



## Factors Behind Emotional Damage to EFL Teacher Professional Identity

Ali Banisharif <sup>1</sup> , Seyed Ayatollah Razmjoo <sup>1\*</sup> , Mohammad Saber Khaghaninejad <sup>1</sup> , Aliyar Ahmadi <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

<sup>2</sup> Department of Sociology and Social Planning, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

Received: 2026/04/21

Accepted: 2026/07/04

**Abstract:** Teacher professional identity is an important driver of teacher motivation and efficacy. However, literature on emotions and EFL teacher professional identity shows that scarce research has been conducted on emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity. To bridge this gap, this study carried out an investigation into the factors contributing to emotional damage to teacher professional identity in Iran, employing a qualitative research design. For this purpose, twenty-one Iranian EFL teachers participated in semi-structured interviews, and sixteen of them were selected for this study through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis method, and codes and themes were identified and interpreted with the help of MAXQDA software. The findings showed that the factors causing the emotional damage can be classified into two categories of personal ecology and contextual ecology factors. Personal ecology factors included professional capital and personal dispositions, while contextual ecology factors involved societal recognition, institutional environment, workplace conditions, and economic conditions. Finally, a comprehensive model of the emerged themes, codes, and sub-codes was developed. Among the many educational implications of this research are the development of more efficient support systems for teachers, a revolutionary transformation in learning environments, and the revival of teachers' motivation and energy in the long term.

**Keywords:** EFL Context, Emotion, Emotional Damage, Teacher Professional Identity.

\* Corresponding Author.

Authors' Email Address:

<sup>1</sup> Ali Banisharif (ali.banisharif@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup> Seyed Ayatollah Razmjoo (arazmjoo@rose.shirazu.ac.ir), <sup>3</sup> Mohammad Saber Khaghaninejad (mskhaghani@shirazu.ac.ir), <sup>4</sup> Aliyar Ahmadi (ahmadi.aliyar@gmail.com)



## Introduction

Since its introduction into the research domain nearly 70 years ago ([Henry, 2016](#)), teacher professional identity has expanded into a principal research topic in education ([Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2022](#)). While teacher professional identity has received various definitions, it can be defined as a dynamic, complex, and collaborative concept ([Akkerman & Meijer, 2011](#)), involving how teachers perceive themselves within specific contexts ([Yazan, 2022](#)). Countless factors can affect and reshape teacher professional identity ([Golzar et al., 2022](#)), which might appear internally or externally, posing some daily challenges that negatively influence EFL teachers' professional identity ([Fairley, 2020](#)). In this regard, much more attention needs to be paid to the studies on emotional factors and their possible effects on teacher professional identity due to the inevitable interrelationship of emotions and identity and its dynamic nature.

In the view of the fact that language teaching is an emotion-laden profession ([Richards, 2020](#)), over recent decades, copious number of studies on the effects of positive or negative emotions on teaching shows a growing interest in teacher emotions ([Al-Amri, 2025](#); [Chen & Cheng, 2021](#); [Derakhshan et al., 2024](#); [Richards, 2020](#); [Roslaini, & Ilyas, 2026](#); [Zhao, & Yang, 2026](#)). As a socio-political and context-dependent construct ([Barcelos, 2015](#)), emotions influence various aspects of teachers' professional lives, including their identity ([Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2012](#)). Such a concept is vital in the teaching profession since teacher identity is the channel through which self- and other-meaning are assigned ([Villegas et al., 2020](#)). Moreover, daily personal and professional challenges ([Fairley, 2020](#)) might lead to emotional challenges for teachers ([Nazari & De Costa, 2023](#)).

Despite abundant research on teachers' identity, several questions await to be answered ([Lutovac, 2020](#)), such as what the underlying implicit factors influencing teacher professional identity in specific temporal and spatial features are, what the virtually invisible roots of the identity iceberg are, to name a few. As mentioned, at every stage of the teaching profession, emotions strongly impact professional identity ([Chen, 2016](#); [Barcelos & Aragão, 2018](#)). With regard to the definition provided by [Rodgers and Scott \(2008\)](#), identity formation is not only an emotional but also a contextual and ongoing process. This implies that much research is needed in this area to uncover differing aspects of teacher professional identity in different places and times.

Emotional damage is a relatively new technical term that was not formally defined in the literature. However, it can be considered as the long-term negative consequences of chronic emotional stress: depression, anxiety, burnout, reduced job satisfaction and

functioning (Raza et al., 2023). Regarding the ecological perspective, emotional damage is the consequence of continuous interactions between personal and contextual factors. The key here is to depict the differences between emotional damage and other emotional constructs such as emotional tension. Overall, these technical terms differ in their length, nature, intensity, and also their relationship to identity (Heck et al., 2021). First, other emotional constructs are transient negative psychological states or processes stemming from interpersonal relationships, while emotional damage is related to long-lasting psychological negative consequences. Second, emotional damage is more intense and severe than other emotional constructs. In other words, emotional damage can induce a deeper impact on teachers' well-being than emotional tension. Third, most of the emotional constructs are states or processes rather than prolonged outcomes as in emotional damage. Finally, the relationships between other emotional constructs and teacher professional identity are indirect or partial, while emotional damage has a direct relationship to teacher professional identity. Consequently, these features make emotional damage a relatively new and yet-to-be-explored emotional concept in the teaching profession.

In spite of the significance of negative emotions in damaging teachers' identities, scarce studies have directly explored the damage of negative emotions to teacher professional identity (e.g., Coleman, 2023). The available studies, though limited, have not devoted sufficient attention to contextual antecedents of teachers' emotion-laden professional identity, especially emotional damage in a sense that it can bring about unpredictable negative changes to teacher professional identity. Moreover, rare studies in the Iranian EFL context paid direct, focused attention to the factors behind emotional damage to EFL teachers' professional identities. For instance, while Nazari et al. (2024) used an ecological theoretical framework to investigate the interrelationships between emotions, Iranian EFL teachers' identity (re)construction, and teachers' wellbeing, they failed to pay nuanced attention to the emotional damage they can grapple with. In the same vein, Tajeddin and Keshvari (2025) explored the emotional tensions caused by shifting from being a teacher to a teacher educator in Iran, yet they did not consider the specific issue of emotional damage. It should also be mentioned that this matter gains momentum since, according to Yazan (2022), identity is a sociocultural concept that is, as a result, context-bound and context-sensitive. Therefore, comprehensive comprehension of such a notion requires further studies in different contexts. Additionally, due to the fact that emotions are still considered a mystery to be solved (Greenier et al., 2021), understanding negative emotions and their possible resultant damage to teacher professional identity can help educational administrators and trainers remedy

teachers with damaged or negatively stigmatized professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011). Therefore, there is an urgent need to explore the underlying factors causing emotional damage to EFL teachers' professional identities.

## Literature Review

### *Emotional Damage and Teacher Professional Identity*

In this study, the researchers moved away from the traditional fixed view of professional identity and incorporated an ecological framework in which professional identity is viewed as an ever-changing entity situated between the teacher's personal resources and their work and sociocultural environment (Mercer, 2021; Yazan, 2022). This approach considers teaching as a complicated system with interconnected elements (van Lier, 2004). In this model, the surrounding environment supplies the affordances for teachers' actions. The incompatibility of the two planes, inner-self and the teaching environment, leads to emotional damage to teachers' professional identity (Tao & Gao, 2021). According to Mercer (2021), identity is a correlative and emerging entity through time. The context or environment in this framework is multi-layered, including macro and micro-contexts.

In addition, teachers' professional identities are (re)constructed through their experiences (Norton & De Costa, 2019), especially their emotional experiences (Maulucci, 2012). Language teaching overflows with numerous challenges and tensions (Nazari & De Costa, 2023; Richards, 2023), which can undoubtedly stir teachers' emotions (Nazari et al., 2024). These challenges might emanate internally—from within teachers (Leeferink et al., 2018)—or externally, from their surrounding environment (Golzar et al., 2022; Nazari et al., 2023). While challenges and tensions are necessary elements of professional growth (Flores & Day, 2006), an excessive amount of them can cause diverse degrees of emotional damage to teachers' professional identity. In other words, negative emotions arising from such challenges and tensions may cause emotional damage to teachers' professional identity (Chen et al., 2022; Song, 2016; Teng, 2017).

Previous literature on teachers' emotions has widely focused on constructs such as emotional stress, emotional tension, emotional conflict, emotional exhaustion, burnout, and emotional labor. However, this study adopted the relatively new concept of emotional damage to investigate a different phenomenon. Emotional damage is defined as a fluid, negative identity-based emotional consequence originating ecologically from teachers' protracted negative emotional experiences in their workplaces. To operationalize emotional damage, the study considers the four main criteria. First, emotional damage originates from

long-term exposure to work-related emotional challenges rather than short-term stress. Second, it results in persistent negative influences on teachers' professional identity and their emotional well-being. Third, it is related to work-related emotional injuries that cannot be resolved easily and quickly with surface situational changes. Finally, it acts as an umbrella term encompassing the emotional constructs mentioned here.

This term is compared and contrasted here with other existing emotional constructs. According to [Batson et al. \(1987\)](#), emotional stress is a short-term response to work-related developments. This construct may depict symptoms such as low mood, fatigue, and worry coming from conflicts or incidents ([Yang, 2023](#); [Chaves-Montero et al., 2025](#); [Chen et al., 2022](#)). A closely related term to emotional stress is emotional tension, which can be defined as part of the stress response when a person's resources are threatened ([Orgambídez et al., 2025](#); [Sankar, 2025](#)). Emotional stress and tension are strong responses that may be relieved if the sources are resolved ([Orgambídez et al., 2025](#)). The next emotional term is emotional conflict. Based on the literature, emotional conflicts are disruptive events that disturb interpersonal relationships and may lead to exhaustion or fatigue ([Zhang et al., 2024](#); [Kim et al., 2025](#)). Emotional exhaustion is defined as a state in which a person's emotional resources are drained by chronic work emotional stress/demands ([Mwakyusa & Mcharo, 2024](#); [Kim et al., 2025](#)). Similarly, emotional damage is different from the concept of burnout, which is an occupational syndrome and centers around psychological exhaustion. Emotional labor means managing feelings and regulating emotions to fulfill organizational rules ([Zhan et al., 2016](#); [Yang & Jang, 2022](#); [Purper et al., 2022](#)). It includes two types of emotional acting. In surface acting, a person fakes or suppresses emotions, while in deep acting, the person tries to experience and feel the requested emotions ([Grandey, 2000](#); [Jeung et al., 2018](#)).

### ***Empirical Research***

Assuming the direct connection between teachers' emotional experiences and career challenges ([Chen et al., 2022](#); [Nazari & De Costa, 2023](#)), emotional damage may be one of the determining factors in influencing teacher professional identity. However, such a concept has scarcely been mentioned in the prior literature on emotions and teacher professional identity. Among the few studies on emotional damage, [Coleman \(2023\)](#) qualitatively investigated how narrative inquiry within teacher education repairs damaged queer teacher identity. Heteronormative expectations result in deep shame, professional detachment, and emotional dissonance. This study showed the effectiveness of narrative repair as a therapeutic

and pedagogical process within teacher education. In addition to healing damaged queer identity, the narration of hurting professional histories of queer teachers promotes agency and critical awareness. In his book, [Lindemann Nelson \(2001\)](#) explored how the professional identity of healthcare providers impacts their clinical decisions. It was stated that compromising professional identity may lead to moral considerations of patients' emotions, which is a kind of narrative repair. In this book, it was mentioned that there is a relationship between identity damage and healthcare moral practices. Moreover, it showed the significance of treating identity damage to create a more sympathetic and moral clinical setting through improving patient and healthcare provider communications. In another relevant study, [Cahill et al. \(2023\)](#) explored the relationship between moral injuries and damaged moral identities in the healthcare context. They showed that moral injuries ruptured moral identity through moral disorientation among healthcare professionals. It was revealed that repairing moral identity is a community-based process rather than an isolated attempt. Also, [Woldarsky Meneses and Greenberg \(2015\)](#) aimed to outline the process of forgiveness among couples to present a model of forgiveness in order to help repair emotional injuries and enhance emotional resilience. In addition, [Hodges et al. \(2025\)](#) examined the relationship between moral injuries and identity loss or change. According to this article, moral injuries negatively impacted veterans' self-sense by breaking beliefs and values. The findings showed that identity is associated with the symptoms of moral injuries. In a medical setting, [Steinauer et al. \(2022\)](#) explored the negative emotional experiences of 19 obstetrics and gynecology residents toward patients regarding their professional identities. After thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews, it was revealed that residents' negative emotional experiences are induced by identity challenges as teachers, learners, or physicians, and the residents frequently grappled with ineffective coping mechanisms.

In addition to the scarce research particularly conducted on the investigation of emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity (mentioned above), some other studies have been carried out on identity, emotional tensions, or emotional experiences in the ELT profession. For instance, [Deng et al. \(2018\)](#) showed that emotional tensions among teachers in China arise from the classroom teaching process and institutional policies. In another study, [Golzar et al. \(2022\)](#) explored professional tensions of EFL teachers in Afghanistan, and the results revealed that tensions originated from workload, mixed-level classes, and the use of technology. Relatedly, a more recent study investigated the impact of Iranian EFL teachers' emotional experiences on their professional identity ([Kamyabifar & Safdari, 2024](#)), showing four main teachers' senses of teaching appreciation, collegial

connectedness, teaching competence, and commitment. This study aimed to explore only the experiences involving emotions; however, studies need to be conducted on the negative impact of emotional experiences and their possible roots. As a recent closely related study, [Seyri and Ghiasvand \(2024\)](#) explored internal and external emotional tensions and the use of emotion regulation techniques among Iranian EFL teachers. The findings indicated that EFL teachers experience a variety of emotions at intra- and interpersonal levels. Nevertheless, this study was among the very few research studies conducted on the separate role of internal and external emotional tensions, which suggests the necessity of research in this area. It must also be mentioned that the focus of this study was only the tensions, not the damage resulting from such emotional tensions.

As a familiar technical term to emotionally damaged teacher professional identity, trauma-informed pedagogy can be defined as opportunities provided for meaningful learning by reducing disturbances to cognition and classroom-centered relationships ([Kirk Anderson, 2026](#)). According to this pedagogy, people cannot be detached from their life experiences and traumas ([Arbour et al., 2024](#)). Regarding trauma-informed pedagogy, a couple of studies are reviewed here. For instance, [Amateau et al. \(2023\)](#) examined certified nursing assistants' experiences using trauma-informed spectacles. The findings indicated that resident relationships are sources of both emotional damage and emotional strength, institutional cultures are disrespectful, and assistants require personal well-being support. The existing environments aggravated the traumas of healthcare staff, leading to lowered job satisfaction and wellness. The use of trauma-informed pedagogy together with enhanced administrative conditions showed promising effects on improving the quality of healthcare and staff resilience. In his study, [Kirk Anderson \(2026\)](#) aimed to develop a conceptual theory for trauma-informed pedagogy applied in higher education through developing theoretical underpinnings in the literature and positing it in relation to a holistic view of pedagogical theories. In another trauma-informed study in an educational context, [Eastman et al. \(2026\)](#) investigated the Australian primary teachers' perceptions of trauma-informed pedagogy through their classroom practices. The findings showed that only half of the participants used trauma-informed pedagogy in their classes. Also, it was depicted that teachers' use of trauma-informed pedagogy focused more on supporting learners' emotions and behaviors rather than class strategies or learning support. Additionally, in an ELT context, [Kostouros et al. \(2023\)](#) examined the use of trauma-informed teaching by ELT teachers. This phenomenological study revealed themes of teacher self-care, mitigation strategies, and viewpoints towards the trauma manifestation in the classroom. [Palanac \(2022\)](#) also studied the use of appropriate

trauma-informed pedagogy for ELT refugees. The results showed the effectiveness of such pedagogy in minimizing the trauma impact, entering the post-traumatic development phase, and enhancing effective learning in ELT refugees.

Another related technical term is burnout. [Montero-Marín \(2016\)](#) defined it as a response to chronic and progressive work-related stress that causes cognitive, emotional, and perspective damage to individuals, which transforms into negative behavior towards work-related identity, individuals, and context itself ([Maslach, 2006](#)). While the study is on emotional damage to teacher professional identity, burnout can be regarded as the manifestation of that emotional damage. According to [Maslach and Jackson \(1981\)](#), burnout is about pessimism, emotional exhaustion, and decreased efficacy. However, emotional damage to teacher professional identity accompanies or follows teacher burnout. In other words, emotionally damaged teacher professional identity paves the way for burnout and even attrition. For example, [Farber and Bishop \(2025\)](#) investigated teachers' perceptions towards teaching in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic through the use of burnout theory. The analysis of the semi-structured interviews with arts and general teachers unexpectedly indicated an elevation of their perception regarding their professional efficacy. In their paper, [Zeshan et al. \(2024\)](#) intended to indicate the role hospital nurses' self-regulation plays in describing the impact of job demands on their burnout. Using structural equation modelling, this study showed that job demands influence nurses' burnout through maladaptive and adaptive regulations. Maladaptive regulation strengthens this effect, whereas adaptive regulation decreases it. In an ELT study, [Xing \(2022\)](#) examined the relationship among Chinese EFL teachers' professional identity, teachers' negative and positive emotions, teacher burnout as a negative factor, and work engagement as a positive factor. The findings showed the negative correlation between burnout and work engagement. In addition, it was stated that various factors played mediating roles among teacher professional identity, burnout, and work engagement. Moreover, emotional experiences influenced the relationship between work engagement and teacher professional identity. In a similar study, [Fathi et al. \(2023\)](#) investigated the correlations among burnout, psychological capital, EFL teacher professional identity, and self-regulation. Applying structural equation modeling, this research indicated the negative correlation of burnout with teacher professional identity and self-regulation. Moreover, professional capital positively impacted self-regulation.

Emotional damage to teacher professional identity can be considered as an implicit factor in teachers' attrition. [Kelchtermans \(2017\)](#) explained that teacher attrition and retention are educational issues, which shows the necessity of preventing teachers from leaving their

job for irrational reasons. According to him, teacher attrition and retention include both a challenge and an issue. For instance, [Koerber et al. \(2023\)](#) conducted a systematic review on the critical factors contributing to teacher attrition and retention as well as their relation to teachers' motivational needs. Frequent fulfillment and support of teachers' motivational needs led to more teacher retention. This can happen through developing a supportive and growth-oriented workplace and allowing teachers' participation in the selection and implementation of local policy and professional development. In their study, [Borman and Dowling \(2008\)](#) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of studies on teacher attrition and retention to uncover the factors moderating teacher attrition. The findings suggested that personal features and professional work-related factors contribute significantly to negative teacher attrition. In a recent study, [Cuervo and Vera-Toscano \(2025\)](#) explored the important factors underlying teachers' withdrawal from teaching and the possible effects of employment in other jobs. The findings indicated that attrition factors were workload demands, inappropriate work-life balance, and high levels of work stress. Moreover, former teachers mentioned the improved level of job satisfaction and wellbeing in other education-related jobs. As can be seen, prior research on teacher attrition and retention has focused on structural factors such as income and institutional support. Notwithstanding, this study moves beyond simple attrition depending on structural conditions to psychological attrition in which teachers are physically present in the classroom but emotionally detached from their professional role.

### ***Research Gap and Questions***

Regardless of the recent research on teachers' emotions and professional identity ([Dağtaş & Zaimoğlu, 2025](#); [Janes & Chen, 2024](#); [Liu & Xie, 2025](#); [Liu et al., 2025](#); [Li et al., 2024](#)), emotional damage has been rarely investigated in the literature. Moreover, a deeper understanding of the relationship between emotions and identity requires further research, especially within EFL contexts ([Golombek & Doran, 2014](#); [Jeongyeon & Young, 2020](#); [Nichols et al., 2017](#)). What is evident in the previous body of literature is the focus on identity formation, emotional tensions, use of emotional regulation strategies, and other emotional constructs, while much research needs to be conducted on the long-lasting negative harm and causes of such inevitable tensions on teacher professional identity. Therefore, there is a need for research to investigate the damage inflicted on teachers' identities, in the view of the fact that much of the current literature on this topic focuses on pathologizing identities ([Tuck, 2009](#)). Additionally, due to the importance of context and fluidity in the formation of

teacher identities, more research studies on this topic need to be conducted with participants from different backgrounds in different educational contexts (Pappa et al., 2017). In addition, He et al. (2022) stated that the literature suffers from a lack of sufficient research on psychological aspects of the teaching profession, specifically in EFL contexts. Hence, there exists a huge gap in the literature regarding research on the causes of emotional damage to EFL teachers' professional identity. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the possible factors behind emotional damage to teacher professional identity in the EFL context of Iran. The current qualitative research intended to answer the following two research questions:

- RQ1: What are the components contributing to the emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity?
- RQ2: What model can be developed based on the emerged components?

## Methods

### *Design of the Study*

This study adopted a qualitative paradigm to explore a dynamic human construct. Qualitative research allows for a thorough investigation of complicated and multi-layered social phenomena (Lodico et al., 2010). For this purpose, the inductive thematic analysis method was employed to uncover underlying factors behind emotional damage based on the participants' experiences.

### *Participants*

At first, 21 Iranian EFL teachers from Shahrekord and Shiraz signed up for this study. All participants had language-related university degrees primarily in the field of teaching. Most participants were female, and teaching experience ranged mainly from 9 to 15 years. Approximately half of the participants held master's degrees; others either had bachelor's or doctoral degrees. Relevant detailed information is demonstrated in Table 1. Written consent was gained from all participants, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of their identity throughout and even after the study. Through purposive sampling, only the participants with emotionally damaged professional identities were chosen. To arrive at the participants with meaningful experience of emotional damage, some diagnostic questions were asked of the potential participants, which inquired about the alignment of teachers' professional vision and their current picture, any teaching instances that fade emotional experiences, the overall professional process, and the compatibility of personal and professional values. In other words, the intended purpose of identity-screening questions was to check whether the

participants' emotions had reached a damage-inflicting point (see Appendix A). Based on their answers, the interviewers excluded those participants who described their career changes with any degree of increased resilience, professional growth, and high adaptation mechanisms, meaning low levels of emotional damage to their professional identity. On the other hand, those participants who described their career changes with expressions of inefficacy, pessimism, emotional deprivation, and survival-mode teaching were selected for the study. These diagnostic questions allowed the researchers to exclude five teacher participants, creating a final sample of 16 teachers. To make sure of the content validity of these diagnostic questions, two applied linguists with expertise in psycholinguistics reviewed the diagnostic as well as the interview questions for clarity, relevance, and operationalization. Moreover, a pilot study was conducted to further strengthen the validity of the questions.

**Table 1.** Participant Demographic Information (Total N = 16)

| Variable                    | Type             | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender                      | Male             | 6         | 37.5%          |
|                             | Female           | 10        | 62.5%          |
| Teaching Experience (years) | < 5              | 2         | 12.5%          |
|                             | 5–15             | 9         | 56.25%         |
|                             | 16–25            | 4         | 25%            |
|                             | > 26             | 1         | 6.25%          |
|                             |                  |           |                |
| Education Level             | Bachelor's (B.A) | 4         | 25%            |
|                             | Master's (M.A)   | 7         | 43.75%         |
|                             | Doctorate (PhD)  | 5         | 31.25%         |

### ***Data Collection Instrument***

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data on the underlying factors causing emotional damage to EFL teachers' professional identity. To avoid embarrassment and guarantee a safe and relaxed atmosphere, interviews were conducted individually. This data collection method allows for follow-up questions when dealing with detailed descriptions of social phenomena (Kvale, 2010). The interview protocol was developed by the researchers. With regard to the credibility and dependability of the interview questions, measures of pilot interviews and expert review (two experts) were taken. Through pilot interviews, the researchers tested the interview procedure, discovered possible problems, and revised

questions before main interviews. Using expert reviews helped the researchers validate the questions, reduce biases, and increase the clarity and relevance of the questions.

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

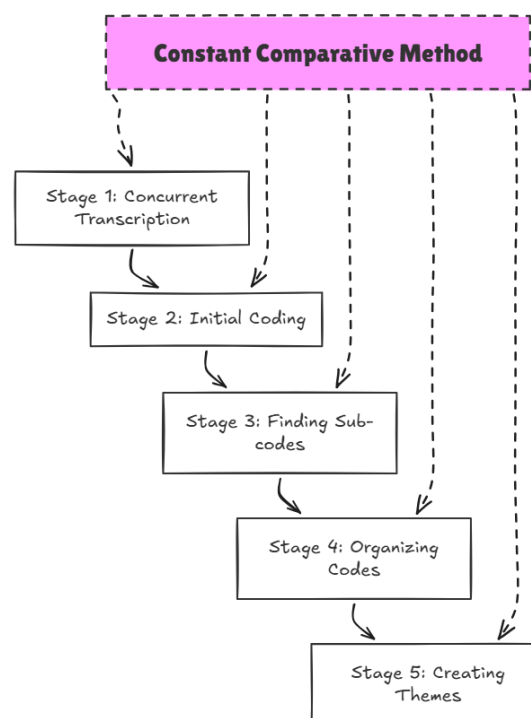
First, three pilot interviews were conducted to spot and address potential issues in the interview questions or process. Then, 21 initial participants took part in a single individual semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted in a private, peaceful place, either at the participants' workplaces in Shahrekord and Shiraz, depending on the participants' availability or exact geographical location. At the beginning of the main interviews, the interviewers carried out some informal talks with the participants to build rapport with them. During interviews, follow-up questions helped clarify obscure or unrelated responses. Interviews were conducted mostly in Persian, the participants' first language, to avoid potential misunderstandings. Then, participants provided written consent after being briefed on the research objectives and ethics. With their consent, all the interviews were audio-recorded. From one participant to the next, the length of interviews varied from 45 to 90 minutes. This way, the researchers ensured that they captured a comprehensive narrative of teachers' emotional experiences and respected their professional time constraints as well.

With regard to data saturation, the interviewing proceeded up to a point at which no new themes or codes stemmed from the analysis of successive interviews. Data saturation helped the researchers to ensure that relatively complete data were collected from an adequate sample size. It should be mentioned that data collection and analysis were administered simultaneously. This process was followed to the sixteenth interview, where no novel themes or codes were observed, indicating the sufficiency of the sample size for deep exploration of factors contributing to the construct under study. The interviews were conducted by two interviewers. The second interviewer's job was to help in probing questions when participants' responses seemed vague and needed further elaboration. The second interviewer was an M.A holder of TEFL and had prior experience in qualitative interviews. Before data collection, both interviewers reviewed the developed interview protocol to make sure they shared a similar understanding of the interview questions and probing techniques. As a form of methodological triangulation, the presence of a second interviewer helps enhance consistency, ensuring credibility and dependability, and reducing biases of a single interviewer. In order to eliminate interviewer incompatibility, after the pilot interviews, a strong preparation and interview procedure was developed.

Regarding interviewer positionality, it should be mentioned that a quasi-insider position was taken for both interviewers. Interviewers were one Iranian PhD candidate of TEFL and one MA holder of TEFL, belonging to the same community, same country, and same locality as the participants. However, the interviewers had age, gender, and familiarity differences with some of the participants. The first interviewer was a male PhD candidate from Shahrekord who had an acquaintance with some of the interviewees and shared a similar age range, gender group, and locality with some of the participants. The second interviewer was a female MA student from Shiraz who had some acquaintance with a few of the interviewees and shared a similar age range, gender group, and locality with some other participants. This way, the interviewers adopted a participant's stance to understand their context.

### **Data Analysis**

MAXQDA software was applied to systematically organize the dataset, manage codes and themes, retrieve segments, and keep a vivid audit trail of analytical decisions. The data analysis stage included five major steps of concurrent transcription, initial coding, finding sub-codes, organizing codes, and creating themes. The following figure shows this five-stage process.



**Figure 1.** Stages of Data Analysis within MAXQDA

First, each audio-recorded interview was jointly transcribed by the two interviewers after the interview using MAXQDA software to ensure transcription accuracy. In order to gain reassurance on data trustworthiness, member checking was done, in which transcriptions were sent to the participants to be checked for authenticity and accuracy. Notes taken during the interviews were then added into the transcripts. Through the constant comparison method, iterative inductive coding of the data started, meaning codes were constantly checked, edited, grouped, and refined as new interviews were conducted. Over 150 initial descriptive codes were assigned to meaningful and topic-relevant segments of the data within MAXQDA software (such as Appendix B). Next, initial codes were merged into sub-codes and later into codes based on conceptual similarity. Finally, the codes were integrated into overarching themes.

To ensure the transparency and rigor of the analysis, interviewers recorded an audit trail within MAXQDA software, documenting steps, data, coding procedures, code and theme development, and coder agreement. In addition, to enhance the credibility of the thematic analysis, inter-coder agreement was applied. This happened following three phases. First, both interviewers coded the data separately in MAXQDA software after each interview. In the second stage, they compared and contrasted the codes and reached a consensus. Then, a refined codebook was developed based on the consensus. Finally, the data were interpreted and reported verbally and visually. Using iterative coding of the data enhances the coding credibility through continuing checks and revisions of the codes while a new interview was analyzed. Moreover, the constant comparison method helped researchers refine the codes and identify unique fixed codes. During the coding process, all the coded segments were continuously checked against the transcriptions to make sure that coding is based on participants' meanings. This process increased the dependability of the final codes and themes.

## Findings

### *Factors behind Emotional Damage to EFL Teacher Professional Identity*

Using MAXQDA software, first the researchers assigned initial codes to the meaningful relevant data segments. Then, the inductive thematic analysis of the data revealed two major themes and twenty-two codes and sub-codes. Table 2 presents these emerging themes, codes, and sub-codes accordingly.

**Table 2.** Themes, Codes, and Sub-codes Causing Emotional Damage to EFL Teacher Professional Identity

| Theme                                                                                                                                                                                               | Code                                                                                                                                                                                   | Sub-code                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Personal Ecology Factors</b><br>Description: These are internal factors originating from teachers' individual resources, constitutions, and life circumstances.                                  | Professional Capital                                                                                                                                                                   | Professional Knowledge                                                   |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Description: This code is about teachers' general, personal, technical, and educational background that brings to their profession.                                                    | Base (level of knowledge)                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        | Educational Attainment (level of education)                              |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Personal Dispositions</b><br>Description: This code refers to teachers' psychological characteristics relevant to teachers' interpretation and response to professional experiences | Professional Motivation                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        | Personal Attitudes toward Teaching                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        | Personality Characteristics                                              |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        | Personal Life Challenges (private affairs)                               |
| <b>Contextual Ecology Factors</b><br>Description: These are external factors originating from different types of environments where the teacher works, such as social, institutional, and economic. | Societal Recognition                                                                                                                                                                   | Public Image                                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Description: This code shows how society perceives and values EFL teachers as professionals.                                                                                           | Societal Expectations                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Institutional Environment</b><br>Description: This code captures structural and policy-related conditions in the educational system.                                                | Educational Sector                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        | Educational Policies and Regulations                                     |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Workplace Conditions</b><br>Description: This code refers to the daily teaching environment and operational requirements.                                                           | Workload Demands                                                         |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        | Availability of Teaching Resources                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        | Stakeholder Interactions (students, parents, administrators, colleagues) |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        | Curriculum and Teaching Content                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Economic Conditions</b><br>Description: This code shows the financial security related to the teaching profession.                                                                  | Employment Security                                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        | Financial Compensation                                                   |

As depicted in the table, two main themes emerged: personal and contextual ecology factors. Personal ecology factors included professional capital and personal dispositions, while contextual ecology factors involved societal recognition, institutional environment, workplace condition, and economic condition. Finally, a model of the emerged codes was developed.

The professional capital category involved a professional knowledge base and educational attainment. High educational levels, particularly among PhD holders, sometimes had a negative impact on professional identity outside university settings. For example, p3 stated, *“With a high education level, they would look at you like you don’t belong here.”* Contrarily, low levels of technical or general knowledge or educational unpreparedness negatively affected EFL teachers’ professional identity. P10 expressed, *“My unpreparedness and teaching weaknesses or lack of knowledge have had a negative impact.”* Some of the mentioned excessive stress was caused by being propelled into teaching without adequate preliminaries *“I had no idea how to deal with students in class, and there was no specific training courses provided at the language school.”*

Personal dispositions contained four sub-codes of professional motivation, personal attitudes toward teaching, personality characteristics, and personal life challenges (private affairs). According to the participants, these internal factors emotionally affected teachers’ professional identity. The first mentioned topic under the personal dispositions category was professional motivation. Professional motivation has mixed effects depending on its kind, intrinsic or extrinsic. In most cases, such a factor had a positive impact when it was intrinsic in nature; for instance, p4 stated, *“Motivation has positively influenced me and made me more focused on the quality of my work.”* It is worth mentioning that p8 noted that only intrinsic motivation may be beneficial to teachers,

*If motivation is just a means to an end, it becomes like chasing money, jumping from one branch to another now and then. The most important motivation is internal, which is the highest form.*

Due to the fact that teachers earn a living from this job, extrinsic motivation influenced most of the teacher participants, even scratched the professional identity of those who were intrinsically motivated. For example, p1 commented, *“I can say it is a wasteful job, and I don’t want to be in school.”*

According to the participants, personal attitude towards the teaching profession has been constructed since early childhood but can be reshaped in the environment. Such a factor can have a positive or negative impact on the EFL teacher professional identity depending on the time frame. While some participants commented on the positive effect of personal attitudes, some others noted the negative effects: *"It's a source of income and living, and I feel no satisfaction at all."*

Personality characteristics were among the most discussed topics in teachers' interviews. Although this factor could induce a positive impact on teachers, it might also produce negative effects. For example, p12 said, *"My perfectionism puts extra pressure on my teaching."* Similarly, p5 added, *"Keeping everyone satisfied has had negative effects on me."* The final sub-code under the category of personal dispositions was personal life challenges (private affairs), which was only mentioned by a few of the participants. Personal matters can be defined as what happened outside the teaching context and inside the teacher's life. Due to the demanding living conditions in Iran, this issue had a negative impact on the teachers' professional identity. For instance, p9 expressed, *"There are also issues that stem from my personal life that create pressure."*

Societal recognition code included public image and societal expectations. Participants underscored how public image toward teachers affected their professional identity. Moreover, many participants commented that teachers confront irrational expectations and social underestimation, which negatively affected their emotional health. Although most of the teachers talked about the positive effects of such a factor, some of them mentioned its negative image: *"I don't see it having a high social standing, and it affects me ... I don't see the ultimate positive impact."* Regarding societal expectations, nearly all the participants felt that social expectations frequently put extreme pressure on teachers, leading to emotional damage. In this regard, p13 said, *"The expectation of a university lecturer's salary is very high, and you should have a high-end car and good financial status."*

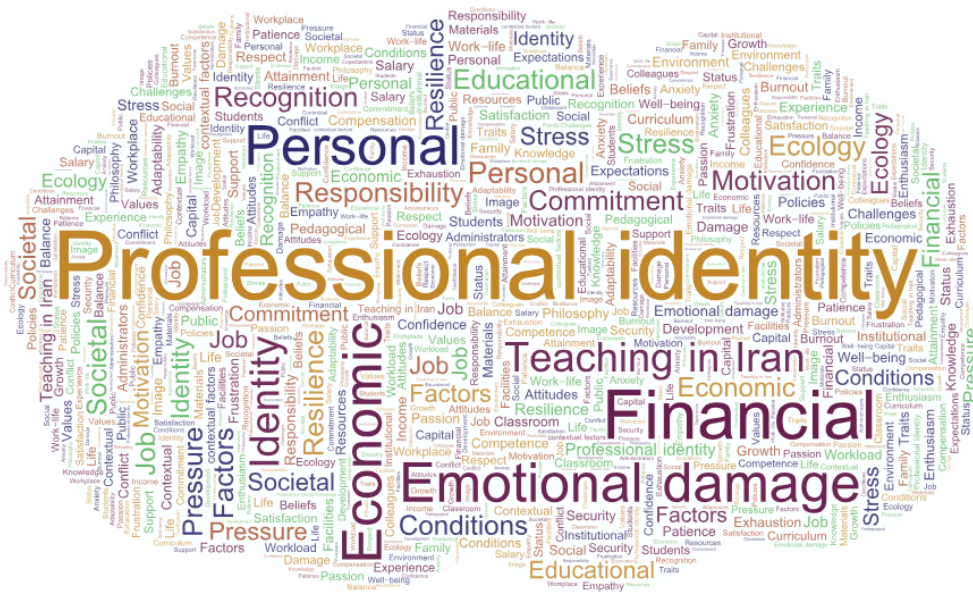
The next code was institutional environment, which involved the educational sector and educational policies and regulations. The educational sector referred to whether teachers worked in private or public institutions. With regard to the educational sector, while both sectors had distinctive challenges of their own, teacher participants stated that the public sector had a higher negative impact on their professional identities. For instance, p15 remarked, *"I feel sad because teaching in language schools, institutions, and even universities doesn't have the value it should have."* Closely related to the educational sector was educational policies. Participants considered macro and micro policies governing

educational contexts as principal roots of emotional damage. This sub-code relates to the concept of emotional labor. For instance, p16 added, *“Educational policies have been very influential; it's hard for me to see someone dictate to me that I should do.”* P7 commented, *“I somewhat oppose educational policies that put pressure on my performance and affect my freedom of action.”*

Another code was workplace condition, which involved workload demands, availability of teaching resources, stakeholder interactions (students, parents, administrators, colleagues), and curriculum and teaching content. Participants conferred various challenges stemming from their daily teaching experiences within their workplace. For example, workload was an often-cited issue. Although some teachers were able to manage their workload skillfully, a large number of them felt overwhelmed. P16 stated, *“I feel like a robot; I go in the morning and return at night, merely getting by without any positive growth or change.”* Participants also stated that insufficient teaching resources and inadequate facilities caused emotional damage. In this regard, p8 said, *“I think the lack of facilities has had a fairly negative impact on me because it has been a bit bothersome.”* Participants added that pre-determined teaching content and demanding curriculum had negative emotional impacts on their professional identity; for example, p6 said, *“Unfortunately, you end up going to class and teaching grammar or maybe a difficult reading while you didn't need them.”* The final sub-code of workplace conditions was interactions with educational stakeholders. The educational context is a significant determining factor of the approving or disapproving effects of these factors. Participants stressed the impact of educational stakeholders, including students, colleagues, managers, parents, and evaluators. Managers, colleagues, and educational evaluators were particularly mentioned as the most common sources of the emotional damage. P3 remarked on the influence of managers, *“Those who are in charge in the education department have had a more negative impact, where there are no encouragement and more harsh criticisms.”* Regarding evaluations, teachers stated that knowledge-based assessments could be constructive, but many participants reported receiving no fruitful feedback. For example, p14 said, *“Evaluations haven't affected me because I don't receive the feedback.”* Interactions with students themselves and their parents also emotionally influenced teachers' professional identity. While positive relationships could be promising, negative experiences sometimes resulted in emotional damage.

Economic conditions, the most prominent code among the participants, was one of the repeatedly mentioned factors. This code incorporated two sub-codes: employment security and financial compensation. Participants underlined their current poor economic situations

and financial pressures. This factor was determining in causing emotional damage, especially among male participants. For example, one p11 stated, *“I couldn't live off this job because there weren't enough students to fill my time.”* Financial issues often co-occurred with job security concerns. For instance, p2 expressed, *“The most important thing is job security and whether you, as a teacher, can have a sufficient income.”* In addition, p6 said, *“In a way, there is no job security, and this makes me view this profession negatively.”* The following figure shows the word cloud of the most common codes and themes assigned to the data segments.

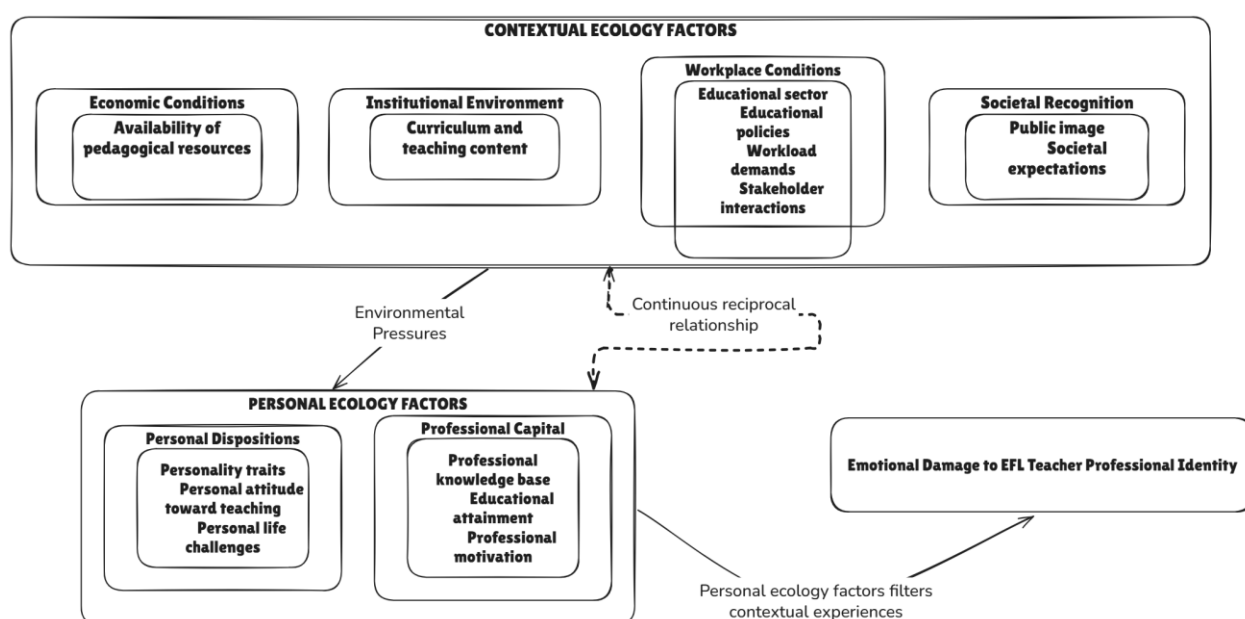


**Figure 2.** Word Cloud of the Codes and Themes in MAXQDA

## *The Model of Factors Causing Emotional Damage to EFL Teacher Professional Identity*

Through inductive thematic coding, themes were uncovered. By amalgamating all themes, codes, and sub-codes, a model illustrating the factors causing emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity was developed (see [Figure 2](#)). As indicated in the graph produced using MAXQDA software, the two principal themes are personal ecology factors and contextual ecology factors. Personal ecology factors include eight codes and sub-codes, while contextual ecology factors involve fourteen codes and sub-codes. Personal ecology factors concern components causing emotional damage from within the teachers themselves, whereas contextual ecology factors refer to damage originating from the elements in the surrounding environment.

According to the model, personal ecology factors comprise two codes of professional capital and personal dispositions. The sub-codes of professional capital are professional knowledge base and educational attainment. Personal dispositions include four sub-codes: professional motivation, personal attitudes towards teaching, personal life challenges, and personality features. On the other hand, contextual ecology factors consist of four codes: societal recognition, institutional environment, workplace condition, and economic condition. Societal recognition includes public image and societal expectations. The institutional environment involves the educational sector and educational policies and regulations. Additionally, the workplace conditions are composed of workload demands, availability of teaching resources, stakeholder interactions, and curriculum and teaching content. Finally, economic conditions have two subcategories of employment security and financial compensation.



**Figure 3.** The Model of Factors Causing Emotional Damage to EFL Teacher Professional Identity

## Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the factors behind emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity and to develop a corresponding model. The inductive thematic analysis of interview transcripts provided a comprehensive description of emotionally induced damage to EFL teacher professional identity—a somewhat new technical term that may expand our understanding of emotions and identity.

The findings pointed out that emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity is induced by a complicated interaction of personal ecology factors and contextual ecology factors. Personal ecology factors refer to issues deriving from within teachers, while contextual ecology factors are related to the ones arising from outside the teachers. This fact aligns with prior research showing that different internal and external sources of emotional injuries affect teachers' emotions (Burić et al., 2020; Wu & Chen, 2018). Additionally, negative emotions emerging from teaching tensions and challenges cause emotional damage to teacher professional identity (Fairley, 2020; Nazari et al., 2024). While most of the factors that emerged have been previously reported in the literature, the present study indicates that emotional damage to teacher professional identity originates from the interaction of two main themes of contextual pressures and teachers' personal dispositions. This interactional nature of factors, rather than the impact of any single factor alone, has received limited attention in previous EFL teacher identity research.

A notable finding is that teachers' personal dispositions affect how contextual factors, such as contextual issues, are interpreted and experienced. Personal ecology factors included two codes of professional capital and personal dispositions. Professional capital, including educational attainment and professional knowledge base, was revealed to influence teachers' sense of professional legitimacy. Findings indicated that low levels of knowledge—either technical or general—led to emotional damage to teachers' professional identity. This aligns with Derakhshan et al. (2023), who stated that negative emotions arising from insufficient professional knowledge negatively affect EFL teacher identity. Some other studies have also stressed the effects of knowledge on teacher professional identity (Beijaard, 2019). However, possessing a strong knowledge base did not necessarily defend EFL teachers from emotional damage because their expertise was not adequately recognized within their teaching environment. This finding suggests that teacher professional identity is not determined entirely by individual competence but also by the extent to which such competence is socially validated. Level of education, especially among teachers with high academic achievements, could also negatively affect EFL teacher professional identity. Although such a factor is rarely examined in the literature, a plausible explanation could be that high educational achievements produce heightened social expectations and pressures (Fairley, 2020).

The findings further indicate that personal dispositions involved professional motivation, attitudes toward teaching, personality traits, and personal life challenges. The study showed that such factors functioned as influential factors in teachers' susceptibility to identity-related emotional damage. Teachers with strong professional commitment and high

levels of motivation often remained engaged despite difficult emotional teaching conditions; however, extended exposure to contextual stressors steadily lessened their self-concept of professional value. This reflects findings by [Roth et al. \(2007\)](#) in which motivation was pivotal in causing emotional injuries to identity. Attitude toward the teaching profession was found to be a vital factor causing emotional damage to teacher professional identity, which was in accordance with research on the relationship between attitude and professional identity ([Timošćuk & Ugaste, 2012](#)). Previous research also mentioned that psychological traits—especially personality type—are manifestations of emotions (e.g., [Ünaldı et al., 2024](#)). Personality type also occupied a fundamental role in causing emotional damage; for example, extroversion led to a positive influence on teacher professional development ([Yu et al., 2021](#)). Similarly, personal life challenges intensified the emotional damage of workplace demands. This finding adds to previous research by stressing that emotional damage to teacher professional identity is not simply the outcome of systemic conditions but is constructed by teachers' broader life conditions and personal interpretations of such conditions. This finding was rarely indicated in the literature.

Contextual ecology factors encompassed four main codes of societal recognition, institutional environment, workplace conditions, and economic conditions. Social perception included public image and societal expectations. Societal recognition was a significant impact on teachers' emotional professional identity. Participants differentiated between public image—the societal impression of the teaching profession—and social expectations—the societal demands for teachers. Participants reported that negative public perceptions and unrealistic social expectations reduced their sense of professional value. Societal expectations were shown to markedly contribute to emotional damage, echoing the descending social value of the teaching profession, probably related to teachers' low socio-economic status, reflecting previous research (e.g., [Derakhshan et al., 2023](#)). Intriguingly, participants cited both positive and negative impacts of social image on their professional identity, opposing [Nazari et al.'s \(2023\)](#) findings in which teaching was considered as an undervalued profession. While previous literature has identified low social status as a challenge for teachers, the present findings indicate that societal recognition directly impacts teachers' professional identity by influencing how they perceive their professional value. This fact shows that teacher professional identity is relatively negotiated through socio-cultural validation and recognition.

Institutional environment factors, involving the educational sector and educational policies, were also displayed to contribute to emotional damage to teacher professional

identity. Participants frequently mentioned policy-related demands and institutional restrictions as inhibiting their professional agency. These findings support the idea that teacher identity is shaped within macro-power systems. Previous research has revealed the substantial place of educational policies in causing emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity (Benesch, 2017; Fredricks & Warriner, 2016). This factor was among the most commonly mentioned causes of emotional damage to teacher professional identity. For instance, Derakhshan et al. (2023) found that educational policies in Iran thrust negative constraints on EAP instructors, resulting in psycho-emotional damage. Regarding the educational sector, previous research also underscored the varied degrees of emotional impact of the educational sector on teacher professional identity (Nazari et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the current study expands this understanding by revealing how institutional pressures interact with personal dispositions to create identity damage. In this study, teachers responded variably to policy constraints depending on teachers' motivations, attitudes, and personal circumstances.

As another major source of emotional damage to teacher professional identity, workplace conditions included workload demands, availability of teaching resources, educational stakeholders' interactions, and curriculum and teaching content. Echoing previous studies (Chen et al., 2020), this study reproduced the negative effects of factors associated with the teaching-learning process. It was depicted that workload contributed to emotional exhaustion, a clear precursor to emotional damage (Golzar et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). Insufficient teaching resources and facilities also contributed to emotional injuries to teacher professional identity, reflecting prior literature (Mann & Tang, 2012; Nazari et al., 2023). The teaching profession, as a social practice, essentially involves interactions. Similarly, the findings indicated that emotional damage also arose from relationships with educational stakeholders. Reflecting on previous studies (Hayik & Weiner-Levy, 2019; Yuan & Lee, 2016; Norton & De Costa, 2019), this research confirmed the fact that students, as the ultimate collectors of teachers' knowledge, radically affect teachers' professional identity (de)construction. Other educational stakeholders, such as educators, also emotionally damaged teachers' professional identity, echoing previous research (Barkhuizen, 2021; Song, 2022; Yazan et al., 2023). Additionally, parents affected teacher emotional well-being, particularly when dealing with younger learners (Pourhassan & Nazari, 2023; Pressley, 2021). Moreover, collegial influence was another source of emotional damage to EFL teachers' professional identity, consistent with prior research (e.g., Wang, 2014). With regard to teaching content, participants commented that some teaching materials were rather

annoying, confirming the results of previous studies on educational systems and ecology (Fairley, 2020). It is important to mention that the findings suggested that these factors scarcely operated independently. Instead, they formed inter-related pressures that amalgamated over time. For instance, the emotional damage coming from heavy workloads became intensified when followed by inadequate facilities, discouraging stakeholders, or an inflexible curriculum. Again, this finding emphasizes the collective nature of emotional damage to teacher professional identity and shows that teacher professional identity is endangered not by single challenges but by the combination of various contextual demands.

Lastly, economic conditions, including employment security and financial compensation, further significantly impacted teachers' perceptions of themselves as teaching professionals. Economic issues frequently played an intensifier role in other factors of emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity, especially in male participants. This can be due to the fact that in Iran's society, men are the sole provider in families. Moreover, Iran has been experiencing difficult economic conditions for years now, and this economic constraint led to the prominence of this factor in the interviews. Teacher participants regularly noted that they could not stand financially on the teaching profession alone. These findings reflect previous studies mentioning economic challenges faced by teachers (Derakhshan et al., 2023; Tao & Gao, 2018). While previous literature widely reported financial challenges, the present findings reveal their identity-based implications. Economic insecurity did not simply influence teachers' well-being; it also changed how teachers appraised their worth in the teaching profession.

Altogether, these findings lead to a holistic and comprehensive model of understanding emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity. The findings indicated that emotional damage is induced through a dynamic process in which societal, institutional, workplace, and economic challenges are refined through teachers' professional capital and personal dispositions. Therefore, teacher professional identity and emotional challenges are perceived as ecological events that are constantly shaped by the mutual relationship between teachers and their surrounding environments. In other words, emotional challenge is conceptualized as an ecological process of identity injuries. Moreover, the developed model suggests that emotional damage to teacher professional identity originates from the accumulation of mutual relationships between contextual and personal ecology factors over time.

## Conclusion

This study intended to explore the underlying factors causing emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity and further develop a model integrating all the emerged factors. Through analysis and interpretation of semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers in Shahrekord and Shiraz, the research uncovered a series of varied factors causing these emotional injuries to EFL teacher professional identity. After inductive thematic analysis, constant comparative method, and arrangement of factors, a model containing two main themes of personal and contextual ecology factors was developed. Personal ecology factors included professional capital and personal dispositions, and contextual ecology factors involved societal recognition, workplace conditions, institutional environment, and economic conditions. Each code comprised two to four sub-codes, which were professional knowledge base, educational attainment, professional motivation, personality traits, personal attitude towards teaching, personal life challenges, public image, societal expectations, educational sector, educational policies, workload demands, stakeholder interactions, curriculum and teaching content, and availability of pedagogical resources. The developed model views teacher professional identity and emotional challenges as ecological entities, which are fluid in relation to contextual and personal factors. To put it differently, the model explains that teacher professional identity is influenced by various contextual factors through the filters of teachers' personal characteristics.

The findings suggest potential implications for policymakers, educational administrators, educational centers, and teacher education programs in the quest to enhance teaching outcomes by gaining deeper awareness of the factors that induce emotional damage to EFL teacher professional identity and by assisting EFL teachers to restore their professional identity. First, the results showed that educational policies of different sectors can cause emotional damage to teacher professional identity. Therefore, policymakers need to involve EFL teachers in the processes of policy formation and implementation to guarantee that educational policies reflect teaching realities. This can be done through establishing formal discussion procedures, like EFL teacher advisory boards or policy feedback mechanisms, which may contribute to the reduction of the division between policy regulations and teaching practice. Additionally, educational officials can devise plans to introduce and strengthen teachers' public image. Programs such as these help reduce teachers' social undervaluation and increase societal gratitude. Second, educational administrators could appraise teachers' workload and decrease non-essential responsibilities to improve workplace conditions, one of the factors in emotional injury to teachers'

professional identity. They may also create a friendly and caring work atmosphere through supplying appropriate teaching facilities and providing opportunities to engage in institutional decision-making. Moreover, to reduce communicative misunderstandings among educational stakeholders, administrators can create some appropriate interaction channels among teachers and other educational stakeholders.

Third, emotional literacy promotion, resilience improvement, and professional identity development should be included in pre- or in-service teacher education programs to help EFL teachers regain control over their personal dispositions. Additionally, professional development programs such as teacher peer-assist groups and reflection workshops could be designed to help teachers share their identity challenges and acquire coping strategies to overcome emotional work-related challenges. Fourth, educational centers should spare no effort to strengthen job security through clarifying the promotion system and providing job development opportunities and vivid work progress pathways. According to the findings, economic condition was an important factor in causing emotional damage to EFL teachers' professional identity. Providing financial motives can help teachers enhance their professional self-worth and also show them institutional gratitude.

Like all other studies, this research has some limitations that provide avenues for future investigation. First, the use of semi-structured interviews, as the only research instrument, leaves some gaps that may be addressed by including quantitative research methods. Therefore, future mixed-method research is highly recommended. Second, due to the dynamic nature of identity in social contexts, conducting longitudinal research focusing on the process of emotional damage would expand our horizons. Third, including additional variables such as gender or years of teaching experience in the study could further elucidate the underlying factors contributing to emotional damage to teacher professional identity. Finally, the current study was restricted by a rather limited geographical sample coverage because the data were gathered from only two cities in Iran. Hence, future studies need to address this limitation by recruiting a geographically larger sample.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors do not have any potential conflicts of interest to declare.

### **Funding**

The authors did not receive any funding related to the research article.

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## Appendix A

### Diagnostic Questions

1. How does the teacher you are today align with the primary professional imagination you had when you first started teaching?
2. Can you describe a specific teaching experience or turning point that caused your emotional experiences in teaching to fade or change into feelings of detachment?
3. When you think about how your teaching style has changed over time, do you consider this process as a positive professional evolution, or as a defense mechanism to cope with emotional stress?
4. To what extent do you feel that your existing classroom responsibilities reflect your personal values, or do you often feel a sense of separation from your day-to-day tasks?

## Appendix B

### Example of Coding Development Process

| Interview Excerpt                                                         | Initial Code                                    | Sub-code                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| "I have a lot of qualifications, but no one really recognizes my skills." | Lack of recognition of teachers' qualifications | Educational attainment   |
| "It's hard to concentrate on teaching with my family issues."             | Family issues affecting work                    | Personal life challenges |
| "Parents think we should fix everything for their kids."                  | Excessive expectations from parents             | Societal expectations    |
| "Every term, the amount of work just keeps piling up."                    | Excessive workload                              | Workload demands         |
| "The pay doesn't match how hard we work."                                 | Inadequate compensation                         | Financial compensation   |