

A Sequential Mixed Method Analysis of Students' Burnout and Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

Burnout has been a major concern in the educational settings and it is worth exploring it among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and finding its relationship with other factors, such as emotional intelligence (EI), which may help reduce burnout sources. In this light, this study was designed to a) explore Iranian EFL students' burnout and EI profiles; b) investigate the relationship between EFL students' burnout and their EI; and c) examine the extent to which EFL students' EI competencies could predict their burnout. To these ends, 100 male and female Iranian EFL university students, selected through convenience sampling from two universities (Shahrekord University and Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz), participated in the study and responded to the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) and the Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i). To triangulate the data, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 20 EFL students. Data analysis showed that EFL students had a low level of burnout and were emotionally intelligent at the intrapersonal level. Also, the data from semi-structured interview provided further insight into the quantitative results and explained some personal and organizational factors in relation to EFL students' burnout. Moreover, bivariate correlation and multiple regression analysis revealed a negative relationship between EI and two dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion and cynicism) and a positive relationship between professional efficacy and EI. Furthermore, intrapersonal, general mood, and adaptability components of EI were found to be better predictors of burnout. The findings have implications for language educators in reducing students' burnout.

Keywords: burnout, emotional intelligence, EFL students

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INTRODUCTION

During learning a new language, students usually face challenges that make the learning environment increasingly stressful for them. The amount of stress and anxiety that students face in the process of learning a foreign language may have detrimental effects on their academic success and achievement (Ebrahimi, 2013). Therefore, if stressors, including academic and non-academic ones, are not dealt with, students may be prone to *burnout*, which may influence their entire life negatively. Burnout is defined as a chronic psychological condition occurring due to the extreme amount of stress in the work situation (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). In recent years, burnout has received sufficient attention in academic settings. As asserted by Jacobs and Dodd (2003), although students are not seen as workers from the psychological perspective, various activities are assigned to them. These activities can be regarded as work, which make students susceptible to burnout. Therefore, student burnout is an extension of job burnout which appears due to the stressors that students deal with during their studies (Zhang, Gan, & Cham, 2007). University is a place where students are involved mentally and psychologically; the imbalance between the amount of energy that students invest in academic settings, such as universities, and what they obtain as feedback in return depletes one's personal energy storage (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Therefore, if the imbalance remains for a long time, student burnout may emerge.

Student burnout is defined as "a three-dimensional syndrome of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy" (Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002, p. 465). The emotional exhaustion is described as the exhaustion from the study demands, and the cynicism refers to the students' negative behaviors and attitudes toward the academic tasks. The professional efficacy also relates to the students' evaluation of oneself as unsuccessful in the educational settings. It seems that student burnout has serious consequences for the students' academic life. As Mostert, Pienaar, Gauche, and Jackson (2007) state, student burnout may result in a loss of enthusiasm to participate in academic study; it can also endanger students' academic future. Thus, it is important to find ways to avoid burnout and identify the variables which can help students reduce burnout experience. It is of paramount importance to help students deal with new challenges in academic settings, which may put them at high risk for emotional

drainage and stress. One important factor and personal coping resource which is worth investigation is *emotional intelligence* (EI).

EI is “an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures” (Bar-On, 1997, p. 14). As mentioned by Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, and Mayer (2000), students differ in their levels of EI. Students with high EI are capable of using their emotions appropriately to deal with daily pressures and challenges (Taylor, 2001). They usually benefit from higher quality of social life, more life satisfaction, mental and physical health, more achievement in academic life, lower stress, and better coping strategies in stressful situations (Heiran & Navidinia, 2015). However, students with low EI do not have the ability to monitor and manage their emotions in dealing with life stressors; therefore, they are more vulnerable to depression, addiction, aggression, and crime (Atari, Haghghi, & Khanekashi, 2002).

Given the above issue and potential role of EI in the betterment of life, it is significant to explore the relationship of EI and burnout. Given a dearth of research on the potential role of EI in ameliorating the detrimental effects of burnout on students’ academic life, particularly in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), investigating this relationship is important. Moreover, there should be a concern to identify the factors which can predict EFL students’ burnout so as to avoid EFL learners’ academic failure and improve their language development. Thus, the present study first explored Iranian EFL students’ burnout and EI profiles. Second, it examined the possible relationship between Iranian EFL students’ burnout and EI and the extent to which Iranian EFL students’ EI could predict their burnout with the hope to find the appropriate ways in confronting burnout experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the introduction of the term burnout by Freudenberg (1974), it has been subjected to research in different domains. Initially, the focus of burnout research was on the role of work characteristics in different human service professions because the traditional view of burnout used to consider burnout as occurring only in human service professions (Chan, 2006). Later, the concept of burnout was extended to include other jobs (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). It was considered as a

chronic psychological condition occurring due to the extreme amount of stress in the work situation, in general (Maslach et al., 1996). Later, Schaufeli et al. (2002) claimed that burnout might have some effects on students in the academic settings. In line with this, Jacobs and Dodd (2003) stated that students are not seen as workers from the psychological perspective; however, various activities are assigned to them. These activities can be regarded as work, which make students susceptible to burnout.

Since the introduction of the concept of burnout, several studies have been done to investigate sources of burnout among students. For instance, Moneta (2011) explored the relationship between the need for achievement (students' tendency to succeed in difficult tasks in competition with their peers) and burnout in a sample of 226 university students in London. The results revealed that the students' need for achievement was negatively correlated with the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and positively associated with the professional efficacy. He proposed the need for achievement as one of the academic factors that might result in burnout among students. Also Pilkauskaite-Valickiene, Zukauskienė, and Raiziene (2011) in a cluster analytic approach, investigated the causes of burnout in a sample of 1741 students from five high schools in the Lithuania, an administrative region of Klaipėda. According to the results, school's atmosphere, students' attachment to school, and open classroom climate for discussion were among the factors that mainly resulted in burnout among high school students. Based upon this finding, Pilkauskaite-Valickiene et al. (2011) suggested the development of positive attachment and opportunity for democratic discussion as strategies for preventing burnout. In another study, Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Pietikinen, and Jokela (2008) reported negative school climate and negative motivation received from teachers as the factors contributing to burnout among high school students.

Moreover, several studies explored the individual-related causes of burnout among students. For example, Capri, Ozkendir, Ozkurt, and Karakus (2012), in a correlational study, explored the relationship between students' general self-efficacy, life satisfaction, and burnout among 354 students from Mersin University. The results showed that students' self-efficacy was positively correlated with life satisfaction and professional efficacy. Life satisfaction was also found to be the best predictor of burnout. Besides, Sulea, Van Beek, Sarbescu, Virga, and Schaufeli (2015), in a study of 255 Romanian economic and social

science university students, examined the relationship between burnout, personality, and basic need satisfaction. The results showed that three personality traits (i.e., neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion) were related to the experience of different levels of burnout among students. Also, the fulfillment of psychological need was negatively correlated with (the) emotional exhaustion. As mentioned by Aypay (2011), feeling of inadequacy and lack of interest could be the other sources of burnout among students. However, quite a few studies have been conducted on this topic in EFL contexts. In a study on 147 English language teachers from Mashhad's private schools, Pishghadam and Sahebjam (2012) investigated the association between burnout and personality types. The results revealed significant relationships between burnout dimensions and personality types. Besides, extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientious were found to be the best predictors of the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

The above-mentioned studies are elucidating, yet not much is known about the association between students' burnout and EI, which is the focus of the current study.

Drawing on Thorndike's *social intelligence* (1920) and Gardner's *personal intelligence* (1983), Salovey and Mayer in 1990 proposed the term EI for the first time to refer to the individuals' ability to manage their emotions. Since then, different conceptualizations of EI have been generated by different scholars (e.g., Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1998). However, the core idea of all these EI conceptualizations is that EI is the individual's ability to identify and monitor emotions in oneself and others (Goleman, 2001).

There are two main models of EI which are currently referred to in the literature: (a) the ability model, and (b) the mixed models. In the ability model, advocated by scholars, such as Mayer and Salovey (see Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), EI is viewed as a set of cognitive and emotional abilities which are independent of personality traits. The ability model covers the four main interconnected abilities of (a) perception of emotions; (b) facilitating thinking; (c) understanding emotions; and (d) managing emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). However, in the mixed model, EI is conceptualized as an amalgamation of cognitive, affective, individual, and personality skills. One of the first exponents of the mixed model is Goleman (1995). Drawing on Salovey and Mayer's (1990) ability model, Goleman (1995) describes EI as "a different way of being smart. It's not your IQ. It's how well you handle

yourself and handle your relationships, how well you work on a team, and your ability to lead” (p. 14). In this model, EI is viewed as a mixture of individual abilities and personality skills which are used for the appropriate recognition and measurement of emotional capacities related to performance in the workplace. Besides, Bar-On (1997, 2000) proposed another version of the mixed model in which EI is perceived “as a mixed intelligence involving cognitive ability and personality aspects and stresses the importance of emotional expression and the outcome of emotionally intelligent behavior in life” (cited by Roohani & Mohammadi, 2014, p. 128). To assess emotional and social competencies, Bar-On (1997) developed a measure which provides information on five key areas: (a) *intrapersonal*, involving such skills as self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, and self-actualization; (b) *interpersonal*, including such skills as empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationship; (c) *stress management* which includes stress tolerance and impulse-control; (d) *adaptability* which involves such qualities as reality-testing, flexibility, and problem-solving; and (e) *general mood*, involving optimism and happiness.

While there have been disputes over the conception of EI for the absence of an explicit specification and the difficulty in its measurement, researchers still agree on the close relationship between emotional skills and success in many aspects of life, especially educational setting (Hashemi & Ghanizadeh, 2011). For example, Gilolarte, Palomera, and Brackett (2006) explored the association between EI and academic performance among 77 high school students in Spain. Results demonstrated that students with high levels of EI had good academic performance. In the same vein, Zhang et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between EI, negative life events, and psychological distress in a sample of 467 Chinese nursing students. Results indicated that EI was negatively related to psychological distress and negative life events. Moreover, in the EFL setting, Pishghadam (2009) examined the relationship of EI to foreign language learning of 508 Iranian EFL students. Results revealed that students’ EI had significant relationship with second/foreign language (L2) learning. Also, Bora (2012) reported that EI had a positive influence on the EFL learners’ perceptions toward the use of brain-based activities in the speaking classes.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Based on the review of literature, much research has been conducted on burnout and EI worldwide, but most of these studies have been carried out in fields such as psychology. Besides, factors such as personality (Sulea, Beek, Sarbescua, Virga, & Schaufeli, 2015), self-efficacy (Rahmati, 2015), and life satisfaction (Capri, Ozkendir, Ozkurt, & Karakus, 2012) have been investigated in relation to burnout, but, to the best of the current researchers' knowledge, few empirical studies, have addressed the relationship between burnout and EI with respect to EFL students. Moreover, the importance of EI in education is well-documented in the literature; however, more studies are required to shed light on its contribution to affective variables such as student burnout, which can influence students' quality of L2 learning. Investigating the mediating role of variables such as EI may be helpful in minimizing the detrimental outcomes of student burnout. Therefore, the present study was intended to shed some light on Iranian EFL students' burnout and EI profiles. Also, it sought to explore the possible relationship between Iranian EFL students' EI and their burnout dimensions and find out the EI competencies that could significantly predict the EFL students' burnout dimensions. In this light, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the Iranian EFL students' burnout profiles?
2. What are the Iranian EFL students' EI profiles?
3. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL students' EI and their burnout dimensions?
4. Do Iranian EFL students' EI competencies significantly predict their burnout dimensions?

METHOD

Participants

The quantitative section of the present study sought to determine Iranian EFL students' burnout dimensions and to identify their EI profiles. Furthermore, this phase was intended to explore the relationship between the two variables and the predictive role of EI competencies on burnout dimensions among Iranian EFL students. To these ends, a sample of 100 EFL students (29 male and 71 female junior and senior undergraduate students) were selected based on convenience sampling from Shahrekord

University and Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz and participated in this phase of the study.

Furthermore, to identify the sources of burnout among Iranian EFL participants and address the first research question of the study, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), qualitative follow-up enquiries may be used by researchers to help reach a more comprehensive understanding of the subject where sufficient interpretation and information are not provided by the quantitative phase. In this phase of the study, 20 EFL students, including 10 participants with low scores on the MBI-SS and 10 participants with high scores on the MBI-SS, were selected in order to be interviewed. From these 20 students, 9 students were male and 11 were female.

Instrumentation

The two instruments used in this study were Maslach burnout inventory-student survey (MBI-SS; Schaufeli et al., 2002) and Bar-On's emotional quotient inventory (EQ-i; Bar-On's, 1997). To assess EFL students' academic burnout, the MBI-SS was utilized. It is a modified version of the Maslach burnout inventory-general survey (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996), which is used to evaluate the students' feeling of burnout. The questionnaire consists of 15 items representing three components: the emotional exhaustion (5 items); the cynicism (4 items); and the professional efficacy (6 items). In this questionnaire, the professional efficacy is coded reversely and described in terms of professional inefficacy in the final analysis. The questionnaire is a Likert-type scale coded on 7-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). The students' high scores on the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and their low scores on the professional efficacy are indicative of burnout. The translated version was validated in the context of Iran by Mohammadyari (2002). Because this questionnaire had been translated and validated by Rostami, Abedi, and Schaufeli (2011), the translated version was utilized in this study to guarantee the students' better comprehension of the MBI-SS. They piloted the MBI-SS on 238 Iranian university students. According to them, the translated version showed acceptable validity and reliability, and presented support for the inventory hypothesis structure. Meanwhile, Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was found to be satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.70$).

The Bar-On's EQ-i was used to assess five broad areas of skills/competencies: (a) Intrapersonal (30 items); (b) Interpersonal (18 items); (c) Stress management (12 items); (d) Adaptability (18 items); and (e) General mood (12 items). The items are coded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very seldom or not true of me*) to 5 (*very often or true of me*). In this questionnaire, some of the items are reverse-coded in the final analysis. The sum of responses on the whole test constitutes the individual's total EI score ranging from minimum of 90 to maximum of 450.

To assess the EFL students' EI, the translated version of Bar-On's (1997) EQ-i was used. The purpose was to achieve consistency and avoid cross-cultural differences. The EQ-i was translated by Dehshiri in 2003; he evaluated the translated version on a sample of 250 Iranian university students. As Dehshiri (2003) states, the translated version has acceptable construct validity, internal consistency, and test-retest reliability in Iran. Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this questionnaire was found to be 0.76 and the results of factor analysis supported the inventory hypothesized structure. In the present study, the total reliability of the measure, computed via Cronbach's alpha, was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.87$).

Furthermore, the students' perspectives regarding the sources of burnout were investigated using semi-structured interviews with 20 EFL university students. The purpose was to find in-depth information on factors which EFL students regarded as the major contributors to the emergence and development of burnout. The interviewees were asked 10 questions (3 yes/no and 7 open-ended) which were developed touching on the primary themes in the burnout, such as: "Have you ever felt that you have lost your interests in your studies? Why yes/no?", "Do you consider yourself as a good student? Any reason?" and "Have you ever used up at the end of a university day?" As Creswell (2008) indicates, open-ended questions provide the opportunity for the individuals to "voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings" (p. 225).

Data Collection Procedure

This study employed a mixed methods sequential explanatory design. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) state, mixed methods research is composed of two phases in which a qualitative study follows a

quantitative phase. In a sequential explanatory design, the quantitative data are collected and analysed initially. Afterwards, a researcher gathers and analyses the qualitative data to gain more insights of the quantitative results. Following Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), the method of this study composed of two different phases. Initially, the quantitative data were gathered and analysed so as to determine the participants' burnout and EI profiles and to explore the relationship between the EFL students' burnout dimensions and their EI competencies. Afterwards, the qualitative data were collected and analysed to help take a better understanding of the obtained findings in the quantitative phase. To this end, prior to the study, the participants were presented with a very brief introduction of the purpose of the research. After that, the two main constructs of the study, EI and student burnout, were briefly explained to them. All the participants were assured that their participation would be confidential and anonymous, and the questionnaires would be assigned codes. Then, the MBI and EQ-i questionnaires were distributed among 100 Iranian EFL university students, who were selected non-randomly from the above-mentioned universities.

Data Analysis

Running the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 23), the present study drew on descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the collected data in the quantitative phase. First, descriptive statistics were utilized in order to identify the EFL students' burnout and EI profiles. Next, to investigate the association between the EFL students' burnout dimensions and their EI, Spearman rank order correlation was used. Moreover, multiple regression was used to gain further understanding of the association between the dependent and independent variables and to determine the extent to which the EFL students' EI competencies could predict their burnout dimensions. The participant scores on the MBI-SS and EQ-i were used as dependent and independent variables, respectively.

In the qualitative section, a sample of 20 EFL students were interviewed. Upon the participants' request, the face-to-face interviews were conducted either in Persian or English, each for approximately 30 minutes; it was of paramount importance to the researchers to carry out the interview utilizing a method that helped the participants feel relaxed and confident during the process. Each interview was recorded digitally

and transcribed. In order to foster the credibility, two experienced raters, who were EFL instructors, analyzed the data from the interview. Drawing on the coding approach proposed by Saldaña (2012), the transcribed interview data were analyzed and coded to gain an in-depth look into burnout sources among the EFL students. Then, the codes were synthesized into some categories. In the final step, these categories were associated with more general themes.

RESULTS

The first research question was destined to determine the Iranian EFL students' burnout profiles. In other words, it was aimed at identifying what levels of burnout were experienced by the EFL students and which factors could mainly result in their experiences of burnout. To this end, initially, the quantitative data from the MBI was gained and, subsequently, the qualitative data from the interviews were obtained. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the three burnout dimensions of the emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for MBI-SS subscales/dimensions

Dimension	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Scale Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis
EE	5	11.52	5.85	2.30	.61	.34
C	4	8.07	5.79	2.01	.60	-.34
PE	6	23.57	6.17	3.92	-.17	-.60

Note. EE = Emotional Exhaustion; C = Cynicism; PE = Professional Efficacy

As displayed in Table 1, the greatest mean score belonged to the professional efficacy ($M = 23.57$, $SD = 6.17$), and the lowest one belonged to the cynicism ($M = 8.07$, $SD = 5.79$). The emotional exhaustion dimension had the mean score of 11.52 ($SD = 5.85$) and the scale mean of 2.30, which was not large (below the median on a 7-point Likert scale). Similarly, the scale mean for cynicism (2.01) was not large. As mentioned by Maslach et al. (1996), the individuals' low scores on the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and high scores on the professional efficacy are indicative of low level of burnout. In this study, the professional efficacy obtained the largest mean score and scale mean,

and the mean score and scale mean for the emotional exhaustion and cynicism were lower. Thus, the participants' burnout level was low.

In the qualitative part, the data from the interviews revealed several sources for the experience of burnout. Table 2 provides the underlying themes and subthemes emerging from the analysis of the interviewees responses.

Table 2: The emerged subthemes for burnout

Outside influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future job-related concerns • Financial difficulties • Family problems
Instructors' attitudes and behaviors
Inside influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class materials • Class environment
Individual motivation

Outside influences. Most of the interviewees pointed out several factors outside the academic environment as the causes of burnout. *Future job-related concern* was found to be the major outside influence among the EFL students with a high level of burnout. One of the students (*Elham*) with high burnout level stated: "I've lost my interests in my studies...When you find out that you cannot get an appropriate job that helps you earn living, you lose your motivation and feel exhausted."

However, Reza, one of the participants with a low level of burnout, who was very optimistic, contended that: "Umm...Some of my friends are concerned about their future. They keep telling that finding a well-paid job in this field is almost impossible... I keep telling them, if you have enough expertise everything is possible."

Financial difficulties were another factor. About 35 % the interviewees who felt exhausted pointed out the financial problems they faced as their cause of disappointment. *Shahrokh*, a senior undergraduate, stated: "I have many financial problems that make me work full time, sometimes...I barely find enough time to get along with my study, so, most of the time, I just feel that I can't continue."

Family problems were another reason resulting in frustration among the EFL students. They found it hard to focus on their study with negative thoughts in their mind. One of the interviewees suffering from burnout (*Rasul*) talked about his feeling in this way: "I've had bad time since my dad's death...I've lost too much. It's about one year that I attend the university aimlessly....I don't care about my study and future anymore."

Instructors' attitudes and behaviors. In the sample, some EFL respondents referred to the direct influence of the instructors' behavior in the class on their feelings of exhaustion and cynicism. They reported that the long-lasting stress, contempt, and feeling of ineffectiveness had been the main outcomes. As an example, *Farkhondeh*, a junior undergraduate, asserted: "Umm... they expect too much. They don't think for a second that we are not native speakers. If we make a mistake in speaking or writing, they belittle us and turn their attentions to other students.... I think the teachers' behaviors in the classroom make us exhausted and frustrated."

Inside influences. Another source of burnout for the EFL student in this study was the impact of the academic setting. About 70 % of the EFL interviewees with high levels of burnout mentioned that the *class material* was the main source of their frustration. They believed that the quality of the materials that they received had lessened their eagerness to study and made them bored. *Shiva*, one of the senior undergraduate, explained her feeling in this way: "Before I entered the university... I thought I would be busy with studying different interesting and inspiring books. [But], I soon found that I was wrong about this...Here, we are just stuck with the old-fashioned books that the instructors suggest."

Class environment also led to the experience of burnout among the EFL students. Some of the interviewees related their tendency to escape some of the classes to the uncomfortable feeling that they had during the class time. *Fateme*, one of the interviewees, maintained: "Being among the students with high language abilities has collapsed my confidence... I hardly participate in class activities [because] I'm afraid of being teased by my classmates...Sometimes, this bothers me to the extent that I think about leaving the university or changing my major."

Personal motivation. The interviewees with high levels of burnout also talked about lack of motivation. They agreed with the fact that most of the students had no interests in their studies. One of them, *Reza*, mentioned: "Sometimes I feel depressed [because] participating in most

of the classes doesn't give me the sense of accomplishment that I seek for..."

The second research question was intended to identify the EI profiles of the participants of the present study. To this end, descriptive analyses, computed in the form of means and standard deviations, were obtained for all the five EI subscales (intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood). Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for EQ-i scores.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of EQ-i scores for each subscale

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Scale Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis
Intrap	30	99.27	8.43	3.85	-.52	.59
Interp	18	68.07	7.45	3.78	-.51	1.56
SM	12	37.52	5.79	3.12	-.07	-.28
A	18	59.67	6.38	3.53	-.21	-.47
GM	12	40.89	6.32	3.40	-.74	1.35

Note. Intrap= intrapersonal; Interp = interpersonal; SM = stress management; A = adaptability; GM = general mood

As Table 3 shows, the intrapersonal intelligence ($M = 99.27$, $SD = 8.43$) received the highest score. The scale mean for the intrapersonal intelligence on a 5-point Likert scale was 3.85 which was quite high. However, the stress management obtained the lowest score ($M = 37.52$, $SD = 5.79$). The scale mean for this type of EI on a 5-point Likert scale was 3.12, which was also high. Generally speaking, all subscales of EI received high mean scales, indicating that the students scored high on each EI subscale.

The third research question was intended to seek whether there was any significant relationship between the EFL students' burnout and their EI. After checking the preliminary assumptions, the Spearman rank order correlation was obtained to estimate the possible relationship between the three burnout dimensions and the five EI competencies. The Spearman rho correlations are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation matrix of the burnout and EI subscales

Variables	Intrap	Interp	SM	A	GM	Total EI
EE	-.32** (.001)	-.07 (.44)	.17- (.07)	.29** (.003)	-.40** (.000)	-.35** (.000)
C	-.44** (.000)	-.21* (.03)	-.42** (.000)	-.43** (.000)	-.53** (.000)	-.54** (.000)
PE	.55** (.000)	.30** (.003)	.40** (.000)	.57** (.000)	.47** (.000)	.63** (.000)

Note. Intrap = intrapersonal; Interp = interpersonal; SM = stress management; A = adaptability; GM = general mood; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As Table 4 displays, a number of significant correlations between the components of both measures were observed. The highest correlations were observed between the professional efficacy and adaptability ($r = .57$, $p < .01$), the professional efficacy and intrapersonal ($r = .55$, $p < .01$), and the cynicism and general mood ($r = -.53$, $p < .01$). The size of the coefficients between the aforementioned components was found to be partially large, indicating the significant relationships between the above-mentioned subscales. Meanwhile, the lowest correlations were found between the cynicism and interpersonal ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$), and the emotional exhaustion and adaptability ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$).

To address the fourth research question of the study, multiple regression analysis was conducted so as to determine the extent to which the EFL students' EI competencies could predict their burnout dimensions. The model summary of the first regression analysis for the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout is provided in Table 5, and the results of regression coefficients are summarized in Table 6.

Table 5: Model summary for the emotional exhaustion

Model ^a	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.46 ^a	.21	.17	5.31

a. Predictors: (Constant) intrapersonal; interpersonal; stress management; adaptability, general mood

b. Dependent variable: emotional exhaustion

Table 6: Regression coefficients for the emotional exhaustion

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.	Part Correlation
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta			
Constant	30.87	8.13		3.79	.000	
Intrap	-.04	.09	-.06	-.49	.622	-.045
Interp	.01	.07	.02	.20	.841	.018
SM	.09	.11	.09	.85	.397	.078
A	-.05	.12	-.06	-.49	.621	-.045
GM	-.39	.13	-.42	-2.79	.006	-.255

Note. Intrap = intrapersonal; Interp = interpersonal; SM = stress management; A = adaptability; GM = general mood

As displayed in Table 5, 21% of the variance in the dependent variable (i.e., emotional exhaustion) could be predicted by the model. As illustrated in Table 6, the general mood with the largest Beta value of -.42 was found to make the strongest unique contribution to the EFL students' emotional exhaustion (6.5%).

Another multiple regression analysis was conducted to find out the contribution of EI components of the EFL students to the variance in their cynicism. Table 7 displays the model summary, and Table 8 provides the regression coefficient results for the cynicism dimension.

Table 7: Model summary for the cynicism

Model	<i>R</i>	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
2	.56 ^a	.31	.27	4.93

a. Predictors: (Constant) intrapersonal; interpersonal; stress management; adaptability, general mood

b. Dependent variable: cynicism

Table 8: Regression coefficients for the cynicism

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.	Part Correlation
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta			

Constant	34.01	7.55		4.50	.000	
Intrap	.02	.08	.03	.30	.763	.026
Interp	-.03	.07	-.05	-.54	.589	-.046
SM	-.12	.10	-.12	-1.20	.230	-.103
A	-.09	.11	-.10	-.82	.411	-.071
GM	-.38	.12	-.41	-2.95	.004	-.253

Note. Intrap = intrapersonal; Interp = interpersonal; SM = stress management; A = adaptability; GM = general mood

As described by Table 7, the R square value was found to be .31, indicating that the EFL students' scores on the EQ-i could predict 31% of the variance in their cynicism scores. To be specific, about 31% of the variation in the EFL students' cynicism could be explained by taking their EI competencies into account. According to Table 8, the largest Beta values, which displayed the unique contribution of each EI subscale (independent variables), belonged to general mood. Namely, the EFL students' general mood characteristics made the most contributions to their cynicism attributes (6.4%).

The final multiple regression analysis was conducted to explore which EI competencies could predict the professional efficacy—the third dimension of burnout. The model summary and the results of the regression coefficients are provided in Tables 9 and 10, respectively.

Table 9: Model summary for the professional efficacy

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
3	.63 ^a	.40	.37	4.90

- a. Predictors: (Constant) intrapersonal; interpersonal; stress management; adaptability, general mood
- b. Dependent variable: professional efficacy

Table 10: Regression coefficients for the professional efficacy

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Part Correlation
	B	Std. Error	Beta			

Constant	-31.46	7.51		-4.18	.000	
Intrap	.25	.08	.35	3.05	.003	.244
Interp	.17	.07	.21	2.46	.016	.196
SM	.09	.10	.08	.89	.372	.072
A	.36	.11	.37	3.25	.002	.260
GM	-.18	.12	-.18	-1.42	.157	-.114

Note. Intrap = intrapersonal; Interp = interpersonal; SM = stress management; A = adaptability; GM = general mood

As illustrated in Table 9, about 40% of the variation in the EFL students' professional efficacy could be explained by taking their EI competencies into consideration. As indicated in Table 10, the adaptability and intrapersonal competency had the largest Beta values (.37 and .35, respectively) displaying the most unique contribution to the professional efficacy (6.7% and 5.9%, respectively).

In sum, the results demonstrated that Iranian EFL students' EI explained 21% of the variance in their emotional exhaustion, 31% in their cynicism, and 40% in their professional efficacy in the current study. Among all EI components, general mood was an important predictor of the emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Besides, adaptability and intrapersonal competencies were found to significantly predict the burnout dimension of the professional efficacy.

DISCUSSION

This study, initially, was aimed at identifying the burnout levels of EFL students and the factors which could mainly result in their burnout in the specific context of Iran. All in all, the results of the current study revealed that EFL students showed a moderately good profile on the MBI-SS. With the low levels of the emotional exhaustion, moderate levels of the cynicism, and high levels of the professional efficacy, the participants, in general, did not feel exhausted due to the study demands; they felt that they gained the sense of accomplishment that they sought for by participating in the classes rather than feeling drained and frustrated by doing the class activities. This is promising for EFL students in view of the fact that the majority of EFL students did not suffer from this psychological syndrome.

The results of the qualitative phase revealed that the personal and organizational factors were the major sources of the three burnout dimensions (i.e., emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy). The three burnout dimensions shared the sources, such as outside influences, instructors' attitudes and behaviors, inside influences,

and personal motivation. The above result finds support from the results of the previous studies (e.g., Cushman & West, 2006), which explained the same sources for burnout. Outside influences were found to be the major causes of burnout. That is, factors outside the educational settings were identified to spill over into EFL students' academic life and result in the experience of burnout. More likely, future job-related concerns, financial and family problems brought about these outside influences. Future-job related concerns were closely associated with the feelings of uncertainty about the future, the inability to find a job after graduation, and the employment pressure among the interviewees. It seems that the continuous stress about the future was a major threat for EFL students, which could influence their academic performance negatively and result in frustration. This argument is also supported by the results of previous research (e.g., Tsai, 2005), which reported future-job related factors as an important correlate to student burnout. The above data also highlight the role of financial problems as an important factor in EFL students' feelings of disappointment. As to the financial difficulties, Ross, Cleland, and Macleod (2006) found that more than a quarter of the experienced stress by their students was due to their financial problems. Besides, for some of the EFL students with high levels of burnout, the stress emerged due to the parental expectations and disciplines. Moreover, instructors' attitudes and behaviors along with students' motivation were related to EFL students' burnout. This finding indicates that students may put off study by their instructors' behavior in the classroom. It also confirms that EFL students' participation and attendance in class may be negatively influenced by the perceived aggression, sarcasm, contempt, inappropriate language, and outbursts in instructors' behavior.

The interviewees also considered class materials and environment as factors contributing to their burnout in the academic setting. The above results confirm that the quality of class materials and students' relationships with their classmates could influence students' motivation and interest in the school. This is in line with the findings of a study by Dobransky and Frymier (2004), who contended that students' in-class relationships and the textbooks recommended by the instructors would have direct influence on the students' interest and sense of efficacy.

Furthermore, the above results demonstrated that EFL students were, in general, emotionally intelligent. More specifically, the students' intrapersonal competency was found to be stronger. As Bar-On (2006, p. 4) states, being emotionally intelligent on the intrapersonal level

compromises “the ability to be aware of ones’ emotions, feelings, and needs.” Thus, it is assumed that when EFL students who are highly emotionally intelligent are involved in stressful situations in their studies, they can have a better control on their emotions and successfully deal with stressors. Also, most of the participants of the study reported that they could maintain and develop mutually satisfying relationships with their instructors or classmates and were able to understand and appreciate others’ feelings. They claimed that they would take an optimistic view of the world, try to adapt themselves to their situations and find solutions than to give up. Hence, they were, in general, intrapersonally and interpersonally intelligent.

The third research question was aimed at assessing the correlation between EFL students’ EI competencies and their burnout dimensions. According to the results, all EFL students’ EI competencies, in general, had negative correlations with the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and positive correlations with the professional efficacy. It is assumed that EFL students’ general well-beings are affected with their level of general mood and adaptability. Also, certain amount of emotional energy is needed to deal with stressful situations and eliminate the feelings of depression, anger, and anxiety associated with burnout. This finding can help us claim that EFL students with high EI skills, such as intrapersonal, general mood, stress management, and adaptability are more capable of dealing with the demands of stressful situations and managing their emotions effectively (Bastian, Burns, & Nettelback, 2005). Another possible explanation is that EFL students with high levels of general mood can demonstrate positive attitudes and outlooks on their academic life and may become less vulnerable to burnout. The above findings of the present study are also consistent with the results of a study on 91 Romanian undergraduate students in which the students’ level of EI was associated in a negative way with their burnout level (Cazan & Nastasa, 2015).

As to the fourth research question, the results demonstrated the significant contribution of EFL students’ general mood, adaptability, and intrapersonal competencies to their burnout dimensions. One can argue that EFL students with high general mood levels are capable of creating an optimistic and funny environment in the classroom that protects them against the anxiety, depression, and stressful situations which all contribute to burnout experience. Besides, the adaptability of EFL students and their flexibility in dealing with the demands of stressful

situations can reduce their levels of burnout. By the same token, when EFL students are perceived as emotionally intelligent individuals at the intrapersonal level, they are well aware of their own feelings, emotions, and needs; they can actualize their abilities; besides, they can provide the necessary emotional energy for setting goals, motivating themselves, and achieving goals. Thus, finding ways to develop these EI competencies among EFL students is of paramount importance.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study demonstrated that EFL students' levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism were not high, whereas their levels of professional efficacy tended to be high. This finding makes us conclude that EFL students generally had low levels of burnout. The results of the qualitative data analyses also explained that several personal and organizational factors were the major sources of burnout among EFL students in the present study. The major causes included outside influences (particular future job-related stress, financial pressure, and family problems), instructors' attitudes and behaviors, inside influences (particularly class materials and class environment), and personal motivations. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that the majority of EFL students were emotionally intelligent at the intrapersonal level.

Furthermore, EFL students' EI competencies were found to be negatively correlated with the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and positively correlated with professional efficacy. More specifically, the results of the present study showed that EFL students' general mood characteristics demonstrated high negative correlations with their emotional exhaustion and cynicism attributes that is, their exhaustion from study demands and negative attitudes toward academic settings. Moreover, EFL students' adaptability and intrapersonal competencies correlated positively with their professional efficacy. Although EFL students' general mood and adaptability characteristics were found to be better predictors of student burnout, they should not be singled out as the only components of the EI that act as significant contributors to student burnout because, as the above results demonstrated, the whole EI construct could play a buffering role in preventing burnout among EFL students.

The findings of the present study can nourish the literature by providing evidence on the significance of EI in dealing with student

burnout in an EFL context. Through identifying the personal and organizational factors and the ways EFL students experience burnout, it may be possible to develop some interventional programs that raise EFL students' awareness of the possible causes of burnout, make them familiar with different coping strategies, and enhance their well-being.

By implication, the findings highlight the importance of students' general mood, adaptability, and intrapersonal competencies in EFL contexts where they face challenges in the process of learning English. EFL students with low levels of these competencies are more likely to experience frustration and exhaustion in dealing with daily pressures. Thus, some EI training programs should be provided in EFL settings, in which students learn how to use their EI competencies in dealing with daily academic-life pressures and burnout sources.

The findings of the current study corroborated the results of the previous studies in this realm of research. However, the presence of several inevitable limitations would decrease generalizations of the findings. This study was carried out on a sample of EFL students from two provinces in Iran. Thus, the generalization of the results to the other EFL settings should be exercised with caution. Besides, the role of students' demographic variables was not taken into account. Future studies in the context of the present research can be carried out to see whether demographic variables can moderate the relationship between EI and student burnout. Moreover, the cross-sectional design of the present study can be complemented by future longitudinal studies to assess the causal relationship between EFL students' burnout and their EI.

Bio-data

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