings of a number of earlier inquiries (e.g., Benson, 2010; Huang & Benson, 2013; Menezes, 2011; Teng, 2019). For instance, Chen and Li (2025) have already emphasized the dynamic nature of the interconnection between language teachers' emotion and agency, which can be used to fill their research-teaching gap. On the other hand, the positive association found here between ES and agency as well as autonomy is mostly unprecedented in the literature, as this underlying component was widely found to be negatively correlated with subjective well-being (Taxer & Gross, 2018), teaching effectiveness (Aldrup et al., 2024), and interpersonal interactions and satisfactions (Gross & Levenson, 1993; Srivastava et al., 2009). In short, the findings suggest that even the less

favorable ER strategies, such as emotion suppression, can still work better in enhancing agentic and autonomous behavior than no strategies at all. The results of SEM analyses revealed that ER significantly predicts agency and autonomy in L2 teachers. This finding was in line with several earlier studies (e.g., Bing et al, 2022; Greenier et al., 2021) supporting the predictive power of ER on foreign language teaching enjoyment, and work engagement, as well as its reverse link to variables such as teaching burnout and stress. Nevertheless, the findings of this study dispute the results of Xie (2021), who did not report any significant predictive power of ER on teachers' work engagement, as an indicator of teachers' well-being and confirm that ER is closely connected with teachers' well-being, particularly in terms of their agency and autonomy.

Conclusion

The present inquiry sought to provide insights into the detailed role of positive psychology in language teachers' well-being, and concluded that optimal emotional well-being of EFL educators, as demonstrated in efficient emotion regulation, is connected with their feelings of autonomy and agency, both of which contribute to teachers' practices and are immensely necessary in creating an encouraging pedagogical environment. ER was found to be among the factors contributing to a more effective professional practice of Iranian EFL teachers as agents of change and independent decision-makers.

The results of this inquiry offer a number of theoretical and practical implications to researchers, policy makers, teacher trainers, and practitioners in the realm of education in general and second language teaching in particular. The quantitative findings of this study can help model the interconnection among teachers' emotional regulation, agency, and autonomy to inform teacher development and teacher support programs with implications for teachers' well-being, pedagogical success, and resilience against burnout. These findings from language teachers in Iran are particularly important in the light of the current predominant focus of positive psychology on limited contexts and its relatively little attention to contextual and cultural factors. The current absence or relative scarcity of emotional training courses for teachers and teacher educators in many contexts, including the one in the present study, is subject to fair criticism. This is particularly highlighted in the light of the additional demands often put on EFL teachers, especially novice ones, and their struggle to cope with a variety of challenges, including identity tensions (Hajmalek & Basiri, 2022). It is widely observed that the syllabi of teacher training courses are mainly concerned with cognitive and methodological practice, which seems to ignore significant factors directly

contributing to teacher effectiveness. Thus, a gradual amendment is expected to be taken by policymakers, curriculum developers, teacher educators, and educational administrators to integrate the findings in positive psychology and its practice as an integral component of teacher training courses.

Additionally, it is recommended to maintain a continued emotional support of the teachers' psychological well-being, empowering them to exercise their agency and autonomy in the most desirable and well-informed fashion. L2 teachers are also required to monitor their personal and occupational well-being by acquiring self-regulation strategies to prevent burnout and frustration and develop autonomous and agentic behavior. It is advisable that teachers be required to seek professional support and frequently brush up on their pedagogical expertise and skill sets in this regard. Although the results of the present study cannot be used to make any cause-and-effect claim, strong mutual relationships are suggested between ER, agency, and autonomy. Hence, it is recommended that educational organizations, especially the less-privileged public schools in developing countries, consider revisiting their administrative policies and practices in promoting teachers' agentic and autonomous behavior by empowering them in order to support their well-being and emotional regulation skills.

The results also revealed that teacher agency and autonomy are strongly correlated constructs. These findings might inspire researchers to revisit the concepts of agency and autonomy and their connection in more detail and perhaps redefine their boundaries. It is suggested that a revised construct of *agentic autonomy* can perhaps better grasp and harmonize the nature of these variables and provide a more solid and consistent baseline for future discussions of teachers' psychosocial and social traits. Agentic autonomy can be defined as teachers' ability to make autonomous pedagogical and curricular decisions leading to positive changes in their classrooms and educational contexts.

As far as the limitations and delimitations of this study are concerned, it is possible that the present results may not be generalizable to all contexts, as educational policies, teacher trainings, and expectations may be largely different in different contexts. However, insights from a variety of contexts can help build a more comprehensive picture of such practices. Also, the focus of this study has been delimited to public schools, which might provide an opportunity for future research to look into university and private sector instructors. Moreover, a rather wide range of ages and experiences was targeted in this study in order to achieve maximum variation sampling; future research can focus on particular subgroups of teachers.

Finally, observing the interconnection between the variables of teachers' positive psychology in the light of newly developed educational technologies can also offer a viable and fruitful line of research. For instance, the interaction between teachers' emotions and their digital literacy will probably provide a potential for future inquiries since modern generations need digital citizens and modern education requires digitally literate teachers. Despite all its advantages, technology can possibly impose increased anxiety on more traditional teachers, hence adding to their emotional labor. In the area of professional practices, teachers' agentic and autonomous abilities in relation to students' affective variables, including motivation, anxiety, self-efficacy, and overall well-being, might also offer a thought-provoking potential.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Questionnaires

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003)

	Items	Strongly Disagree	Quite Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Quite Agree	Strongly Agree
	Reappraisal factor							
1	I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I'm in.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	When I want to feel less negative emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	When I want to feel more positive emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	When I want to feel more positive emotion (such as joy or amusement), I change what I'm thinking about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	When I want to feel less negative emotion (such as sadness or anger), I change what I'm thinking about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	When I'm faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Suppression factor							
7	I control my emotions by not expressing them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	When I am feeling negative emotions, I make sure not to express them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9	I keep my emotions to myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10	When I am feeling positive emotions, I am careful not to express them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Agency Related to Planning Teaching and Learning Activities (Leijen et al., 2022)

	Items	Strongly Disagree	Quite Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Quite Agree	Strongly Agree
	Iterational dimension							
	When considering alternatives and making decisions while planning learning and teaching activities, I am influenced by:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Values and beliefs developed based on my personal life experiences	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	Knowledge and skills developed based on my personal life experiences	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	Knowledge and skills gained from teacher training	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	Values and beliefs developed during teacher training	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	My confidence in planning learning and teaching activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Projective dimension							
	When considering alternatives and making decisions while planning learning and teaching activities, I am influenced by:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	Short-term goals related to learners' acquisition of content knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	Short-term goals related to supporting learners' self-determination	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	Short-term goals related to developing learners' social skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9	Short-term goals related to my personal teaching principles	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10	Long-term goals related to learners' acquisition of education qualification (e.g., secondary education)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Items	Strongly Disagree	Quite Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Quite Agree	Strongly Agree
11	Long-term goals related to supporting the development of learners' personalities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12	Long-term goals related to learners becoming active members of the society	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13	My long-term goals related to the meaning of my life and serving society	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Practical-evaluative dimension							
	When considering alternatives and making decisions while planning learning and teaching activities, I am supported by:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14	Classroom atmosphere (e.g., willingness to cooperate)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15	Class structure (e.g., group size, percentage of boys and girls)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16	The physical environment of my class	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17	School organizational culture (e.g., collaborative orientation)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18	School administrative support (e.g., lesson plan, workload, support professionals)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19	Support from colleagues at school	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20	Material resources of my school (e.g., computers and other equipment)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Teaching Autonomy Scale (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006)

	Items	Definitely true	More or less true	More or less false	Definitely false
	Curriculum Autonomy				
1	In my teaching, I use my own guidelines and procedures.	1	2	3	4
2	In my situation, I have little say over the content and skills that are selected for teaching.	1	2	3	4
3	My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I select myself.	1	2	3	4
4	What I teach in my class is determined for the most part by myself.	1	2	3	4
5	The materials I use in my class are chosen for the most part by me.	1	2	3	4
6	The content and skills taught in my class are those I select.	1	2	3	4
	General Autonomy				
7	I am free to be creative in my teaching approach.	1	2	3	4
8	The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control.	1	2	3	4
9	Standards of behavior in my classroom are set primarily by me.	1	2	3	4
10	My job does not allow for much discretion on my part.	1	2	3	4
11	The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control.	1	2	3	4
12	I seldom use alternative procedures in my teaching.	1	2	3	4
13	I follow my own guidelines on instruction.	1	2	3	4
14	In my situation, I have only limited latitude in how major problems are solved.	1	2	3	4
15	In my class, I have little control over how classroom space is used.	1	2	3	4
16	The evaluation and assessment activities used in my class are selected by others.	1	2	3	4
17	I select the teaching methods and strategies I use with my students.	1	2	3	4
18	I have little say over the scheduling of use of time in my classroom.	1	2	3	4