

Self-oriented, Other-oriented, and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism in Iranian EFL Teachers: Relationship with Burnout and Engagement

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Abstract

Many teachers suffer from stress and burnout. Perfectionism is one of the personality characteristics associated with increased stress, maladaptive coping, and burnout. This study aimed at identifying the associations between three dimensions of perfectionism (self-oriented, other-oriented, & socially prescribed), three components of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment), and three components of engagement (vigor, dedication, & absorption) in English teachers in Iran. To carry out the study, a sample of 167 teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) working in language institutes, universities, and public schools in different cities in Iran completed a battery of questionnaires including the *Maslach Burnout Inventory*, *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale*, and *Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale*. Pearson correlation analyses were performed on the data. The results indicated that there was a significant negative correlation between burnout and engagement, a significant positive correlation between perfectionism and burnout, and a significant negative correlation between perfectionism and engagement in EFL teachers. The results and implications of this study extend the literature on burnout, perfectionism, and engagement and the relationship between paired members of possible sets and can be of great assistance to EFL teachers and educators in general.

Keywords: Perfectionism; EFL teachers, teacher burnout, engagement

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1. Introduction

Awareness about the levels of stress that teachers experience in their job, the consequences of that experience, and the factors which contribute to teachers' stress or interact with its consequences can constitute a significant reason for research in teacher education and related disciplines, including language teacher education. A brief survey of literature reveals that teaching is widely considered a stressful job (Borg & Riding, 1991). About as many as a third of the teachers surveyed in various studies around the world are reported to regard teaching as highly stressful (Borg, 1990). High levels of occupational stress often lead to job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, turnover, and burnout (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Teacher burnout represents a serious threat to the quality of education for students, teachers, and the education system as a whole. The severe problem is the fact that teacher's demotivation, stress, and burnout seem to be contagious and spread to other teachers and students (Dworkin, 2009). Thus, it is of crucial importance to study and learn about the nature, conditions and consequences of burnout to be able to create a healthier and more productive teaching-learning environment. Research has now started to look at personality characteristics which may predict differences in teachers' stress and burnout (Cano-García, Padilla-Munoz, & Carrasco-Ortiz, 2005).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Perfectionism

The personality construct of perfectionism has been conceptualized as the striving for flawlessness and the setting of high personal standards (Flett & Hewitt, 2002), which has both adaptive and maladaptive components (Rice & Preusser, 2002). Burns (1983) defines perfectionism as a network of cognitions, including expectations and interpretations of events and

evaluations of oneself and others, characterized by the setting of unrealistic standards, rigid and indiscriminate adherence to these standards and the equating of self-worth and performance (Haase & Prapavessis, 2004). Perfectionist people are often characterized by behavioral tendencies which trigger a low tolerance for mistakes, a preference for order and organization (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990), and a desire for admiration (Rice & Preusser, 2002).

2.2 Dimensions of Perfectionism

Frost and colleagues (1990) identified perfectionism as having five dimensions and constructed their Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS). In view of that, the first dimension of perfectionism, which is considered the major dimension, has to do with mistakes. It constitutes a tendency to interpret mistakes as equivalent to failure, and the belief that one will lose the respect of others following failure. The second dimension is having too high personal standards, which often cannot be met satisfactorily. Their third dimension is parental expectations, which deals with the extent to which the parents of the individual are perceived as setting high expectations. The fourth dimension relate to the extent to which perfectionist people perceive their parents as criticizing too much. The fifth dimension of perfectionism in the conceptualization of Frost et al. (1990) is doubts about actions, which is the tendency of perfectionists to doubt the quality of their performance.

Hewitt and Flett (2004) describe the distinction among the dimensions of perfectionism in terms of the individual to whom perfectionism is directed or is derived from. According to this conceptualization, although the behaviors exhibited are frequently similar among the dimensions, the behaviors can be distinguished from each other by whether the perfectionist expectations derive from the self or others, and whether the behaviors are directed toward

the self or others (Hewitt & Flett, 2004). The first one of these dimensions is self-oriented perfectionism, in which the individual has unrealistic standards, strives for these standards, is overly self-critical, tends to overly focus on their flaws, and tries to avoid failure. The second dimension is other-oriented perfectionism, in which the individual has unrealistic standards and expectations about the abilities of others, and is often overly evaluative of others' performance. The third dimension is socially prescribed perfectionism, in which the individual believes that others have perfectionist expectations and motives about them, and they feel they must attain these standards (Blankstein & Winkworth, 2004; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Hewitt, Flett & Turnbull-Donovan, 1992; Kobori, Yamagata, & Kijima, 2005).

2.3 Perfectionism and Burnout

As mentioned earlier, perfectionists often put great importance on the evaluation of themselves and others (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a). Consequently, perfectionists may perceive a great deal of pressure to excel because they feel that they have to live up both to their own high standards and to those of others. Thus, it comes as no surprise that perfectionism has been associated with higher levels of stress and burnout (Gould et al., 1996; Mitchelson & Burns, 1998).

Evidence suggests that when individuals strive for perfection and avoid engaging in negative, self-focused reactions to imperfection, they are able to maintain adaptive patterns of cognition, affect and behavior which are conducive to sustained investment (Stoeber et al., 2007; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008; Stoll, Lau, & Stoeber, 2008). However, it is not the act of striving for perfection that spoils one's motivation, but the perception that one is falling short of desired standards. Because perfectionism induces a rigid adherence to excessively high goals and an irrational belief in the importance of their

attainment, it frequently leads to the employment of harsh and excessive self-criticism, rumination, and a focus on personal and interpersonal inadequacies when performance in a valued domain is perceived to be discrepant from desired goals (Flett & Hewitt, 2007). It is this process, which not only contributes to elevated stress levels in teachers (Hall, Kerr, & Matthews, 1998), but, over time, renders them increasingly vulnerable to the experience of burnout because achievement needs remain unmet and performance expectations go unfulfilled (Lemyre, Hall, & Roberts, 2008).

Maslach (1982) defined burnout as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind" (p. 3). Emotional exhaustion refers to a lack of energy and a feeling that one's emotional resources are used up (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The energy that burned-out individuals once had to devote to their work is now depleted, leaving them without the resources to perform their work. Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, (2001) identify emotional exhaustion as the core element of burnout and the construct most frequently described by individuals who refer to themselves as burned out. Kristensen et al. (2005) argue that burnout involves only emotional exhaustion. Shirom (1989) considers emotional exhaustion the hallmark of burnout and maintains that this exhaustion results from high levels of work demands that cause an individual to feel lethargic and without coping resources. In addition to emotional exhaustion, high levels of depersonalization and low levels of personal accomplishment contribute to burnout (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Maslach et al., 2001). As Halbesleben and Buckley (2004) explain

Depersonalization (also known as *cynicism* and *disengagement* in the literature) often occurs in response to the aforementioned emotional exhaustion and describes a process whereby employees

detach from their jobs and begin to develop callous or uncaring attitudes toward their job, their performance, and those associated with the job (e.g., clients, coworkers, and more specifically related to this study, students). Reduced personal accomplishment (also known as *personal efficacy* in the literature) refers to diminished perceptions of ability on the job. (pp. 859-860)

Although there is some research on different external/environmental causes of teacher burnout, limited literature exists about the internal/emotional aspects of teachers' lives and its connection with teacher burnout (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). Consequently, besides contextual factors such as job demands and job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001), research has now started to look at personality characteristics which may predict differences in teachers' stress and burnout (e.g., Cano-García et al., 2005). One personality characteristic that has been suggested to play an important role in teacher stress and burnout is perfectionism (Friedman, 2000).

2.4 Engagement, the hypothesized opposite of burnout

Maslach and Leiter (1997) consider engagement and burnout "the opposite poles of a continuum of work-related well-being, with burnout representing the negative pole and engagement the positive pole" (cited in Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003, p. 4). Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1997) believe that in contrast to burnout, engagement is an energetic state in which one is dedicated to excellent performance at work and confident of one's effectiveness. Salanova et al. (2010) agree with the idea that engagement and burnout, which are two key indicators of teacher functioning, lie at opposite ends of the spectrum. In other words, it is believed that, while burned-out workers feel exhausted and cynical, their engaged counterparts feel vigorous and enthusiastic about their work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Schaufeli et al. (2001) argue that work engagement is the opposite of burnout and the measurement and the structures of the two concepts differ. They contend that the idea of assessing burnout and engagement by the same questionnaire has at least two important negative consequences. Firstly, it is not plausible to expect that both concepts are perfectly negatively correlated as it is likely to have non-engaged workers and employee who are not burned out. Secondly, the relationship between both constructs cannot be empirically studied when they are measured with the same questionnaire. Thus, for instance, both concepts cannot be included simultaneously in one model in order to study their concurrent validity. For these reasons burnout and work engagement are later defined as two distinct concepts that should be assessed independently (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

3. The Purpose of the Study

Although it is crucial to know how individual differences contribute to teacher burnout and engagement, not many studies have explored the relationship between perfectionism and teacher burnout and engagement. The primary goal of this study was to explore how the multidimensional construct of perfectionism is correlated to teacher burnout and engagement and the components of each. The study investigated how the three forms of perfectionism proposed by Hewitt and Flett (1991a), namely self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism, were associated with burnout (exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy) and engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) in a sample of Iranian EFL teachers. The following questions were formulated to examine the relationship between these constructs.

1. What is the relationship between burnout and engagement in Iranian EFL teachers?

2. What is the relationship between perfectionism and burnout in Iranian EFL teachers?
3. What is the relationship between perfectionism and engagement in Iranian EFL teachers?
4. What are the relationships between the three components of perfectionism (self-oriented, other-oriented, & socially prescribed perfectionism) and the three components of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) in Iranian EFL teachers?
5. What are the relationships between the three components of perfectionism (self-oriented, other-oriented, & socially prescribed perfectionism) and the three components of engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) in Iranian EFL teachers?
6. What are the relationships between the three dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, & reduced personal accomplishment) and the three components of engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) in Iranian EFL teachers?

4. Method

4.1 Participants

To be eligible to participate in the study, participants needed to be EFL teachers teaching in language institutes, universities or public schools. The teachers were expected to have at least one year of teaching experience. Three-hundred copies of each questionnaire sets were distributed to these EFL teachers in Semnan, Mashhad, Neishabour, Damqaan, Tehran, Sanandaj, Gorgan, Ahvaz, Shiraaz, Isfahan, Babolsar, and Zahedan. When it was not possible to hand in the questionnaires directly, they were sent via e-mail. One-hundred and sixty-seven completed forms were returned. They were completed by 110 female and 57 male teachers. The teachers varied from

young teachers (the youngest was 25 years old) to those close to retirement (the oldest was 66 years). The mean age was 44.5 years. Their average number of years in the teaching profession was 15.29.

4.2 Instrumentation

The data for this study were collected through three well-known self-report questionnaires, which enjoy adequate psychometric properties—Maslach Burnout Inventory, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator's Survey (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) is the most common measure used to measure levels of teacher burnout (Byrne, 1991). This scale is a widely used measure of burnout across occupational groups and has demonstrated good reliability and validity in numerous studies (see Schaufeli et al., 1996, for a review). It consists of 22 seven-point Likert-type items: five items measuring Emotional exhaustion, e.g., *I feel like I'm at the end of my rope*, (Cronbach's alpha =.87), five items tapping cynicism, e.g., *I doubt the significance of my work* (alpha =.73), and six items measuring (lack of) *professional efficacy*, e.g., *I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job* (reversed, alpha =.71).

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was used to measure levels of engagement for each participant. The UWES is a recently developed measure of engagement that has demonstrated reliability and validity in a number of studies (see Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007, for a review). The 17 seven-point Likert items in the UWES comprise three subscale: Vigor (6 items), Dedication (5 items), and Absorption (6 items).

Vigor is assessed by six items such as *At my work, I feel bursting with energy*. These items refer to high levels of energy and resilience, the willingness to invest effort, not being easily fatigued, and persistence in the face of difficulties. *Dedication* is assessed by five items including *My job inspires me*. These items refer to deriving a sense of significance from one's

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work, feeling enthusiastic and proud about one's job, and feeling inspired and challenged by it. *Absorption* is measured by six items such as "*I am immersed in my work*". These items refer to being totally and happily immersed in one's work and having difficulties detaching oneself from it so that time passes quickly and one forgets everything else that is around.

Perfectionism was measured using the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett 1991b). The MPS is a seven-point 45-item measure of self-oriented perfectionism (15 items), other-oriented perfectionism (15 items), and socially prescribed perfectionism (15 items). Responses on the self-oriented perfectionism subscale reflect the extent to which individuals place high standards on themselves (e.g., *One of my goals is to be perfect in everything I do*). Responses on the other-oriented perfectionism subscale represent the extent to which an individual places high standards of achievement on significant others (e.g., *I have high expectations of the people who are important to me*). Finally, responses to the socially prescribed perfectionism subscale reflect the extent to which people feel that high standards are being imposed on them by significant others and that acceptance is based on the attainment of those standards (e.g., *I feel that people are too demanding of me*). The MPS is a widely used measure of dispositional perfectionism and has demonstrated reliability and validity in numerous studies (see Hewitt & Flett, 2004, for a review).

In order for the questionnaires to fit the study, minor changes were made by the researchers. For example, the words 'my job' and 'recipients' were replaced by 'teaching' and 'students'. Moreover, where the items included idiomatic expressions or words which were thought to belong to hard-level vocabulary, they were paraphrased so that the participants with lower proficiency would also be able to comprehend the items easily and without feelings of ambiguity.

4.3 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire forms were administered to the participants either by the researchers or by their colleagues, who had been briefed about their task. When it was not possible to hand in the questionnaires directly, they were e-mailed to the participants. Each of the 300 participants received three questionnaires: the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, and the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. After about three months, one-hundred and sixty-seven forms of each questionnaires were returned with a return rate of 48%.

4.4 Data Analysis

Bivariate Pearson correlation analysis in SPSS version 19 was run on the obtained data to find associations between burnout and engagement, perfectionism and burnout, perfectionism and engagement, the components of perfectionism and the dimensions of burnout, and the components of perfectionism and the dimensions of engagement.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics including the ranges, means, and standard deviations for scores on the measures for teacher burnout, engagement and perfectionism as well as the three dimensions of each. The participants reported high levels of perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism, and moderate levels of self-oriented perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism. They also reported moderate to low levels of burnout, emotional exhaustion and lack of personal accomplishment. In addition, they reported being highly engaged, vigorous, absorbed, and dedicated to teaching.

Table 1
Means, Ranges (Min and Max), and Standard Deviations of Study Variables (N= 167)

Variable	Mean	Min.	Max.	S.D.
Perfectionism	217.65	132.00	289.00	29.05408
Burnout	28.2500	2.00	82.00	15.71752
Engagement	76.8526	8.00	100.00	16.95223
SOP	71.5321	39.00	105.00	13.07764
OOP	70.0769	28.00	105.00	13.98503
SPP	86.8141	23.00	105.00	20.06306
EE	14.2500	.00	44.00	9.73164
DP	4.0897	.00	21.00	3.72675
LPA	9.9103	.00	30.00	6.74166
VI	28.4679	7.00	36.00	5.51060
DE	24.4551	4.00	36.00	5.04987
AP	24.4423	1.00	36.00	7.07037

SOP = Self-oriented perfectionism; OOP = Other-oriented perfectionism; SPP = Socially prescribed perfectionism; EE = Emotional exhaustion; DP = Depersonalization; LPA = Lack of personal accomplishment; VI = Vigor; DE = Dedication; AB = Absorption.

5.2 Inferential Results

5.2.1 Answering research questions 1, 2, and 3

The relationship between perfectionism and burnout, perfectionism and engagement, and burnout and engagement were assessed via correlational analyses (Table 2). Bivariate correlations indicated that perfectionism was positively and significantly correlated with burnout ($r = .697$, $p < .01$). In contrast, perfectionism was negatively correlated with engagement ($r = -.457$, $p < .01$). Burnout and engagement were also negatively correlated ($r = -.654$, $p < .01$).

Table 2

Correlations between Perfectionism and Burnout, Perfectionism and Engagement, and Burnout and Engagement

	Per.	Burn.	Eng.
Per.	-	.697**	-.457**
Burn.	-	-	-.654**

Note. Per. = Perfectionism; Burn. = Burnout; Eng. = Engagement; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

For more in-depth insight into the above-mentioned correlations, the relationship between the three dimensions of perfectionism and burnout and engagement were also investigated through correlational analysis (see Table 3). The analyses revealed that while other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism were positively and significantly associated with burnout (OOP: $r = .580, p < .01$; SPP: $r = .585, p < .01$), self-oriented perfectionism had negative but insignificant correlation with burnout ($r = -.010$). Moreover, other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism were both negatively and significantly associated with engagement (OOP: $r = -.401, p < .01$; SPP: $r = -.392, p < .01$) while no significant correlation was found between self-oriented perfectionism and engagement ($r = .031$)

Table 3

Correlations between the three Dimensions of Perfectionism and Burnout, and three Dimensions of Perfectionism and Engagement

	SOP	OOP	SPP
Burn.	-.010	.580**	.585**
Eng.	.031	-.401**	-.392**

Note. SOP= Self-oriented perfectionism; OOP= Other-oriented perfectionism; SPP= socially prescribed perfectionism; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

5.2.2 Answering research questions 4, 5, and 6

To answer research questions 4, 5, and 6, the relationship between the three dimensions of perfectionism and the three components of burnout and the three components of engagement were assessed in pairs through the same statistical procedure mentioned above. The results of the analysis are displayed in Table 4. Although the results of Bivariate correlations indicate no significant correlations between self-oriented perfectionism and the three dimensions of burnout (SOP and EE: $r = -.023$; SOP and DP: $r = -.008$; SOP and LPA: $r = .014$), they reveal significant positive correlations between the components of perfectionism and the dimensions of burnout (OOP and EE: $r = .513$; OOP and DP: $r = .447$; OOP and LPA: $r = .377$; SPP and EE: $r =$

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.524; SPP and DP: $r = .336$; SPP and LPA: $r = .423$). The results reveal no significant correlations between self-oriented perfectionism and the dimensions of engagement (SOP and VI: $r = -.051$; SOP and DE: $r = -.001$; SOP and AB: $r = -.009$), but show significantly negative correlations between other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism and the dimensions of engagement (OOP and VI: $r = -.419$; OOP and DE: $r = -.381$; OOP and AB: $r = -.231$; SPP and VI: $r = -.456$; SPP and DE: $r = -.444$; SPP and AB: $r = -.319$).

Table 4

The Relationship between the three Dimensions of Perfectionism and Respectively the Components of Burnout and Engagement

	Per.	Burn.	Eng.	SOP	OOP	SPP	EE	DP	LPA	VI	DE	AB
Per.	*	.697**	-	.174*	.817**	.729**	.610**	.460**	.490**	-.541**	-	-
Burn.		*	-.457**	-.010	.580**	.585**	.860**	.665**	.722**	-.717**	-.498**	-.343**
Eng.			*	-.212**	-.402**	-.468**	-	-.285**	-	.762**	.863**	.846**
SOP				*	.061	.424**	-.023	-.008	.014	-.051	-.001	-.009
OOP					*	.483**	.513**	.447**	.377**	-.419**	-	-
SPP						*	.524**	.336**	.423**	-.456**	-.381**	-.231**
EE							*	.425**	.327**	-.545**	-.523**	-.427**
DP								*	.382**	-.366**	-.272**	-.240**
LPA									*	-.682**	-.637**	-.545**
VI										*	.847**	.724**
DE											*	.719**
AB												*

EE= Emotional exhaustion; DP= Depersonalization; LPA= Lack of personal accomplishment; VI= Vigor; DE= Dedication; AB= Absorption; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

6. Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore the relationship between perfectionism and teacher burnout and its hypothesized opposite, engagement. The significantly negative correlation between burnout and engagement not only proves the previous findings on the two concepts (Bakker et al., 2008), but also reveals more details on the correlations among the components of the

two. The results show stronger correlations of emotional exhaustion and lack of personal accomplishment with the components of engagement than correlation of depersonalization with those dimensions in engagement. In other words, according to the findings, those teachers who feel emotionally exhausted, incompetent at work and unable to solve problems that arise in their classrooms or workplace in general are more prone to be less engaged in teaching.

Moreover, the findings indicate that individual differences in perfectionism significantly correlate with teacher burnout and engagement. Teachers with higher levels of perfectionism were found to feel more burned out and consequently less engaged; on the other hand, those with lower levels of perfectionism showed lower levels of burnout and higher levels of engagement.

However, it should be noted that the relationship is not simple and one-dimensional as different facets of perfectionism show different patterns of relationship with the dimensions of burnout and engagement. The results reveal that whereas other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism significantly correlate with burnout and engagement, self-oriented perfectionism does not correlate with either of them. In other words, teachers who have very high and/or unrealistic expectations of their students expect them to endeavor and pull out all the stops and are rather authoritarian and demanding; teachers who think their students, colleagues or managers/supervisors want them to be perfect, depend their self-worth on meeting others' expectations, consider making mistakes as highly unacceptable, and have a marked fear of rejection and looking foolish tend to be more burned out.

Therefore, it can be claimed that the habitual patterns in teachers judgments about students behavior and progress as well as others' judgments

of their own behavior, level of knowledge and performance may contribute significantly to teachers' repeated experience of unpleasant emotions, such as stress, and those emotions may eventually lead to burnout which consequently leads to a lack of or insufficient engagement in the job. These findings corroborate, to some degree, findings from previous studies that looked at other populations, such as athletes, and found that concern over mistakes in the face of others was associated with high levels of burnout (Appleton, Hall, & Hill, 2009). As with other educational practitioners, language teachers' and language teacher educators' awareness of such psychosocial mechanisms and relationships can effectively diminish the negative consequences of debilitating perfectionism, which may manifest itself in the form of emotional exhaustion and lack of interest in language learning processes and outcomes.

However, according to the results of this study, Iranian EFL teachers who are high in burnout are not high in perfectionism. Thus, it could be discussed that teachers who strive for perfection seem to perceive potential stressors as challenges, not as threats and losses, and show a preference for active coping, not avoidant coping. As a result, they may not become stressed out when facing problems in the classroom or workplace in general, but instead actively try to change the situation for the better. This finding is in line with findings from a review on positive conceptions of perfectionism which showed that perfectionist strivings are mostly related to positive characteristics, processes, and outcomes (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Moreover, the findings dovetail with findings from a number of other studies which show that striving for perfectionism is associated with higher self-confidence, higher achievement motivation, sustained goal-directed behavior, and better test results (e.g., Stoeber et al., 2007). Hence self-oriented perfectionism may be regarded as a kind of 'healthy pursuit of excellence' which can result in

greater degrees of engagement rather than a negative concept leading to burnout.

In line with recent conceptualizations of perfectionism, which include both positive and negative dimensions, the findings of this study indicate that not all aspects of perfectionism are necessarily negative; the results show that self-oriented perfectionism has no significant correlations with burnout and any of its dimensions, and even enjoys some negative correlations with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Lack of association between self-oriented perfectionism and burnout and presence of link between other-oriented perfectionism and burnout are justifiable and supported by intuition because, in the case of the former, teachers have relatively free access to their psychological and emotional resources, while in the case of the latter they spend psychological energy to counter real or imagined social pressure and fulfil others' expectations. This scenario may be even more relevant to language teaching, which is a hugely social activity and involves different parties and in which the achievement or lack of achievement of communicative goals is publicly felt.

Several models of the stress process (e.g., Ellis, 1968; Kyriacou 1987; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) have posited that burnout results from teachers' negative appraisals, interpretations and reactions to stress. The physiological consequences one experiences during stress are reported to be closely related to people's cognitive processes and coping mechanisms. So, it is not the stressor that is directly responsible for burnout, but the irrational interpretation and subsequent reactions. Furthermore, studies have also explored perfectionism variables as potential factors that may influence one's interpretation and experience of stress. For example, Flett and Hewitt (2002) identified four mechanisms by which perfectionism may influence stress to produce or maintain psychological distress. These mechanisms include (a)

stress generation, (b) stress anticipation, (c) stress perpetuation, and (d) stress enhancement.

7. Conclusion and Implications

The findings of the study provide evidence on the relationship between perfectionism, as a personality factor, and EFL teachers' burnout and engagement. They indicate that perfectionism not only associates with teacher stress but also with teacher burnout. Teachers' perceptions that others expect them to be perfect is significantly related to the experience of burnout, particularly if teachers perceive this pressure as coming from their students, students' parents or educational managers/supervisors. Ironically, those who feel they have to be perfect to be accepted by others and want others to be perfect and flawless, are suffering more from burnout syndrome and experience lack of personal accomplishment and become cynical about their job and careless about the people they should care for.

The results imply that teacher trainers and educational supervisors need to raise teachers' awareness of the significance of perfectionism and its association with burnout and engagement in the classroom. The existing system in Iran trains EFL teachers mainly within the boundaries of teaching methodologies and what is good for learners, leaving teachers and the importance of their psychological health out. EFL teachers who are aware of the associations of perfectionism with burnout and engagement can take their perfectionism under control and make good use of it, instead of letting it take over and do harm to their psychological and physical health.

Exploring the role of perfectionism, teacher burnout and teacher engagement will potentially be of benefit to educators, psychologists, administrators, and other related professionals. At a prevention level, if the dimensions in teacher burnout and teacher engagement are really connected to one or more of the three orientations of perfectionism, then identification

of at-risk teacher populations based on these differences may be possible and teacher burnout prevention programs may be implemented targeting those at risk. At an intervention level, understanding how perfectionism is linked to burnout can help teacher consultants to confront and challenge the negative beliefs that characterize perfectionists. Any orientations of perfectionism positively correlating with teacher engagement can be included in intervention programs designed to boost teacher engagement and/or reduce teacher burnout. Although it is unlikely that intervention will change a teacher's perfectionist tendencies, it may help teachers develop a better awareness of how perfectionism may positively or negatively impact teaching behaviors.

Future studies are suggested to work on adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism in EFL teachers and their possible correlation with teacher burnout and engagement in a more fine-tuned way. As teachers have different motives for working in the classroom (Woods, 1999), prospective studies can also explore burnout and engagement in the light of teacher motivation as well as other individual differences. Follow-up studies with adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists that involve interviews can prove useful in uncovering the thought processes which may interact with the daily stressors associated with teaching that ultimately result in burnout.

Since self-report scales were used as the data collection instruments, the results were limited by participants' willingness to disclose honestly and accurately with respect to the reported behaviors and feelings being measured. Some of the participants may have been hesitant to report with accuracy their experiences of burnout, given the negative implications that are associated with this construct. Therefore, the results reported may not reflect the participants' actual behavior very accurately. Additionally, the

sample size of 167 teachers was relatively small and may not represent many aspects of teacher population.

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