TEACHER EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the role of experience in L2 teachers’ turnover intentions/occupational stress and psychological well-being/grit: A mixed methods study

Mostafa Nazari1* and Parastoo Alizadeh Oghyanous1

Abstract: The present mixed methods study examined the relationships among Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers’ turnover intentions, occupational stress, psychological well-being, and grit in light of their teaching experience. The participants of the study were a total of 325 EFL teachers (138 novice and 187 experienced). To collect the data, four instruments of occupational stress, turnover intentions, grit, and well-being were administered to the participants, followed by semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers. Data analyses indicated that the novice and experienced teachers’ occupational stress/turnover intentions and grit/psychological well-being were significantly correlated. The results also revealed that the strength of relationship between occupational stress/turnover intentions and grit/psychological well-being is significantly higher for novice teachers than the experienced teachers. The analysis of the interviews indicated that while occupational stress collectively influences the teachers’ identity, emotions, and retaining in the profession, their well-being was largely defined in light of various institutional and socio-economic factors. The results of the study are discussed and implications for teacher education are provided.

Subjects: Sustainability Education, Training & Leadership; Teachers & Teacher Education; Language Teaching & Learning

Keywords: grit; occupational stress; psychological well-being; turnover intentions; teaching experience; teacher identity construction

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mostafa Nazari is a PhD candidate of Applied Linguistics at Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran. His area of interest is second language teacher education and he has published in RELC Journal, Computer Assisted Language Learning, Journal of Education for Teaching, etc.

Parastoo Alizadeh Oghyanous is a PhD candidate of Applied Linguistics at Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran. She has presented papers in national conferences and published papers in national and international journals. She has also coauthored an EAP textbook for students of Education. Her areas of interest are teaching/learning strategies, cognitive psychology, etc.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Exploring teachers’ psychological aspects has always been intriguing for researchers working within the realm of teacher cognition/education. This study has moved along the body of knowledge on teacher cognition and has examined the relationships between four substantial factors influencing teachers’ professional practice (grit, well-being, turnover intentions, and occupational stress). It also portrays the teachers’ sense-making of these factors in constructing their identities and emotions. The findings of the study provide policy-makers and teacher educators with insights into the importance of paying attention to positive/negative aspects of teachers’ work and how to improve the teachers’ working conditions.
1. Introduction

Teaching in general and language teaching in particular are a complex, interactive enterprise that are highly influenced by and influence various teacher-related factors. As pointed out by Kumaravadivelu (2012), second language (L2) teaching and teacher education are “social institutions that pose moral, ethical, social, philosophical, and ideological questions” (p. 1) to teachers and their work. In this vein, psychological dimensions of teaching have always attracted the researchers’ attention. Teachers’ psychological variables can range from self-efficacy, stress, burnout, turnover intentions, and motivational dynamics, to the multiplicity of their cognitive dimensions. The body of knowledge on L2 teacher psychological research emphasizes that teacher psychology not only influences the teachers’ own effectiveness in their overall classroom approach, but it also affects learner motivation for learning an L2 (e.g., Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017).

According to Mercer (2018), teacher psychology is essential to understanding the cognitive and social processes that take place in the classroom. She further notes that classrooms are a complex milieu wherein successful language teaching/learning hinges on teachers’ psychology and psychological status. This line of thinking and research emphasizes that teachers’ psychology substantially informs their effectiveness, classroom practice, identity and autonomy, and student achievement (e.g., Agarwal & Roediger III, 2018). Indeed, the vibrant strand of theorization known as “teacher cognition” emerged from this bedrock. A psychology-informed perspective, therefore, integrates psychological variables into teachers’ professional practice across different stages of their career.

Recent research (e.g., Agarwal & Roediger III, 2018; Duckworth, 2016; McCain, 2017; Mercer, 2018; Mercer et al., 2012) highlights the importance of integrartively considering the emerging concepts that shape and influence teacher psychology. Moving beyond an individualistic perspective that was dominant in the 1970s, teacher psychology now focuses on the psychological and cognitive dimensions of teachers as an integrative, holistic agenda, which focuses on teacher identity, cognition, motivation, and ultimately professional well-being (Mercer, 2018). Teachers’ psychology also relates to their job perceptions including perceptions about occupational stress, which originates from unexpected responsibilities and work pressures that are not in accordance with teachers’ capabilities, skills, and knowledge (Xu et al., 2017). Occupational stress is assumed to increase when teachers do not feel supported by their colleagues and institutions or feel they have no control over their teaching practices. In this regard, Xu et al. (2017) found that occupational stress results in turnover intentions among teachers. They demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between teacher occupational stress and turnover intentions, as also indicated by Liu and Onwuegbuzie (2012), Xu et al. (2017), and Yin and Yang (2002). Moreover, recent research shows that different factors might mediate this relationship such as teacher grit (e.g., McCain, 2017), teacher professional burnout (e.g., Antoniou et al., 2013), teacher well-being (e.g., Spilt et al., 2011), harmonious passion (e.g., Moe, 2016), and efficacy beliefs (e.g., Klassen, 2010).

The literature strongly supports the proposition that teachers’ psychological well-being affects their performance throughout their career pathway. According to Huppert (2009), “psychological well-being is about lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively” (p. 137). This construct, as it appears, is also related to the emotional aspect of teaching. Huppert (2009) notes that teacher psychological well-being “is compromised when negative emotions are extreme or very long lasting and interfere with a person’s ability to function in his or her daily life” (p. 137). Moreover, as noted above, a number of emerging concepts have the potential to exercise their relative influence on teacher identity, cognition, and performance. A less-examined concept is teacher grit, which refers to “a two-factored, non-cognitive skill including perseverance and passion” (McCain, 2017, p. 3). Teacher grit is directly linked to life
success as life satisfaction contributes to teachers’ teaching performance (Duckworth, 2016). Moreover, teacher grit entails a teacher’s continuing efforts to overcome teaching barriers in his/her professional practice (Duckworth, 2016; McCain, 2017).

Despite this body of knowledge, little research has investigated the mediating role of teaching experience in the relationships among the abovementioned variables. Therefore, the present study explored the relationships among teachers’ turnover intentions, occupational stress, psychological well-being, and grit in the light of their teaching experience.

2. Literature review
In what follows, we present the concepts that undergird the study, namely teacher grit, occupational stress, psychological well-being, turnover intentions, and teaching experience.

2.1. Teacher grit
As mentioned earlier, teacher grit includes perseverance and passion (McCain, 2017). It is the perseverance and passion one feels for long-term goals. Grit involves “working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087). This construct is related to life success and motivational development (Duckworth et al., 2007). To date, limited studies have explored this construct in teacher education, much less in language teacher education. Duckworth (2016) maintains that teacher grit acts as a potential factor in influencing teachers’ pedagogical performance in and outside the classroom.

2.2. Occupational stress
Research has indicated that occupational stress in teachers can be more prominent than occupational stress in other occupations (Darmody & Smyth, 2016). Sing and Katoch (2017) stated that occupational stress is generally caused by a mismatch between perceived effort and perceived reward, or a sense of low control in a job with high loads. They further pointed out that low social support at work and job insecurity can also increase the level of occupational stress in teachers. Kokkinos (2007) has found that factors such as time pressure, discipline-related problems, lack of resources, lack of professional recognition, lack of support, and diversity of tasks influence teachers’ occupational stress.

2.3. Psychological well-being
Based on Dagenais-Desmarais and Savoie (2012), the answer to the question “what is psychological well-being (PWB), really?” remains ambiguous within the scientific community. They pointed out that despite influential steps taken to define PWB over the last 30 years (e.g., Diener et al., 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001), the definition of PWB is still controversial (Danna & Griffin, 1999; G. E. Harris & Cameron, 2005). Consequently, a wide range of PWB conceptualizations have appeared, sometimes with unexplained or ill-founded theoretical bases (Ryan & Deci, 2001). There is little consensus about the conceptual basis of PWB; consequently, there are three main research perspectives believed to be mostly influential in defining PWB (e.g., Zee & Koomen, 2016).

The hedonic approach views PWB in terms of happiness and life satisfaction. On the other hand, the eudaimonic approach conceptualizes PWB in terms of optimal functioning, meaning, and self-actualization (e.g., Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Nonetheless, a number of researchers have proposed that there should be an integrative approach to PWB as a possible third alternative. For this purpose, Diener et al. (1999) argued that neither the hedonic nor the eudaimonic approach are enough to explain the good life of individuals. Therefore, they suggest that it would be ideal to consider PWB as integrating these two agendas.

2.4. Turnover intention
Turnover intention is defined as “a plan for an employee to leave the organization; it is a deliberate effort to look for a job outside the organization” (Imran et al., 2017, p. 830). Turnover intention is
becoming a serious problem in educational settings. It has also devastating effects on educational systems and pedagogical organizations of countries, including poor quality of education, lack of motivation, and lack of commitment. Research (e.g., Atteberry et al., 2017; Holme et al., 2018; Kafumbu, 2019) shows that teacher turnover intention includes internal and external factors. Internal factors consist of motivation, burnout, personality, job satisfaction, etc. External factors include financial support from the organization, job promotion, career development, and teaching environment.

2.5. Teaching experience

Another factor that is considered important in teacher professionalism and has been subject to many studies is teaching experience. Teaching experience can influence teachers' classroom management behavior and the teaching-learning process (Tsui, 2009). It has persistently been important for teacher educators to explore how novice and experienced teachers are different in various aspects including burnout, grit, turnover intentions, and occupational stress. Studies on teaching experience (e.g., Fallah & Nazari, 2019; Karimi & Norouzi, 2019; D. N. Harris & Sass, 2007) have mostly taken the form of novice-experienced comparisons. These studies have mainly drawn on teachers' mental processes in planning and decision-making, which were seen as a link between thought and action, and were heavily influenced by an information processing model of the mind in cognitive psychology.

Previous scholarship indicates that teachers go through various changes as they progress in their career. For example, Maynard and Furlong (1995, p. 12–13) suggest that novice teachers navigate their first years through five stages of development including “(1) early idealism, (2) survival, (3) recognizing difficulties, (4) reaching a plateau, and (5) moving on”, during which they start with ideals and then invest in student learning in subsequent years. Experienced teachers also go through changes as they develop their experience. For example, Rice (2010) argues that experience is more influential during the initial years and as teachers grow, their experience comes to influence their work differentially in later stages. Therefore, teachers do not undergo a uniform developmental trajectory in their career and multiple mediating factors contribute to the multi-dimensionality of their work.

Investigations into teaching experience have shown that the number of years a teacher teaches is an important and influential factor in relation to their cognitions and practices. Klassen and Chiu (2010) study indicated that “teachers’ years of experience have nonlinear relationships with self-efficacy factors, increasing from early career to mid-career and then falling afterwards” (p. 741). Additionally, Akbari and Moradkhani (2010) study showed that “experienced teachers had a significantly higher level of global efficacy, efficacy for student engagement, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for instructional strategies compared to their novice counterparts” (p. 25). This line of inquiry has yielded various characteristics of novice and experienced teachers relative to their functioning (Tsui, 2009).

3. The present study

Conceptualizations of teacher education have evolved into perspectives that underscore a situative understanding of teachers and teaching (e.g., Borko, 2004; Burns et al., 2015; Korthagen, 2017). This paradigm shift envisages teacher education/learning as embedded within the sociopsychological settings teachers operate in (Borg, 2015). For long, the focus of teacher education was on viewing teachers and their learning as merely cognitive, irrespective of contextual idiosyncrasies (Burns et al., 2015). This perspective changed in the 1990s with the emergence of the sociocultural theory and more attention was paid to psychological aspects of teachers as relative to socio-historical dimensions of their professional career. Along these lines, research in various aspects of teacher education has focused on cognition, practice, identity, professional learning, etc. as being influenced by and influencing contextual peculiarities.

Current conceptualizations of teacher education/learning, however, emphasize a holistic perspective of studying teachers' mental lives (Bukor, 2015; Korthagen, 2017; Li, 2020). This line of
thinking argues that research should move beyond considering a single-sided perspective of teachers’ mentalities and take “their thinking, feeling and wanting [or motivation] into account” (Korthagen, 2017, p. 391). All of these factors are in constant synergy with contextual particularities and dynamically contribute to the way teachers make sense of their professional learning and development. The present study moves along this line of thinking and examines the way experiencing high psychological tension could influence English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers’ retention and the way perseverance and passion could be associated with their quality life. These psychological factors could influence various aspects of teachers’ work including their sense-making of their work, their identity as teachers, and their relationship with institutional participants (Yazan, 2018). In this regard, we selected teacher experience as a variable that is often argued to influence teacher mentality and functioning throughout teachers’ career pathway (Fallah & Nazari, 2019) and well aligns with all the four variables both theoretically and empirically, as discussed above and below.

It is reasonable to assume that novice teachers largely experience stress at the outset of their career. Such stress is often caused by the divide between their pre-service education and what they encounter practically (Farrell, 2012). Although the psychological stress of performing ideally gradually reduces in the course of experience, contextual challenges and impediments could intensify teachers’ occupational stress. This is more evident in contexts like Iran where teaching English “is likely to provide substantial challenges to some EFL teachers and to present them with both political and personal conflicts” (Eslamdoost et al., 2019, p. 4). Such exigencies are coupled with other sociocultural-educational challenges such as low payment, burnout from work, high workload, lack of adequate professional development, etc. (Karimi & Nazari, 2019) that complicate teachers’ work. The repercussions of such challenges could be extended to all of the teachers, be it novice or experienced, yet they seem to influence novices more largely. Indeed, research (e.g., Joiner & Edwards, 2008) has indicated that generally 24% of novice teachers leave the profession due to the range of problems they face and the low adequacy of teaching in catering to their needs. Thus, it is significant to explore how novice and experienced teachers differ in their occupational stress and its impacts on their turnover intentions to build the associated scholarship in more depth.

Additionally, teaching is a profession that is replete with fluctuations of various types. These fluctuations apparently influence the way teachers perceive their own development. Teachers, thus, need to develop an informed understanding of the nature of their career and its difficulties/benefits. Such an understanding requires developing an attitude that guards them against the negative aspects of their work. This is what Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) have recently called “teacher immunity”, which can function as a double-edged sword both safeguarding the teachers against the “chronic demands of the L2 teaching profession” (p. 10) and impede their action-taking toward professional development. A myriad of sociocultural, institutional, and occupational factors could influence the extent to which teachers retain their passion to continue in their career. These factors in turn influence the way teachers experience a quality life in their educational context and persist in their work. In this regard, experience can function as a strong predictor in enabling teachers to deal with the difficulties of their work, remain in the profession, and develop the ability to resolve their pedagogical and non-pedagogical challenges on the basis of their accrued experiential knowledge. It, thus, follows that studying teacher passion/perseverance and well-being could open doors to a better understanding of how novice and experienced teachers deal with different fluctuations of their profession and how these fluctuations influence the teachers in different stages of their career. Against the accounts presented, we selected four significant dimensions of teachers’ professional practice (occupational stress, turnover intentions, grit, and well-being) to explore their possible relationships and the teachers’ associated perceptions. The questions guiding the study were:

1. Does Iranian novice and experienced EFL teachers’ occupational stress significantly correlate with their turnover intentions?
2. Does the relationship between occupational stress and turnover intentions vary across novice and experienced groups of teachers?

3. Does Iranian novice and experienced EFL teachers’ grit significantly correlate with their psychological well-being?

4. Does the relationship between psychological well-being and grit vary across novice and experienced groups of teachers?

5. How do occupational stress, turnover intentions, psychological well-being, and grit influence the teachers' professionalism?

4. Method

4.1. Participants
A total of 325 EFL teachers (170 females and 155 males) were recruited as the participants of the study (selected via convenient and snowball sampling methods). The teachers were teaching English at different private language institutes in Tehran, Iran, and they had a range of students from various proficiency levels, from elementary to advanced (both children and adults). They held BA (n = 169), MA (n = 150), and PhD (n = 6) degrees and their age ranged from 23 to 45. As to teaching experience, 138 teachers had 1–3 years of teaching experience (novice) and 187 teachers had more than five years of teaching experience (experienced). Dividing the teachers based on this experience range is consistent with Farrell (2012). From this sample, 20 teachers were selected conveniently to participate in the interview protocol (10 teachers per group).

4.2. Data collection
A mixed methods research design was adopted in this study. In this regard, a triangulated design (Creswell et al., 2003) was implemented whose purpose is “to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic” (Morse, 1991, p. 122). The weighting of the study was a QUAN + qual approach and the timing of the study was QUAN → Qual (Tavakoli, 2012). The reason for selecting a triangulated design was that it is an efficient design as both types of data are collected at approximately the same time (Creswell et al., 2003), which well suited the purpose of the present study. Four survey instruments were administered to the participants to first collect the required data for the quantitative phase and semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect the qualitative data.

4.2.1. EFL teachers’ perceived occupational stress questionnaire
In order to assess the participants’ occupational stress, the EFL Teachers’ Perceived Occupational Stress Questionnaire developed by Weinstein and Trickett (2016) was administered. This questionnaire is comprised of 40 items assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all stressful (1)” to “extremely stressful (5)”. The questionnaire measures four main subscales, namely systematic impacts, social support/climate, formal job characteristics, and informal job duties. Five of the items were not suitable for the Iranian culture and were thus omitted (based on expert opinion) and 35 items were administered; consequently, the score was computed in the potential range of 35 to 175. The Cronbach Alpha reliability of the scale was calculated, which produced a 0.80 value.

4.2.2. Turnover intention scale
In order to assess the teachers’ turnover intentions, the Turnover Intention Scale developed by McInerney et al. (2015) was administered. This instrument is composed of eight items rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree (1)” to “strongly agree (7)”. It should be pointed out that a higher score basically indicates a high level of turnover intention. The unit of measurement in this scale is based on the participants’ intentions to leave the institute they work at or their own profession, estimated by two main sub-scales, namely the profession-focused and
the school-focused items each consisting of four items. In this study, the profession-related section was employed. The range of scores for each sub-scale varies between 4 and 28. The Cronbach Alpha reliability of the Turnover Intention Scale was calculated and it was \( r = 0.86 \).

4.2.3. Grit scale
In order to assess the teachers’ grit, the Grit Scale developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009) was administered. This instrument involves eight items assessed on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Not like me at all (1)” to “Very much like me (5)”. A higher score indicates a high level of teachers’ grit. The scores on this scale vary between the highest (5 = extremely gritty) and the lowest scores (1 = not at all gritty). The scale measures two main factors, interest and effort. A number of the items on the scale (1, 3, 5 and 6) are reversely scored. The Cronbach Alpha reliability of the scale was calculated to be 0.85.

4.2.4. Index of psychological well-being at work
In order to measure the participants’ psychological well-being, the Index of Psychological Well-Being at Work, developed by Dagenais-Desmarais and Savoie (2012), was administered. This questionnaire consists of 25 items assessed on a six-point Likert scale ranging from “disagree (0)” to “entirely agree (5)”; accordingly, the total score was computed in the potential range of 0 to 125. According to Dagenais-Desmarais and Savoie (2012), this questionnaire measures five different factors, namely perceived recognition at work, thriving at work, interpersonal fit at work, desire for involvement at work, and feeling of competency at work. In this study, Cronbach Alpha reliability of the scale was 0.91.

4.2.5. Semi-structured interviews
In order to expand on the quantitative data and explore the way the above four factors influence the teachers’ professionalism, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 teachers in Persian (L1). The interviews (on average 20 minutes per teacher) were audio-recorded for further analysis. These interviews were done face to face and the teachers were asked about: a) the way their work-related stress influences their professional practice, b) whether they would like to leave teaching and the possible associated reasons, c) the way they describe their quality of life both inside and outside their institution, and d) the extent to which they feel passion for and perseverance in their career, along with the related follow-ups. In designing the questions, we initially relied on the literature of each concept and then the questions were given to two university instructors for comment. The questions were then piloted on two teachers to disambiguate the possible points and were then returned to the experts for finalizing the minor areas of ambiguity.

4.3. Data analysis
After collecting the required data, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20) was used to summarize the data set and also to estimate the reliability of the instruments using Cronbach Alpha coefficient. To explore whether novice and experienced teachers’ occupational stress is correlated with their turnover intentions, a correlation analysis was used. This procedure was also carried out to explore the association between the teachers’ grit and psychological well-being. Finally, to probe whether there is any significant difference in the relationship between occupational stress/turnover intentions and grit/psychological well-being across the novice and experienced teachers, \( Z_{\text{obs}} \) formula (Pallant, 2010) was employed. To use this formula, Pearson correlation was initially used to obtain the \( r \) values. Then, the \( r \) values were converted to \( z \) values (i.e., standard score forms) based on the table of transformation of \( r \) to \( z \) (Pallant, 2010, p. 142). Finally, the \( Z_{\text{obs}} \) formula, as shown below, was utilized for exploring the significance of the differences, as proposed by Pallant (2010).

\[
Z_{\text{obs}} = \frac{z_1 - z_2}{\sqrt{\frac{1}{n_1 - 3} + \frac{1}{n_2 - 3}}}
\]
In this formula, $z_1$ and $z_2$ refer to the $z$ value corresponding with each of the $r$ values in group 1 (novice teachers) and group 2 (experienced teachers). $N_1$ and $N_2$ represent the number of participants in each group, that is, $N_1$ (novice) and $N_2$ (experienced) groups.

To analyze the teachers' interview responses, thematic analysis was used, which is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). To this end, the data were transcribed verbatim and the initial themes were drawn separately by the researchers. These themes were then put against the data in a coding-recoding, constant-comparison strategy to come up with a more thorough, inductive analysis of the emerging themes. Then, the researchers met to discuss the themes and make better sense of the data. After having two rounds of discussion and finalizing the themes, we discussed the themes with a qualitative researcher. The minor areas of disagreement were resolved through discussion.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics including the mean scores and standard deviations for each group of novice and experienced teachers on each of the quantitative variables (i.e., occupational stress, turnover intention, grit, and well-being). The independent-group t-tests were also run on each variable, comparing the mean scores across the novice and experienced groups. The relevant $p$-values from the t-tests are reported in Table 1. The results show that turnover intention ($t(273.33) = -3.87, p < 0.001$) and grit ($t(323) = -3.30, p < 0.001$) significantly differ in terms of experience, having a higher mean in the experienced group than the novice group. However, occupational stress and well-being do not show a significant difference across novice and experienced groups.

5.2. Correlation coefficients

Table 2 shows the correlation coefficients for all variables, reported above and below the diagonal for novice and experienced groups, respectively. It should be mentioned that no violation of correlation assumptions in terms of linearity, homoscedasticity, and outliers was observed in the data.

5.2.1. The teachers' occupational stress and turnover intentions

The first research question sought to explore whether the novice and experienced teachers' occupational stress is correlated with their turnover intentions. To this end, a correlation was run. As indicated in Table 2, occupational stress and turnover intentions are significantly and positively correlated for both novice and experienced teacher groups.

5.2.2. Difference in the groups' occupational stress and turnover intention

The second research question probed whether there is any significant difference in the relationship between occupational stress and turnover intentions across novice and experienced teachers. To
this aim, the $Z_{obs}$ formula was utilized, as suggested by Pallant (2010). The result was greater than 1.96 ($Z_{obs} = 4.86$). This suggests that the strength of correlation between occupational stress and turnover intention is significantly higher for novices than for experienced teachers.

5.2.3. The teachers’ grit and well-being
The third research question sought to explore whether the novice and experienced teachers’ well-being is correlated with their grit. As indicated in Table 2, well-being and grit are significantly and positively correlated for both novice and experienced teacher groups.

5.2.4. Difference in the groups’ psychological well-being and grit
The fourth research question aimed to investigate if there is any significant difference between the relationships of the novice and experienced teachers’ psychological well-being and grit. The result obtained from the $Z_{obs}$ formula was greater than 1.96 ($Z_{obs} = 6.40$). Thus, it can be concluded that the strength of correlation between psychological well-being and grit is significantly higher for novices than for experienced teachers.

Overall, the findings showed that high occupational stress is associated with high turnover intention and high grit is associated with a high sense of well-being.

5.2.5. Teachers’ professional sense-making of the four factors
The analysis of the teachers’ interviews indicated that occupational stress highly influences their identity (both novice and experienced) in that their emotions and institutional identity become largely negatively influenced. The reverberation of this identity conflict was also extended to the teachers’ narratives in that most of them shared stories about colleagues who have left teaching due to the heavy workload they had to undertake, yet with low payment that did not suit their functioning: “I have many male colleagues who have a family and have to earn money; I know that Mr. X has recently started to read for medicine which is what I also might do”. For example, in the extract below, one of the teachers reports how the incongruity between her workload and payment has influenced her institutional identity in that she has become indifferent to parts of her career. Furthermore, she underscores that pressure from the parents and managers has influenced her emotional identity in dominantly clinging to her own personalized understanding of professional practice:

We experience too much stress. Each day we should be careful not to annoy different people including the parents, the managers, the students, etc. After all, we are humans and we are always conceived to be guilty when something negative happens. To be honest, when I want to step into the institution I do not feel well, but I have to do it as I have to make a living. I hate it when I do not keep up with the standards I have in mind for teaching, but sometimes

| Table 2. The correlation coefficient matrix across the novice (N = 138) and experienced (N = 187) groups above and below the diagonal |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                                          | Turnover          | Occupational Stress | Psychological Well-being | Grit               |
| Turnover                                                  | Pearson Correlation | .65***          | -.73***          | -.56***          |
| Occupational Stress                                     | Pearson Correlation | .22**           | -.61***          | -.40***          |
| Psychological Well-being                                 | Pearson Correlation | -.17*           | -.51***          | .73***           |
| Grit                                                      | Pearson Correlation | -.21**          | -.003           | .20**            |

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$
I do not do it the way I like and want. All of these problems have made me listen less to what the managers tell us [here she referred to her colleagues].

Most of the novice teachers maintained that they have the passion for teaching and they think that teaching is a job that suits them. The common thread among their responses pertained to the possible self they perceive for themselves in the future, which was marked by being an effective teacher in contributing to the learners’ success, being a teacher who can teach in higher proficiency levels, and being a teacher who contributes to the accountability of the educational system. In the extract below, a novice teacher believes that after one year of teaching she thinks that she will persist uniformly throughout her career. She acknowledges that challenges always happen, yet she seems to think pragmatically and considers the challenges as a natural part of teaching, which should be tolerated if one is committed enough to be a language teacher. She further noted that such an attitude contributes to teachers’ retaining a quality life for themselves and those around them:

I think that I will keep my passion for teaching. I am aware that there are many challenges as I am teaching and I see them. But I think that we must develop an attitude that helps us face the challenges and solve them. Is it possible to do something without any problems and ups and downs? Impossible. In my opinion, if we consider the challenges as a natural part of our work, we can feel well and give this energy to other people including the students, our colleagues, etc.

On the other hand, half of the experienced teachers held that their passion for teaching has decreased in comparison to the initial years of their teaching and they have experienced levels of burnout, becoming habituated, and developing an identity oriented toward satisfying the students’ educational needs only, rather than other stakeholders. This perspective of the teachers was also considered to influence their functioning in that they feel motivated and lively to invest in their work in the classroom, but be less obedient to institutional rules:

I feel that I have gradually become fossilized in my job. It is important to be a difference between you and the person just joining the school, but I have little experienced this difference. This is not just me and my colleagues also complain about this. The only thing that is heartwarming for me is trying to help my students learn English better. These students have trusted me and I feel that it would not be right to betray them.

In the above excerpt, an experienced teacher explains how she has experienced burnout as a function of little institutional recognition, which has led her to develop a routinized style in her performance. She proceeds that she feels only committed to her students in that she structures her efforts toward catering to their needs and wants.

6. Discussion
The present study aimed to investigate the relationships among Iranian EFL teachers’ turnover intentions, occupational stress, psychological well-being, and grit in the light of their teaching experience. The results of quantitative data analyses indicated that both the novice and experienced teachers’ occupational stress was significantly correlated with their turnover intentions. Additionally, it was found that the strength of the correlations between occupational stress and turnover intentions was higher in the novice group than the experienced group. Moreover, both the novice and experienced teachers’ grit was significantly associated with their psychological well-being. The results also revealed that the strength of the correlations between grit and psychological well-being was higher in the novice group than the experienced group of teachers. These findings generally suggest that on the one hand, due to their low experience, novice teachers are likely to experience more professional challenges, which may lead to their attrition (Rice, 2010). On the other hand, the same novice teachers seem to show a strong sense of passion for teaching as a profession they pursue, which might shape their feelings of well-being as teachers.
It was interesting that the novice teachers showed a significant negative correlation between grit and occupational stress (with low scores on grit associated with high scores on occupational stress). This correlation was not significant for experienced teachers (having a coefficient of −.003). It seems that grit might operate as a protective factor for stress that might be related to teacher resilience in the early years of professional experience, and that as experience increases the protective nature of grit becomes less important. Moreover, the results of the interviews showed that the four factors highly influence the teachers’ identity and they perceive their role differently in terms of their future selves and current functioning.

The findings of the present study concerning the association of turnover intentions and occupational stress are compatible with the findings of Xu et al. (2017) and Liu and Onwuegbuzie (2012) who found that there is a positive relationship between teachers’ occupational stress and turnover intentions. It is extensively acknowledged that teachers’ turnover intention is regarded as a consequence of occupational stress (Zembayas & Papanastasiou, 2004). The reason might lie in the fact that various internal and external factors influence the connection between occupational stress and the intention to leave the teaching profession. In this regard, the Iranian context seems to intensify this condition. As mentioned previously, Iranian EFL teachers experience a wide range of conundrums, which are not limited to pedagogical aspects and involve the multiplex of educational, social, economic, and temporal challenges. Such issues, most notably the very low payment as indicated in qualitative data, may lead the teachers to experience pressure in their social life, which is likely to influence their educational performance (for a complete discussion see Soodmand Afshar & Doosti, 2016). This point was emphasized by the teachers in referring to the role of various internal and external factors in their performance, especially in their institutional identity (Li, 2020).

The findings of the study regarding the relationship between psychological well-being and grit are in congruence with the findings of Vainio and Daukantaité (2016) and Disabato et al. (2019). It seems that having passion for teaching propels the teachers through their career despite its challenges (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017) and enables them to safeguard against the factors impeding their professional development. This point was also supported by the findings from the interviews with the novice teachers. However, the experienced teachers in qualitative results did not seem to display as great a degree of passion for teaching, despite having higher grit scores than novice teachers. This finding corroborates the claim that the “impact of experience is strongest during the first few years of teaching; after that, marginal returns diminish” (Rice, 2010, p. 1). Indeed, it seems that during the early years, teachers embark on experimenting with their educational functioning and it is after several years that they heed higher-order dimensions of educational practice. This point was noticeably existent among the experienced teachers, who argued for further recognition from school managers. Thus, it appears that experienced teachers largely define their well-being in terms of the degree of attention they receive from school managers.

The two groups of the teachers, however, differed in their perseverance levels. While both groups emphasized the importance of contributing to students’ learning, the experienced teachers were more resistant to institutional rules and showed more perseverance in supporting student learning. This finding is in contrast to Harter et al. (2002) contention that individuals who meet adequate levels of psychological well-being in their work are more productive, contribute to their institute’s objectives and aims, and have low aspirations to leave. Psychological well-being is typically considered as engagement with the existing challenges of life (Keyes et al., 2002). For the teachers of this study, well-being was largely mediated by two factors of institution-related and socio-economic factors. Regarding the former, it appears that the teachers have not received the adequate support they have in mind, which attests to Farrell’s (2012, p. 436) contention that “unfortunately, it seems that supportive environments are the exception rather than the rule”. As to socio-economic barriers, it seems that novices may not be that concerned about their economic adequacy as they have started their professional itinerary with the hopes of professional upgrading and meeting the requirements of their
practice. However, experienced teachers consider a more central role for economic aspects in their work as they have made their choice to become teachers and feel more entwined with the status of teaching in the quality of their life.

The results of this study imply that as teachers proceed in their career, they need assistance to develop novel professional purposes as doing so seems to thwart or at least postpone the process of experiencing burnout and professional attrition. Although the findings of the quantitative phase of this study indicated that teachers’ grit is significantly correlated with their well-being, this correlation often happens at the ideal state, and there are a wide array of issues that might mediate this process. These issues could extensively influence the way teachers define their own role, the way they make sense of their professional development, and the way they perceive themselves in their educational context. Much in the same vein, although occupational stress was significantly correlated with the teachers’ turnover intentions, this finding should not be interpreted uni-dimensionally. That is, it appears that the strength of the negative side of teachers’ work might offset the positive side of their work. And what seems to be the mediating factor, at least based on qualitative results, is the social nature of teaching in contributing to individuals’ lives, not just their educational performance.

7. Conclusions
This study explored the associations between Iranian EFL teachers’ occupational stress, turnover intentions, psychological well-being, and grit in light of teaching experience. The results of the study indicated that occupational stress/turnover intentions and well-being/ grit are significantly correlated. Additionally, although not all of the interviewed teachers agreed on the contribution of the four factors to their perceptions, they mentioned the role of their well-being as a significant factor in shaping their identities, and defined their well-being in socio-economic terms. The results of the study call for further attention of policy-makers and teacher educators to these four factors in order to facilitate the teachers’ professional practice and sense of professionalism. Furthermore, heeding the teachers’ voice across different stages of their career is more likely to contribute to teacher retention in the profession and motivating them to persevere in their career.

One of the limitations of this study was that the correlation between the teachers’ well-being and grit and occupational stress and turnover intentions was not examined as four interrelated constructs. Grit and well-being (as two positive variables) could be positively correlated (see Vainio & Daukantaitë, 2016) and occupational stress and turnover intentions (as two negative variables) could also be positively correlated. Future research may examine these relationships to develop a possible model of the relationships as we only examined the simple univariate correlations between the dyad variables. Additionally, policymakers and teacher educators could take agentive initiatives to deal with such factors and assist teachers with experiencing a more favorable professional atmosphere. Such an initiative, however, needs substantial consideration of the way curriculum and pedagogy are currently enacted and whether they suit teachers’ psychological statuses. While this study investigated the contributions of the above four factors to the teachers’ work, a number of other factors exist that could influence their professionalism. Among these factors, autonomy, self-efficacy, and motivation seem to be determining in the way teachers construct their identities and proceed in their career (Korthagen, 2017; Yazan, 2018). Furthermore, examining how psychological factors influence the teachers’ practice through observational protocols would better demonstrate the societal and school-based factors that can influence teachers’ identities, practices, and perceptions.

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Author details
Mostafa Nazari
E-mail: Mostafanazari136969@gmail.com
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1087-126X
Parastoo Alizadeh Oghyanous

E-mail: alizadeeeng2@gmail.com
1 Department of Foreign Languages, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran.

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