

Minimizing Burnout through Reflection: The Rocky Road ahead of EFL Teachers

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Abstract

Teacher reflection has been recently promoted based on the claim that it positively affects various aspects of teaching and provides solutions to some of the challenges teachers encounter in their career. However, these arguments are mainly theory-driven with little empirical evidence indicating the constructive role of teachers' involvement in reflection. Inspired by this scarcity of research, the first objective of this mixed-methods study was to examine how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' engagement in reflective practice can be associated with their burnout. To this end, 223 Iranian EFL teachers completed reflection and burnout inventories. The results indicated that reflection is negatively correlated with burnout implying that involvement in reflective practice is associated with less burnout. Having found this, we conducted some interviews to explore the factors which impede teachers' reflection. Analysis of interview data revealed that impediments to reflection can be divided into the four categories of teacher related, job related, curriculum related and student related issues. Implications of this study for teacher education research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Reflection, Burnout, EFL teachers, Mixed Methods

Received on March 22, 2017

Accepted on March 12, 2018

1. Introduction

Teachers play a significant role in all aspects of education. They influence not only students' achievement and success (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004) but also the future of generations and nations. Their individual

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and organizational conditions are, therefore, of utmost importance since they might have tremendous consequences for the educational system. Teachers should shoulder the many responsibilities of teaching effectively while handling various life tensions which might impact their performance (Nguyen, 2017). English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers are even comparatively more pressured as they have to also keep their knowledge of a foreign language updated, a language which is not their own and with which they are minimally in contact. Teachers, who are often overworked and underpaid, may gradually become uninterested and, in the long run, leave their profession in pursuit of higher-paying and less emotionally demanding jobs.

The rise of process-oriented approaches in teacher education (Borg, 2011) and postmethod discourse in English language teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) have called for teachers' taking the initiative and playing more active roles in decision making. Reflective practice is therefore loudly promoted as an effective resort in helping teachers tackle their challenges and improve their teaching by constantly revising their performance based on their prior experience and the particularities of each context. Despite the assumed benefits of reflection, the empirical evidence supporting it is inadequate, with most of the positive roles of reflection circulating among academicians 'at the level of speculation' (Moradkhani, Raygan, & Moein, 2017, p. 2).

Considering that teachers work under stressful conditions which may provoke burnout (Khani & Mirzaee, 2014), and that empirical evidence as to the positive effects of reflection on various aspects of teaching and learning in general and on burnout in particular is inadequate, the current study set out to examine if greater involvement in reflective practice lowers the probability of burnout. The central premise of the current study is that if reflection leads to lower possibility of burnout, one may conclude that teachers' engagement in reflection will have a positive influence on teachers' practice. On the other hand, because the promotion of reflection undoubtedly

necessitates removing barriers in its way and that each teaching context has its own peculiarities, we moved one step forward to also explore the issues which impede Iranian EFL teachers' involvement in reflective practice.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Reflection

Reflection has been rather elusive in definition as used in education. As Louden (1991, p. 148) has commented "[t]he educational uses of the term have carried forward and built on this ordinary language sense of reflection in a wide variety of ways, perhaps so wide as to make the term unusable without careful redefinition". Dewey (1933), who is credited as a pioneer in raising the concept of reflection, defined it as "turning a topic over in various aspects and in various lights so that nothing significant about it shall be overlooked" (p. 57). Reflective teachers are therefore those who are constantly involved in identifying problems, evaluating the contexts and goals, exploring possibilities, suggesting solutions and providing learners with more appropriate learning conditions.

Although various models regarding the components or stages of reflection have been conceptualised (e.g., Jay & Johnson, 2002), relatively little is done to define it operationally. In an attempt to fill this gap, Akbari, Behzadpoor and Dadvand (2010) proposed an operational definition of reflection and evaluated the validity of its construct in a sample of EFL teachers leading to the development of a scale for the measurement of reflective practice. In this model, reflection was conceptualized within five scales. *Practical reflection* includes aspects related to the application of tools such as journal writings and lesson reports as well as sharing teaching related issues with colleagues. *Cognitive reflection* is concerned with those activities which aim at professional development such as attending conferences or doing action research. *Learner/affective reflection* is teachers' concern for their students at different instructional and noninstructional levels. Included within this dimension might be teachers' concern for students' learning style,

linguistic/cultural background and interests. *Metacognitive reflection* "deals with teachers and their reflections on their own beliefs and personality, the way they define their practice, their own emotional make up, etc." (Akbari et al., 2011, p. 214). *Critical reflection*, the last subscale, relates to teachers' cognizance of sociopolitical forces that inform and may be informed by their teaching. Teachers' attention to topics like gender, class, race etc. in their pedagogy is part of this dimension.

Irrespective of how reflection has been conceptualized and interpreted, it has been generally conceived as a desirable quality which deserves promotion (Cole, 1997). There is, however, relatively inadequate empirical research on if and how reflection is of benefit and on the factors which might encourage or discourage teachers from reflective practice. In one of such studies, Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad, & Ghanbari, (2013) found that reflective journal writing improves EFL teachers' self-awareness, understanding of issues related to ELT, reasoning skills, and dialogue with the teacher educator. Farrell (2016) also concluded that collective reflection can help novice teachers better understand and survive the many shocks they encounter in the first year of their teaching. Reflection has also been reported to be related to higher teachers' self-efficacy (Moradkhani et al., 2017), teachers' better awareness of their development and current professional knowledge (Kabilan, 2007), teacher autonomy (Noormohammadi, 2014), higher evaluation of teaching by students (Winchester & Winchester, 2014) and teachers' better ability to involve students in classroom activities (Farrell, 2011).

Research on barriers to reflection is however much scarce and mostly of a theoretical nature. For example, Cole (1997) argued that professional contexts seldom encourage reflective practice. She argued that undesirable working conditions result in the arousal of some psychological states like anxiety, fear, loneliness, meaninglessness, helplessness, and hostility which impede reflective practice. Davies (2003) also suggested that the

demotivation of teachers is the major issue which should be dealt with before attempting to foster reflective practice. She suggests that lack of resources, lack of recognition, overwork and lack of appreciation of the additional burdens put on academics are the major reasons causing demotivation and, by extension, impeding reflection.

2.2 Burnout

Teacher occupational burnout is considered as a challenging problem in any educational setting. In nontechnical terms, burnout can be synonymous with fatigue, uninterestedness or being fed up with what you are doing. Maslach and Jackson (1981) defined burnout as composed of three components. *Emotional exhaustion* is the feelings of being overpressured, emotionally drained, and physically depleted which lead to cognitively distancing oneself from one's work. *Depersonalization* refers to negative, pessimistic and uncaring attitudes and feelings about one's students or colleagues which may, in turn, lead to detachment from them. A *reduced sense of personal accomplishment* is a tendency on the part of the teacher to evaluate himself and his job as not working anymore or being useless and meaningless.

Burnout is a serious challenge in educational settings not only because teachers will leave their profession; but, more importantly, because demotivated and uninterested teachers will continue their ineffective practice doing more harm to the educational system than the ones who leave. As a result of this significance, research on various dimensions of teacher dissatisfaction and burnout is abundant (Khani & Mirzaee, 2014; Yaghubinejad, Zarrinabadi & Nejadansari, 2016). Some studies have focused on the role of demographic features in experiencing burnout. For example, Lau, Yuen, & Chan (2005) found that men scored higher on depersonalization while women were higher in emotional exhaustion and reduced sense of accomplishment. Younger teachers were reported to be more burned out than their older counterparts. Other individual qualities like neuroticism and introversion (Mills & Huebner, 1998), negative

perfectionism and anxiety (Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2016), and low self-efficacy (Khani & Mirzaee, 2014) have also been reported to be associated with teacher burnout in various contexts. Friedman (1995) focused on some of the contextual correlates of burnout and reported that students' misbehaviors such as lack of respect for the teacher and their inattentiveness in the class is conducive to burnout. Weiqi (2007) also found that student quality, leadership and administration, working conditions and salary were some significant sources of teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction.

Another research stream which is similar in nature to burnout studies is that of teachers' demotivation. In one of such studies, for example, Sugino (2010) found that students' impolite attitudes and their inattention in the class, long meeting hours, heavy paperwork and inflexible teaching methodology were some major demotivating factors for Japanese teachers. Yaghubinejad et al. (2016) examined the demotivating factors among Iranian EFL school teachers and reported that lack of social recognition and respect, few adequate rewards, lack of support or understanding regarding English education and a large number of students in a single English class were the major demotivating factors for Iranian teachers teaching at junior high schools.

In view of the significance of reflection and burnout in teachers' professional life and the inadequacy of empirical research on these topics as discussed above, this mixed method study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between reflection and burnout among Iranian EFL teachers?
2. What are the impediments to teachers' involvement in reflective practice?

3. Methodology

3.1 Context of the Study

The duty of language teaching in Iran is undertaken by public schools and private language institutes which follow different policies and have thus

different practices. Survival English is what students are supposed to achieve at schools (Farhady & Hedayati, 2009), while the main objective of private language institutes is meeting learners' demands by making them proficient in all four skills, a goal which is loudly advertised but hardly achieved in many of these institutes (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016). Iranian public education follows a 12 year schooling system at the end of which students should sit the national university entrance exam which has had a long-lasting negative wash-back effect on school curricula (Farhady & Hedayati, 2009).

School teachers are usually employed based on their performance on a nation-wide selection test and are salaried tenured employees of the ministry of education. Private institutes are, however, much more flexible and vary in their teacher recruiting, and textbook and methodology selection criteria. Teachers at these centers are usually younger university students and graduates who are employed, to a large extent, based on their English proficiency and in return for hourly wages.

3.2 Participants

A total of 223 teachers (144 females & 79 males) from both school and private institute contexts participated in this study. They ranged in age between 19 and 51 ($M = 27.1$). Two hundred and nine participants held English related university degrees (i.e., English Literature, English Translation, & Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and the others had various nonEnglish degrees. Their teaching experience varied from less than a year to 23 years ($M = 6.8$).

3.3 Instruments

To measure teachers' reflection, English Language Teaching Reflection Inventory developed by Akbari et al. (2010) was employed. It is composed of 29 items measuring five components (practical, six items; cognitive, six items; affective, three items; metacognitive, seven items; critical, seven

items). Participants should indicate their responses on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 'never' to 'always'.

On the other hand, the Persian version (Akbari, Ghafar Samar, Kiany and Eghtesadi, 2011) of *Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey* (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) was used to measure teachers' burnout. The instrument has 22 items measuring three components namely *emotional exhaustion* (9 items), *depersonalization* (5 items) and *reduced personal accomplishment* (8 items). Respondents should mark their answers on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 'Never' to 'Once a day'. To answer the second research question, 10 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected participants. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions, making it possible for the interviewees to freely express their ideas as to the factors which impede reflective practice in their teaching context.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The data collection and analysis of this study followed a mixed-methods quantitative-qualitative procedure with all participants first filling out the instruments and 10 of them attending a series of individual semistructured interviews. Around 300 questionnaires were distributed in hard copy format or as email attachments of which 244 returned (hence, a return rate of 81.33%). After discarding the carelessly completed questionnaires, 223 were kept for final analysis. Participants' responses to the surveys were fed into SPSS, descriptive statistics were calculated and normality and reliability of the data were checked using KS and Cronbach's alpha tests. The relationship between (scales of) reflection and burnout were then checked through correlation and regression.

Out of those who had filled the surveys, 10 were chosen to take part in the qualitative interviews. Factors like age, gender, context of teaching, experience and university degree were considered to select the interviewees

with various backgrounds. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and explored based on Merriam's (2009) inductive approach. More precisely, the transcripts were iteratively read by two coders and segmented into thematic patterns as to the impediments to reflection.

4. Results

4.1 Phase One

Phase one of this study was quantitative and concerned the relationship between reflective practice and professional burnout. First, we calculated the reliability of the scales and descriptive statistics of the variables (See Table 1). To examine the relationship between reflection (and its 5 dimensions) and burnout (and its 3 dimensions), Pearson correlation was used. As shown in Table 1, all correlation indices were negative and statistically significant except the ones between critical reflection and emotional exhaustion, critical reflection and depersonalization, and critical reflection and total burnout score which were negative but not significant.

Multiple regression was then run to examine if and to what extent teachers' reflective practices can predict their burnout. The findings revealed that meta-cognitive reflection accounted for 16% of the variance of the total burnout score. Inclusion of practical reflection increased the predictability of the burnout to 20% (see Table 2, model 1).

Multiple regression also revealed that of the five components of reflection, the meta-cognitive element accounted for about 8% of the variance in emotional exhaustion. The addition of cognitive reflection increased the explained variance to about 11% and the inclusion of critical reflection in the model made it account for 13% of the variance in emotional exhaustion (see Table2, model 2).

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Table 1
Correlation Matrix, Reliability Index and Descriptive Statistics of the Measured Variables

	EE	DP	LPA	Brnt	Prac	Cog	Affct	Mtcg	Crit	Reflect
EE										
DP	.60**									
LPA	.50**	.32**								
Brnt	.85**	.64**	.86**							
Prac	-.26**	-.18**	-.32**	-.34**						
Cog	-.26**	-.16*	-.22**	-.27**	.52**					
Affct	-.24**	-.17*	-.23**	-.27**	.41**	.29**				
Mtcg	-.28**	-.22**	-.40**	-.40**	.39**	.31**	.51**			
Crit	-.01	-.045	-.18**	-.11	.24**	.27**	.14*	.32**		
Rfct	-.29**	-.21**	-.39**	-.40**	.74**	.70**	.59**	.72**	.65**	
Alpha	0.63	0.83	0.87	0.87	0.73	0.83	0.78	0.82	0.84	0.86
Min	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.66	2.14	1.14	1.97
Max	5	5	6.5	4.95	4.83	5	5	5	4.85	4.65
Mean	1.76	1.46	2.40	1.93	3.10	3.18	3.53	3.90	3.02	3.33
SD	0.84	0.62	1.20	0.75	0.73	0.73	0.81	0.62	0.78	0.50

Notes. EE = Emotional Exhaustion; DP = Depersonalization; LPA = Lack of Personal Accomplishment; Brnt = Burnout; Prac = Practical; Cog = Cognitive; Affct = Affective; Mtcg = Metacognitive; Crit = Critical; Rfct = Reflection; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$.

As demonstrated in Table 1, depersonalization also significantly correlated with all dimensions of reflection except the critical dimension. Multiple regression showed that it is only the metacognitive reflection that can significantly predict depersonalization. As the R square index shows, meta-cognitive reflection could account for only 5% of the variance in depersonalization. Other facets of reflection were excluded from the model altogether suggesting that their contribution to the prediction of depersonalization were statistically nonsignificant. (See Table 2, model 3).

The final part of our data analysis concerned the relationship between reflection and lack of accomplishment. As Table 1 indicates, all correlation coefficients were statistically significant. Regression analysis showed that meta-cognitive reflection accounted for around 16% of the variance in this dimension of burnout. The addition of the practical reflection to the model increased the explained variance to about 19%. (See table 2, model 4).

Table 2
Summary of Regression Models

	Dependent variable	Predictors	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SEE
Model 1	Burnt	1.Mtcg	0.40	0.16	0.15	15.30
		2.Mtcg, Prac	0.45	0.20	0.19	14.96
Model 2	EE	1.Mtcg	0.28	0.08	0.07	7.16
		2.Mtcg, Cog	0.34	0.11	0.10	7.04
		3.Mtcg, Cog, Crit	0.36	0.13	0.12	7.00
Model 3	DP	1.Mtcg	0.22	0.05	0.04	3.02
Model 4	LPA	1.Mtcg	0.40	0.16	0.15	8.87
		2.Mtcg, Prac	0.44	0.19	0.18	8.70

Notes. EE = Emotional Exhaustion; DP = Depersonalization; LPA = Lack of Personal Accomplishment; Brnt=Burnout; Prac=Practical; Cog=Cognitive; Mtcg=Metacognitive; Crit = Critical.

In sum, the findings of the first phase revealed that reflection is negatively correlated with burnout among Iranian EFL teachers. In other words, we found that higher involvement in various aspects of reflective practice is associated with lower levels of burnout among Iranian EFL teachers.

4.2 Phase two

Having found, in the first phase, that more reflective teachers are less likely to burn out, we decided to see why teachers stay away from reflection or what factors impede reflective practice and prevent teachers from reaping its rewards. Analysis of the interview data resulted in four major themes to which teachers attributed their lack of reflection: teacher related, job related, curriculum related and student related factors.

Teacher related factors

One of the very common reasons raised by the interviewees as impeding reflection was that they do not know what reflection is and how it should be performed. A few participants said that they knew just a little bit about reflection as they had heard about it at some training sessions or university:

- *I know the meaning of the word 'reflection' and it's a positive word which means thinking and planning. But if you mean something technical I don't know what it is and how it should be done.*

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However, as exemplified in the following excerpt the majority of participants claimed that they have never heard about it:

- *To be frank, I can't figure out how to do it. Is it just a matter of getting prepared before going to the class or its more? I have no idea.*

One of the other barriers to teachers' reflection was their attitude. Some teachers maintained that it could make no difference and that's why they do not welcome it. Some argued that there are many more priorities for the success of the classroom to which reflection is secondary.

- *Reflection is not as important as many other factors are. For example, there are many teachers who have problems with their general English; I think reflection doesn't help them.*
- *You believe that reflective practices like discussions and collaboration would solve some of the problems as teachers learn from each other but what if your colleagues are not much more knowledgeable than you are and have difficulty solving their own challenges. How can it help?*

Job related factors

Some of the other reasons teachers referred to as impeding reflection were job related issues. Many claimed that the small amount of money they get in return for the job they are doing is so small that it takes away their motivation for spending extra time and getting involved in reflective activities.

- *One should not expect teachers to handle all these tasks in return for this small amount they are paid. Reflective teaching, as I have understood, means doing more work and it should entail higher pays; otherwise it would be ignored as it is.*

Job security issues, the fact that they have to overwork and that they look at teaching as a temporary job were also among the job related factors teachers raised as impediments to reflective practice.

- *Let's be realistic. I teach at three institutes; I have 5 classes everyday; at nights, I work as a tutor and how much money do you think I earn? Just enough to survive as a single man. Besides, I have no insurance or perks. I cannot spend time on such stuff like reflection when I am this much overworked and still have difficulty making the ends meet.*
- *I started teaching English because I had nothing to do after my graduation; and I have been and am looking for a better job opportunity. I can't spend much time*

getting prepared or reflect; Actually, that's one of the reasons I do not teach at advanced levels.

Curriculum related factors

Some of the issues teachers raised in response to impediments to reflection could be categorized under the category of curriculum related factors. Predetermined syllabi, textbooks and tests were among the issues that forced teachers to follow a fixed plan and discouraged innovations in their teaching. Some implicitly argued that they are not the final decision makers and even if they reflect, and decide to add or delete a part of the syllabus, students would have difficulty passing the tests and supervisors may also complain.

- *Each book is divided into four parts and we have to cover each of these sections in 18 sessions. We have two supplementary books which have to be covered every other session. There is no room for changing this plan. I may find fault with some parts of the materials based on my reflections but so what? I have no right to make changes. So why bother?*
- *If I decide, based on my reflections, to have a discussion on topics which are not part of our plan, then I would fall behind the schedule and my students would have difficulty passing the test.*

Student related factors

The fourth major theme to which teachers attributed their lack of reflection and their burnout was their students. Our interviews showed that the attitude, behavior and motivation of the students play an important role on teachers' motivation to spend time reflecting on their practice.

- *My students have a big effect on my teaching. Some of them are at school because they have to; so, they don't care. It makes the teacher exhausted and reluctant to teach; let alone reflecting on his teaching.*
- *When I teach to a group of active and interested students, I automatically spent more time and effort. I get prepared before going to the class and I think of ways to teach better.*

5. Discussion

The findings of the quantitative part of this study revealed that reflection is negatively associated with burnout, implying that more reflective teachers are less likely to burn out. It can be argued that since reflective teachers feel

more committed to and passionate about their teaching, they are constantly in search of solutions for their challenges rather than letting the problems get worse by ignoring them. This interest in finding solutions through reflection would help improve their conditions, hence preventing feelings of uninterestedness or burnout. The negative relation between reflection and burnout can also be interpreted in light of the mediating role of self-efficacy. As Moradkhani et al. (2017) reported reflection is positively linked to teachers' self-efficacy with metacognitive reflection as its best predictor. On the other hand, self-efficacy has been found to not only decrease burnout directly but also reduce the negative effects of contextual factors and stressors on burnout (khani & Mirzaee, 2014). It can, therefore, be hypothesized that "teachers who have a stronger sense of self-efficacy perceive difficulties as challenges rather than threats, and thus invest their effort in the face of adversities and direct their efforts in resolving problems" (Hong, 2012, p. 420) by reconsidering those beliefs which lead to failure. In contrast, lower sense of self-efficacy makes teachers accept that they can do nothing to solve the problems, thus putting little efforts into solving the issues and survive.

Of the five dimensions of reflection, the metacognitive aspect was found to be more strongly associated with, hence better predicting, teachers' burnout and its components. Teachers' attention to (re)defining their teaching philosophy, their background and role models in teaching, their strengths and weaknesses and how teaching gives them a sense of satisfaction are indicative of their involvement in metacognitive reflection. It can be implied that teachers high in metacognitive reflection are more aware of their professional identity and how their career informs and is informed by who they are. These metacognitively reflective teachers derive satisfaction and meaning from their job and feel an inner call to teach since they believe that their work makes a difference in their students' lives. They will therefore

make more efforts in confronting professional challenges as they view them as challenges to their own self-concept and identity (Hong, 2012; Friedman & Farber, 1992) and are thus less likely to submit to adversities and burn out.

The findings of this study also revealed that among the five dimensions of reflection, the critical dimension plays the least significant role in teachers' burnout. Although it was negatively correlated with burnout and its components, this relationship was small. This might be due to the nature of critical reflection which includes teachers' awareness of higher order sociopolitical concerns like race, gender and poverty and does not directly relate to the immediate context of teaching and factors like students, colleagues, teaching methods, learning styles, so on. Another point which should be highlighted in interpreting this weak relationship is the fact that Iranian teachers, as some of them acknowledged in the interviews, feel hesitant in getting involved in critical reflection and practice (it had the lowest mean among the five dimensions of reflection) as it might have irreversible consequences like losing their jobs (Akbari, 2008).

Following the quantitative phase we conducted follow-up interviews to explore the reasons which impede teachers' reflection. The findings revealed that teacher related, job related, curriculum related and student related impediments were the four major themes to which teachers attributed their lack of reflection. Teachers' unfamiliarity with reflection and their doubtful attitude toward its positive effects was also reported by Moradkhani and Shirazizadeh (2017) as hurdles to reflective practice. One explanation is that the training sessions Iranian educators attend are one-shot, sporadic, and basically theoretical. Many teachers attend these sessions involuntarily and for the purpose of keeping their jobs or getting promotions. Inadequate pay was one of the most common factors teachers raised for their lack of reflection. Yaghubinejad et al. (2016) focusing just on Iranian public school teachers reported that they raised this issue as an important demotivating

factor. Low pays and job insecurity were even more frequently raised by private teachers we interviewed since they are low-paid waged workers who are employed based on a short-term contract and do not enjoy any perks. Financial issues can also lead to low social recognition making teachers lose their passion for teaching and unwilling to spend time improving their practice through reflection. It can also force teachers to get involved in second jobs to bolster their income and support their families (Nguyen, 2017).

The results also showed that the inflexible and predetermined syllabi, textbooks and tests do not let teachers change their practice even when they conclude that they ought to. These findings resonate with the ones obtained by Sugino (2010) and Yaghubinejad et al. (2016) who reported that inflexible methodology, students' attitudes and large class size are some major demotivating factors for teachers. Confinement of teachers within the limits of curriculum is actually at odds with the nature of reflection which requires teachers to take the initiative in their classes and act reflectively (Akbari, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Teachers' teaching to the tests put them at the service of policy makers and strip them of the recognition and autonomy which are prerequisites for any reflective practice (Davies, 2003; Noormohammadi, 2014). This would be exacerbated by teachers' constant responsibility of handling students who are uninterested, inattentive and playful.

6. Conclusion

This study empirically verified one of the positive aspects of reflective practice by showing that reflective teachers are stronger at tackling teaching-related problems and less likely to get defeated and burn out. It can be implied from our findings that the promotion of reflective practice necessitates removing the barriers in its way. EFL teachers are not only pressured by the challenges of the classroom and teaching a language and culture (which are not theirs) but also, as Nguyen (2017) maintains, by many

external life tensions which impact their practice. Improving teachers' financial and social status, modifying the curricula and granting teachers more authority and autonomy in teaching and assessment, designing systematic training and support programs in charge of teaching and helping teachers to reflect, survive and improve are some of the steps that can be taken to promote reflection and prevent burnout. Researchers and practitioners in teacher education should also more deeply explore the multiple dimensions of reflection and how it can be taught, practiced and constantly promoted. All the assumed benefits of reflection notwithstanding, teachers cannot be left on their own to shoulder the heavy burden of practicing reflectively.

Although some experimental evidence was provided for the positive role of reflection in teachers' professional life, the findings of this study should be treated with caution. First, we did not examine the role of teaching context, gender, experience, and many other factors into account. It is, therefore, possible that each of these variables exert a mediating effect on the relationship between reflection and burnout and on the factors which impede reflection. Also, this study was limited to Iranian EFL teachers and the findings may change with teachers of other subject matters. Another issue which must be taken into account when dealing with our results is EFL teachers' language proficiency and their cultural attachment to English speaking countries, both of which may affect teachers' reflection and burnout. It is therefore recommended that more studies are conducted to examine the role of different variables which can affect or mediate the relationship between reflection and burnout. Further research can also be conducted on ways of promoting reflection or preventing burnout in different settings and on how reflection and burnout affect numerous aspects of teachers' professional life and students' learning.

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