Professional identity and psychological capital as determinants of EFL teachers' burnout: the mediating role of self-regulation

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ABSTRACT: This study delves into the intricate web of relationships among professional identity, psychological capital, self-regulation, and burnout in a cohort of 434 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators. Employing validated measures and structural equation modeling, we unravel these critical connections. Professional identity emerges as a robust predictor, significantly linked to reduced burnout. Additionally, psychological capital exerts a positive influence on self-regulation, highlighting its significance within the EFL teaching context. Self-regulation, in turn, negatively impacts burnout. Mediation analysis solidifies the role of self-regulation: it partially mediates the relationship between professional identity and burnout and fully mediates the connection between psychological capital and burnout. This research deepens our comprehension of EFL teaching psychology and carries implications for both practitioners and policymakers.

Keywords: professional identity, psychological capital, self-regulation, burnout, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Structural equation modeling

Identidad profesional y capital psicológico como determinantes del agotamiento en profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera: El papel mediador de la autorregulación

RESUMEN: Este estudio explora las complejas relaciones entre la identidad profesional, el capital psicológico, la autorregulación y el agotamiento en una muestra de 434 docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Utilizando medidas validadas y modelado de ecuaciones estructurales, desentrañamos estas conexiones críticas. La identidad profesional emerge como un predictor sólido, relacionado significativamente con la reducción del agotamiento. Además, el capital psicológico ejerce una influencia positiva en la autorregulación, resaltando su importancia en el contexto de la enseñanza de EFL. A su vez, la autorregulación impacta negativamente en el agotamiento. El análisis de mediación solidifica el papel de la autorregulación: media parcialmente la relación entre la identidad profesional y el agotamiento y media completamente la conexión entre el capital psicológico y el agotamiento. Esta investigación profundiza nuestra comprensión de la psicología en la enseñanza de EFL

y tiene implicaciones tanto para los profesionales como para los responsables de políticas.
Palabras clave: identidad profesional, capital psicológico, autorregulación, agotamiento, inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), Modelado de ecuaciones estructurales

1. Introduction

The teaching profession often exposes educators to considerable stress, potentially leading to burnout—a state characterized by anxiety, reduced accomplishment, emotional exhaustion, and diminished enthusiasm for the job (Muhonen *et al.*, 2022; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). This burnout results in decreased productivity and willingness due to insufficient personal and job resources to meet teaching demands (Chang, 2009). In the context of language learning, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers facing burnout may suffer adverse effects such as compromised health, decreased self-efficacy, and intentions to leave their positions (Fathi *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, burnout in second language (L2) teachers can negatively impact students, leading to less engaging classes, limited feedback, and reduced academic achievement. Despite these consequences, research on burnout among L2 teachers remains limited compared to other educational settings, necessitating further exploration of this issue (Bing *et al.*, 2022; Chang, 2022; Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014).

One potential cause of teacher burnout might be a lack of self-regulation abilities—a crucial aspect enabling individuals to choose appropriate responses in various contexts (Baumeister *et al.*, 2006). Self-regulation could act as a remedy for job burnout and strain, as individuals who effectively manage their behavior and emotions tend to adapt better to work demands (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Tikkanen *et al.*, 2017). Investigating how self-regulation development influences teachers' burnout in the context of L2 learning and teaching is therefore crucial. The roles of professional identity and psychological capital are significant in educators' professional lives but require further exploration regarding their implications for teacher burnout in EFL instruction. Professional identity encompasses educators' beliefs and values, influencing their commitment, motivation, and resilience (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2023; Lu *et al.*, 2019). Psychological capital, including components like hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, significantly shapes individuals' well-being and performance in professional settings (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). Understanding how these factors interrelate and affect burnout among EFL educators is crucial for enhancing teacher well-being and resilience in the dynamic teaching environment.

Despite advancements in understanding burnout among educators, particularly in other educational settings, the domain of EFL education remains relatively unexplored. Examining psychological factors as predictors of burnout among EFL teachers is imperative to fill this gap (Fathi *et al.*, 2021). Our study focuses on the impact of professional identity and psychological capital on burnout among language educators, concurrently exploring the mediating role of self-regulation within these relationships. This study contributes significantly by delving into the less-explored domain of EFL instruction and examining the intricate interactions between professional identity, psychological capital, and teacher burnout. Unlike prior research in diverse settings, our specific focus on EFL instructors offers a novel perspective. Furthermore, our research enriches established theories related to burnout, self-regulation, and psychological resources in education, aiming to refine pedagogical practices and interventions to alleviate burnout among EFL educators, ultimately enhancing language education quality.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Teacher Burnout

Initially conceptualized by Freudenberger (1974), burnout refers to exhaustion resulting from strenuous work and self-neglect (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). It represents a job-related syndrome characterized by physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion due to prolonged exposure to high workplace demands and inadequate coping (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). Maslach *et al.* (2001) outlined its three components: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy. Emotional exhaustion reflects perpetual fatigue during work, cynicism involves negative attitudes toward colleagues and detachment from the job, and reduced efficacy indicates a perceived lack of competence (Leiter & Maslach, 2016; Maslach, 2003). In education, burnout adapts to explore unique stressors in the teaching profession. Teacher burnout manifests as exhaustion and stress, lacking the resources needed for effective job performance.

Teacher burnout is widely recognized for its negative impact on teacher well-being, student achievement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020), and its association with teacher turnover and attrition (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Moreover, it has been linked to adverse effects on student academic achievement and motivation (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Given these implications, it is imperative to explore strategies to mitigate burnout, especially among L2 teachers. Previous studies have examined various factors related to preventing teacher burnout. For instance, Tian *et al.* (2020) investigated the impact of transformational leadership on teacher burnout in a sample of 990 teachers, revealing a negative predictive relationship between transformational leadership and burnout. In the context of L2 teaching, researchers have also focused on teacher burnout. Fathi *et al.* (2021) identified that emotion regulation and self-efficacy negatively predicted burnout among EFL teachers. Wang and Wang (2022) emphasized the significant roles of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy in reducing the risk of burnout among EFL teachers.

While teacher burnout has recently gained attention in L2 research, there remains a lack of clarity regarding its theoretical and empirical underpinnings. Further research is needed to advance our understanding of burnout among EFL teachers. Additionally, it is crucial to explore the factors that contribute to EFL teachers' burnout, with a particular focus on teachers' psychological traits, which are considered a significant factor in this phenomenon (Ferradás *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2023). Regrettably, previous research has not adequately addressed this aspect. Among the psychological factors that could potentially help teachers cope with job burnout, self-regulation stands out (Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014).

2.2. Teacher Self-Regulation

Self-regulation involves managing, monitoring, controlling, evaluating, and adjusting cognition, feelings, and behaviors based on situational demands (Zimmerman, 2000). It represents a character strength characterized by self-initiated efforts to achieve objectives (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). In teaching, it encompasses strategies used by teachers to efficiently accomplish tasks and overcome challenges. Effective instruction is believed to stem

not only from content knowledge but also from teachers' ability to self-regulate motivation, emotions, thoughts, and seek necessary information (Greenier *et al.*, 2023). Mattern and Bauer (2014) emphasize that self-regulated teachers can control emotional reactions and inner processes to successfully navigate teaching and learning situations.

Existing evidence highlights the significance of teacher self-regulation in language learning success and its positive correlation with teachers' professional well-being (Greenier *et al.*, 2021; Teng & Zhang, 2022). Kazemkhah Hasankiadeh and Azari Noughabi (2022) explored the relationship between L2 grit and self-regulation in EFL teachers, revealing that self-regulation significantly contributed to L2 grit, enhancing their determination and passion for teaching. Similarly, Teng and Zhang (2022) investigated the role of self-regulation in L2 education and found that teacher self-regulation enriches language learning and teaching. In the EFL context, understanding how positive teacher-related factors, like self-regulation, can prevent or mitigate job burnout is crucial in language classrooms. Despite growing attention in other fields, the relationship between teacher self-regulation and burnout remains underappreciated in the field of EFL. Notably, Bakker and de Vries (2021) demonstrated a negative association between self-regulation and job burnout, highlighting the impact of low self-regulation on burnout. Tikkanen *et al.* (2017) explored self-regulation and its connection to burnout risks, involving 420 school principals and teachers. Their analysis revealed that high self-regulation levels were linked to lower burnout symptoms. Gaeta González *et al.* (2023) also reported a negative influence of self-regulation strategies on predicting job burnout among university professors. These studies collectively emphasize the importance of investigating the role of self-regulation in mitigating burnout among language educators.

Similarly, Mattern and Bauer (2014) found that self-regulation strategies negatively predicted the level of emotional exhaustion, a component of burnout, among teachers. In the context of EFL, we are only aware of a single study, with a limited sample size, that investigated the relationship between self-regulation and teacher burnout. That is, Karamooz and Narafshan (2017) found self-regulation to negatively predict teachers' job burnout. Although recent studies, though few in number, have touched upon the impact of self-regulation on job burnout, there is still scant research into the role of self-regulation in reducing the risk of teacher burnout, particularly in the realm of EFL.

2.3. Teacher Professional Identity

Professional identity encompasses an individual's attitudes, values, motives, and beliefs within their expertise, providing purpose and role clarity in their career (Trede *et al.*, 2012). In teaching, it significantly influences professional efficacy, adaptability, and resilience (Beijaard *et al.*, 2000; Nickel & Zimmer, 2019; Ntim *et al.*, 2023). It shapes motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment, impacting teacher retention. Conversely, a weak professional identity can exacerbate stress and burnout among educators, garnering substantial attention in recent research. In this study, teacher professional identity is defined as a sense of belonging and identification with the teaching profession, reflecting how teachers perceive their role at work (Lin *et al.*, 2022; Wei, 2008). This construct embodies work-related self-esteem, commitment, motivation, satisfaction, and future perspective, guiding teachers' reflections on practice and approaches (Cheng, 2021; Mehdizadeh *et al.*, 2023). Fathi *et al.* (2023) sug-

gested that professional identity boosts engagement and perseverance among EFL teachers, enhancing their enjoyment at work.

Prior research holds that teacher professional identity is essential to tap its potential for reducing job burnout. For instance, Chen *et al.* (2020) investigated the potential role of professional identity in predicting burnout among teachers. Their results indicated that professional identity negatively exerted influence on teachers' job burnout. In another study by Lin *et al.* (2022), the effect of teacher professional identity on burnout was explored. The findings showed a decrease in burnout levels in those teachers with high levels of professional identity. Lu (2019) surveyed a total number of 205 teachers and found that professional identity could predict their job burnout. In the L2 domain, Xing (2022) found that EFL teachers' professional identity negatively predicted their burnout.

To date, with the exception of Xing (2022), limited research has explored the connection between professional identity and job burnout among EFL teachers. Additionally, despite the significant influence of teacher professional identity on teacher burnout, there is a paucity of research that comprehensively defines and explores teacher professional identity's core aspects and its role in preventing burnout, especially among EFL teachers. Notably, no prior study has examined the relationship between professional identity and self-regulation in the teaching profession. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the impact of professional identity on teacher burnout and self-regulation within the applied linguistics context.

2.4. Teacher Psychological Capital

Drawing on theory and research derived from positive psychology (Seligman, 2002), and positive organizational behavior (Luthans *et al.*, 2007), psychological capital stands for the psychological capacities and resources of an individual that can be measured, developed, and managed to conforms to the standards of positive organizational behavior for workplace success. Conceptualized as a first-order psychological and motivational factor (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017), psychological capital is a personal resource that is a vital point for work performance and achievement (Peng & Chen, 2022). This construct places strong emphasis on the positive organizational behavior perspective which is in circulation to answer the questions of who the person is and what he could become in terms of personal growth (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). Psychological capital is composed of four dimensions of *hope*, *efficacy*, *optimism*, and *resilience* which acts as a prime mover to boost teachers' well-being.

Hope, rooted in Snyder's hope theory (2002), encompasses both successful agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to achieve goals). Teachers with higher levels of hope may exhibit greater resilience against workplace turnover intentions (Kavgaci & Öztürk, 2023). *Self-efficacy*, founded on Bandura's social cognition theory (1997), refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to efficiently execute specific tasks. Teachers with higher self-efficacy tend to experience increased job satisfaction and decreased emotional exhaustion and burnout (Daniel & Van Bergen, 2023). Furthermore, teacher self-efficacy is closely associated with their self-regulation strategies (Ghonsooly & Ghanizadeh, 2013). *Optimism*, developed by Scheier and Carver (1985), centers on a positive life attitude and problem-solving approach. Optimistic teachers are less likely to experience negative outcomes such as job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions (Liu *et al.*, 2021). Finally, resilience reflects

an individual's ability to recover from adversity, manage stress, and cope with workplace challenges. Resilient teachers are better equipped to promote well-being, handle stress, and mitigate burnout (Fathi & Naderi, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2022).

Altogether, psychological capital's four components foster effective workplace performance and have been linked to reduced teacher burnout in recent studies. Xie *et al.* (2022) conducted a two-wave longitudinal study with 3,743 teachers, finding that psychological capital, along with professional identity, protects teachers from burnout. Similarly, Zhang *et al.* (2019) asserted that teachers with psychological capital resources resist burnout and continue teaching. Zhao *et al.* (2022) explored the relationship between psychological capital and burnout among 3,300 teachers, concluding that psychological capital significantly reduces burnout. Ferradás *et al.* (2019) demonstrated that psychological capital serves as a critical resource for reducing burnout among teachers. While research on teacher psychological capital in educational settings, especially in L2 learning and teaching, is still emerging (Wu *et al.*, 2023), its interaction with job burnout and self-regulation in L2 teachers requires further validation.

2.5. The Hypothesized Model

In this research, we tested a hypothesized model (see Figure 1), which outlines the hypotheses grounded in the existing literature on teacher burnout, self-regulation, professional identity, and psychological capital, as discussed in the preceding literature review.

H1: *Teacher professional identity is directly and negatively related to burnout.*
This hypothesis draws upon the well-established link between professional identity and well-being in the literature (Beijaard *et al.*, 2000; Nickel & Zimmer, 2019; Ntim *et al.*, 2023). Teachers who possess a strong sense of professional identity are more likely to perceive their role in the teaching profession positively, exhibit higher levels of commitment, motivation, and satisfaction, and maintain a resilient attitude towards challenges (Trede *et al.*, 2012). This positive self-concept as a teacher can act as a protective factor against the emotional exhaustion and cynicism components of burnout (Maslach *et al.*, 2001).

H2: *Teacher psychological capital is directly and negatively associated with teacher burnout.*
This hypothesis is based on the literature that underscores the importance of psychological capital as a personal resource that can enhance well-being and buffer against burnout (Luthans *et al.*, 2007; Peng & Chen, 2022). Teachers with higher levels of psychological capital are more likely to maintain their motivation, emotional stability, and sense of control in the face of workplace stressors, making them less susceptible to burnout (Freire *et al.*, 2020).

H3: *Teacher self-regulation is directly and negatively related to teacher burnout.*
Teachers who can strategically control their emotional reactions and inner processes are better equipped to handle the demands of the teaching profession (Mattern & Bauer, 2014). By exercising self-regulation, teachers can mitigate emotional exhaustion and maintain a greater sense of efficacy, reducing the risk of burnout (Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014).

H4: *Teacher self-regulation mediates the relationship between professional identity and burnout.*

This hypothesis is supported by the idea that a strong professional identity may influence teachers' self-regulation strategies (Chen *et al.*, 2020; Derakhshan *et al.*, 2020). Teachers who identify strongly with their profession may be more motivated to regulate their emotions and behaviors effectively in line with their role expectations (Nickel & Zimmer, 2019; Trede *et al.*, 2012). This enhanced self-regulation, in turn, can act as a mechanism through which professional identity reduces the risk of burnout.

H5: *Teacher self-regulation mediates the relationship between teacher psychological capital and burnout.*

This hypothesis builds upon the notion that psychological capital resources, such as self-efficacy and resilience, may facilitate the development of effective self-regulation strategies (Mikus *et al.*, 2022). Teachers with higher psychological capital may be more adept at regulating their emotions and behaviors in a manner that reduces the risk of burnout (Viseu *et al.*, 2016).
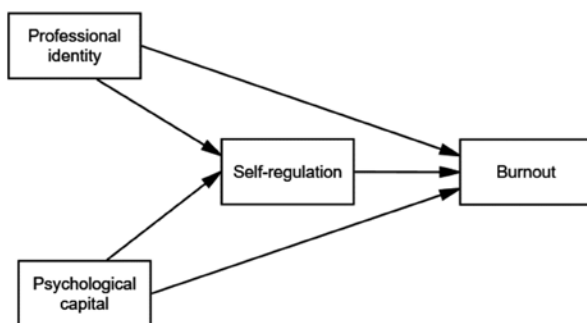

Figure 1. *The Hypothesized Model*

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and Procedure

In this study, 434 EFL educators representing diverse educational institutions, including schools and language institutes across various regions in Iran. All participants exhibited commendable English proficiency, demonstrated by their completion of self-report questionnaires in English. Gender diversity was evident among the participants, with 171 (39.40%) identifying as male and 263 (60.59%) as female. Regarding teaching experience, the cohort consisted of instructors with varied backgrounds: 131 (30.14%) had 1 to 5 years of experience, 176 (40.55%) had 6 to 10 years, 83 (19.08%) had 11 to 15 years, and 44 (10.14%) boasted over 15 years of experience.

A substantial majority of the teachers, totaling 373 (85.78%), held academic majors aligned with English-related disciplines such as TEFL, English literature, translation studies,

and linguistics, reflecting a strong foundation in the field. Conversely, 61 teachers (14.02%) held degrees in non-English majors, contributing to a diverse participant pool. Among those with English-related degrees, 33 teachers had already achieved or were pursuing Ph.D. qualifications, indicating their commitment to advanced academic exploration. Additionally, 248 participants held a Master of Arts (MA) degree, while 92 held a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree, highlighting a continuum of educational backgrounds within the EFL teaching community.

Participants were approached through a convenience sampling method, chosen for its practicality and ability to provide a comprehensive representation within the EFL teaching community. The data collection process spanned over a two-month period, during which participants were provided with clear instructions and ample time to complete the questionnaires, ensuring comprehensive and accurate responses. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study, with explicit consent obtained from each participant. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained, and all data were securely stored. Data collection took place through a secure online platform designed for research purposes, guaranteeing the confidentiality of responses and facilitating efficient data management.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Teacher Self-Regulation Scale (TSRS)

We assessed participants' self-regulation using the Teacher Self-Regulation Scale (TSRS) developed by Capa-Aydin *et al.* (2009). The TSRS consists of 40 items, rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). This scale measures nine distinct factors: goal setting ($\alpha = 0.81$; six items), intrinsic interest ($\alpha = 0.79$; five items), performance goal ($\alpha = 0.82$; five items), mastery goal ($\alpha = 0.78$; four items), self-instruction ($\alpha = 0.84$; four items), emotional control ($\alpha = 0.81$; five items), self-evaluation ($\alpha = 0.81$; four items), self-reaction ($\alpha = 0.88$; four items), and help seeking ($\alpha = 0.79$; three items). For instance, one item asks, "When a problem arises in the classroom, I initially attempt to maintain composure." The TSRS has been established as a reliable and valid instrument for assessing self-regulation, including among EFL teachers (Capa-Aydin *et al.*, 2009; Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014).

3.2.2. Teachers' Professional Identity Scale

The Teachers' Professional Identity Scale, originally developed by Wei (2008), was employed in this study. The scale consists of an 18-item questionnaire organized into four subscales: occupational values, role value, the sense of occupational belonging, and professional behavior inclination. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 5 (very strongly agree).

3.2.3. Teacher Burnout Scale

To assess burnout among the participating instructors, we utilized the teacher version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-ES), originally validated and piloted by Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996). The MBI-ES comprises 22 items, evaluating three subscales:

reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion. Participants rated each item on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day).

3.2.4. *Psychological Capital*

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) was measured using the 24-item Psychological Capital Questionnaire developed by Luthans *et al.* (2007). This questionnaire assesses four sub-dimensions of PsyCap: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Participants expressed their agreement with each statement on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. An illustrative item from the scale reads, "I feel confident in analyzing long-term problems to find solutions." Given the interrelated nature of these four dimensions and their combined influence on various variables, a composite score was computed for PsyCap (Siu *et al.*, 2014).

3.3. Data Analysis

In the initial analysis phase, we performed descriptive and correlation analyses in SPSS 26.0 to understand data characteristics and variable associations. For hypothesis testing and structural relationships, we utilized Amos 25.0 for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) guidelines. Model fit was assessed using established indices: χ^2/df, GFI, CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR. Acceptable values were $\chi^2/df < 3$ (p > .05), GFI, CFI, and TLI > .90 (Marsh *et al.*, 2004), and RMSEA < .08 and SRMR < .10 (Kline, 2023), collectively ensuring a robust evaluation of model fit and structural validity.

4. RESULTS

Participants showed a moderately high level of professional identity (M = 3.69, SD = 0.53), notably elevated psychological capital (M = 4.21, SD = 0.81), and relatively high self-regulation (M = 3.71, SD = 0.65). Burnout symptoms were reported at a moderate level (M = 3.04, SD = 0.69).

Reliability analyses, assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, confirmed strong measurement scale reliability, with coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.91. Correlation analysis revealed significant patterns: positive correlations between professional identity and psychological capital (r = 0.33, p < .01) and self-regulation (r = 0.42, p < .01). Conversely, a negative correlation emerged between professional identity and burnout (r = -0.36, p < .01). Psychological capital positively correlated with self-regulation (r = 0.39, p < .01) and negatively correlated with burnout (r = -0.29, p < .01). Self-regulation showed a positive correlation with burnout (r = 0.49, p < .01).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

	M	SD	Croanbach's α	1	2	3	4
1.Professional identity	3.69	0.53	0.88	-			
2. Psychological capital	4.21	0.81	0.91	0.33*	-		
3. Self-regulation	3.71	0.65	0.83	0.42*	0.39*	-	
4. Burnout	3.04	0.69	0.79	-0.36*	-0.29*	-0.49*	-

*Note. *p* < .01.*

To assess the unidimensionality of the study variables, a series of confirmatory factor analyses were conducted. Three alternative measurement models were compared against the hypothesized baseline model, and the results are presented in Table 2. It is noteworthy that, in each instance, the hypothesized measurement model provided a superior fit to the data compared to the alternative models (χ^2 = 825.941, df = 524, p < 0.001). The CFI, GFI, RMSEA, and SRMR values further confirmed the robustness of the hypothesized model (CFI = 0.971, GFI = 0.880, RMSEA = 0.031, SRMR = 0.053). These results substantiate the validity of the measurement model in capturing the underlying structure of the study variables.

Table 2. *The results of measurement models*

Measurement Model	χ^2	df	CFI	GFI	RMSEA	SRMR
1.Professional identity	3.69	0.53	0.88	-		
2. Psychological capital	4.21	0.81	0.91	0.33*	-	
3. Self-regulation	3.71	0.65	0.83	0.42*	0.39*	
4. Burnout	3.04	0.69	0.79	-0.36*	-0.29*	-

1. All variables were treated as a unified factor.

2. Burnout, self-regulation, and professional identity were combined into a single factor, while psychological capital was treated as an independent factor.

3. Burnout and self-regulation were merged into a single factor, whereas professional identity and psychological capital were regarded as distinct factors.

4. Each variable was treated as an individual, separate factor.

Convergent validity for the hypothesized measurement model was assessed following Fornell and Larcker's (1981) recommendations. Table 3 displays that both the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) values for the study constructs exceeded the established thresholds of 0.50 and 0.60, respectively. Additionally, the standardized factor loadings of all indicators within the baseline measurement model exceeded 0.5, confirming convergent validity. To assess discriminant validity, we utilized the Straub *et al.* (2004) criterion, comparing the square root of AVE with construct correlations. As demonstrated in Table 4, the correlations among all study constructs were lower than the square root of AVE for each respective construct, supporting the distinct nature of the study variables and affirming their divergent validity.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

	AVE	CR
Professional identity	0.61	0.931
Psychological capital	0.58	0.903
Self-regulation	0.55	0.891
Burnout	0.53	0.879

Note. AVE = Average variance extracted, CR = Composite reliability

Table 4. *Discriminant validity*

	1	2	3	4
Professional identity	0.781			
Psychological capital	0.33*	0.762		
Self-regulation	0.42*	0.39*	0.741	
Burnout	-0.36*	-0.29*	-0.49*	0.728

Given the satisfactory fit of the measurement model, the study proceeded to evaluate alternative structural models in order to scrutinize the study hypotheses. Initially, we compared the hypothesized partial mediation model (Model 3) with two other competing models: the full mediation model (Model 2) and the direct effect model (Model 1).

Model 1 assumed a direct effect, setting all path coefficients to and from self-regulation to zero. Model 2 proposed full mediation, with path coefficients from professional identity and psychological capital to burnout set to zero. Model 3 maintained the hypothesized partial mediation. Table 5 displays fit statistics for these models. Model 3 outperformed both Model 2 (df = 4, $\Delta\chi^2$ = 73.75, p < 0.001) and Model 1 (df = 11, $\Delta\chi^2$ = 240.07, p < 0.001), indicating superior fit. The fit indices in Model 3 were statistically significant, confirming its adequacy in explaining variable relationships. Thus, Model 3, a partially mediated model, was retained as the most suitable representation, consistent with the study's hypotheses.

Table 5. *Comparison of fit indices for three models*

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	TLI	SRMR
Direct Effect (1)	859.53**	443	–	0.84	0.91	0.06	0.90	0.19
Full Mediation (2)	693.21**	436	166.32	0.87	0.94	0.05	0.93	0.08
Partial Mediation (3)	619.46**	432	73.75	0.89	0.97	0.03	0.96	0.05

Note. $\Delta\chi^2$ indicates the difference in χ^2 between the current and subsequent model. **p < 0.001.

Figure 2 presents path estimates for the final partial mediation model, with most path coefficients showing statistical significance. However, there was one exception – the path from psychological capital to burnout, which was non-significant (β = 0.08, p > 0.05). The structural model revealed significant associations among the study variables. Firstly, professional identity had a significant negative relationship with burnout (β = –0.29, p < 0.01), supporting Hypothesis 1. Secondly, psychological capital was significantly related to self-regulation (β = 0.26, p < 0.01), indicating that higher psychological capital was associated with greater

self-regulation. Thirdly, self-regulation showed a significant and negative association with burnout ($\beta = -0.50$, $p < 0.001$), aligning with the expectations of Hypothesis 3. These results offer valuable insights into the relationships between professional identity, psychological capital, self-regulation, and burnout, confirming the study's hypotheses.

Table 6. *Path estimates of structural model*

	Standardized path coefficients (t-value)		
	Direct effects model	Full mediation model	Partial mediation model
PI → burnout	−0.33 (3.94***)		−0.29 (3.67**)
PsyCap → burnout	−0.15 (2.64*)		−0.08 (0.81)
PI → self-regulation		0.35 (4.02***)	0.31 (3.84**)
PsyCap → self-regulation		0.23 (3.22**)	0.26 (3.48**)
Self-regulation → burnout		0.54 (6.03***)	−0.50 (5.89***)

Note. PI: professional identity; PsyCap: psychological capital, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

To explore self-regulation as a potential mediator, we employed Baron and Kenny's (1986) method in three steps. In the direct model (Table 7), both professional identity and psychological capital significantly related to burnout (PI → burnout: −0.33, $p < 0.01$; PsyCap → burnout: −0.15, $p < 0.05$), confirming the first step. In the full mediation model, professional identity and psychological capital significantly influenced self-regulation (PI → self-regulation: 0.35, $p < .001$; PsyCap → self-regulation: 0.23, $p < 0.01$), confirming the second step. In the partial mediation model, professional identity negatively related to burnout ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < 0.01$). Self-regulation partially mediated this relationship, with its indirect effect (0.15) smaller than the direct effect (0.15 < 0.29) of professional identity on burnout, supporting Hypothesis 4. Although psychological capital did not directly relate to burnout, self-regulation fully mediated the relationship ($0.26 \times 0.50 = 0.13 > 0.08$), strongly endorsing Hypothesis 5.

In addition, to assess common method bias, we performed Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986), including all indicators from the four constructs in the analysis. The results showed that the first factor explained only 39.48% of the total variance, below the 50% threshold commonly accepted for indicating significant common method bias. Thus, we conclude that common method bias was not a substantial concern in this study.

Finally, the researchers examined the consistency of the mediation model across gender to identify potential differences in the structural path coefficients. Results indicated that the proposed model displayed a satisfactory fit with the data for male and female educators. Analysis evaluating the uniformity across gender revealed that both the restricted model ($\chi2/df = 1.450$, CFI = .920, TLI = .925, RMSEA = .038, SRMR = .072) and the unrestricted model ($\chi2/df = 1.445$, CFI = .921, TLI = .918, RMSEA = .039, SRMR = .070) demonstrated acceptable fit with the data. The comparison between the $\chi2$ values of constrained and unconstrained models ($\Delta\chi2 = 3.982$, $\Delta df = 4$, $p = .315$) indicated consistency in the model coefficients across gender. Furthermore, individual SEM analyses for male ($\chi2/df = 1.375$, $p < .001$, CFI = .927, RMSEA = .051, SRMR = .070) and female students ($\chi2/df = 1.460$, $p < .001$, CFI = .922, RMSEA = .053, SRMR = .065) exhibited satisfactory fit.

Hence, there were no notable differences observed between male and female instructors regarding the direct and indirect influences of professional identity and psychological capital on EFL teacher burnout. Additionally, the mediating function of self-regulation appeared consistent across both genders.
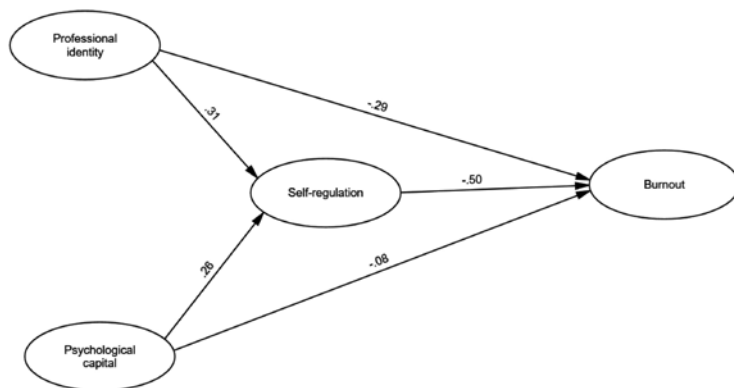

Figure 2. *The Mediation Model*

5. DISCUSSION

In line with our research objectives to investigate the intricate relationships between teacher professional identity, psychological capital, self-regulation, and burnout among EFL educators, the discussion now delves into the nuanced findings and their implications.

First, the study revealed a significant, negative correlation between teacher professional identity and burnout, aligning with existing literature (Chen *et al.*, 2020; Lin *et al.*, 2022; Lu, 2019; Xing, 2022). Professional identity, encompassing teachers' belonging and identification with their profession, reflects their self-esteem, commitment, motivation, and satisfaction (Wei, 2008). A strong professional identity correlates with positive views of their role, higher job satisfaction, and reduced emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Beijaard *et al.*, 2000; Nickel & Zimmer, 2019; Richter *et al.*, 2021). Teachers with robust professional identities adeptly integrate emotions with behavior in various situations, effectively managing high-stress scenarios (van der Wal *et al.*, 2019). Task perception within professional identity indicates teachers' awareness of responsibilities and challenges, enabling better preparation, resilience, and stress management (Richter *et al.*, 2021). This preparation equips teachers to navigate challenges and prevent burnout.

Another explanation for the negative link between professional identity and burnout is that teachers with a strong professional identity have clearer purpose and values associated with their role (Fathi *et al.*, 2023). This deeper commitment fosters intrinsic motivation and resilience, reducing susceptibility to burnout (Trede *et al.*, 2012). A coherent and positive narrative about their role serves as a cognitive buffer against burnout, allowing reframing of challenges as growth opportunities (Cheng, 2021). This positive reframing contributes to lower emotional exhaustion and cynicism, core components of burnout (Maslach *et al.*, 2001).

Second, our findings highlight a direct, negative link between teacher self-regulation and burnout, consistent with prior research (Gaeta González *et al.*, 2023; Karamooz & Narafshan, 2017; Tikkanen *et al.*, 2017). Strong self-regulation skills enable teachers to handle inherent stressors and challenges effectively. They manage emotional reactions and cognitive processes, making adaptive decisions in classrooms (Mattern & Bauer, 2014). Highly self-regulated teachers excel in setting boundaries, managing time, and avoiding overextension, essential for preventing burnout (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Prioritizing self-care and stress reduction leads to reduced emotional exhaustion and lower burnout risk (Tikkanen *et al.*, 2017). Their perception of teaching challenges as manageable stems from effective control over thoughts and emotions, fostering psychological resilience (Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014). Additionally, self-regulation cultivates a positive teacher narrative, re-framing setbacks as growth opportunities, thus diminishing stressors' impact on well-being and job satisfaction (Cheng, 2021).

This finding also aligns with Bakker and de Vries (2021), who suggest that self-regulation is associated with lower job burnout. Highly self-regulated individuals apply adaptive strategies like job crafting to tailor their work environment (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Self-regulated teachers use job crafting to adjust job demands, resources, and relationships, effectively managing stress (Capa-Aydin *et al.*, 2019). This proactive adjustment aligns tasks and relationships with their professional needs and skills (Mattern & Bauer, 2014; Teng & Zhang, 2022), potentially increasing job satisfaction and engagement while reducing emotional exhaustion and burnout among EFL teachers, in line with Mattern and Bauer (2014). Reduced professional efficacy is a key dimension of burnout (Maslach, 2003). Teachers experiencing burnout often lack self-efficacy and confidence in their teaching tasks. Self-regulation includes self-efficacy, and its negative impact on burnout can be explained by their relationship. Improved self-efficacy beliefs can reduce burnout by enhancing teachers' confidence in their abilities (Wang & Wang, 2022). This resonates with findings by Bing *et al.* (2022) and Zarrinabadi *et al.* (2023) highlighting self-efficacy's role in reducing teachers' burnout.

Third, the findings highlight that psychological capital negatively influences teacher burnout through the mediation of self-regulation. This mediation can be understood through various mechanisms. Teachers with high psychological capital often possess self-belief and optimism, enabling effective goal-setting and pursuit (Snyder, 2002; Viseu *et al.*, 2016). This agency and optimism enhance their ability to self-regulate emotions and behaviors, especially in challenging classroom situations (Mattern & Bauer, 2014). Furthermore, psychological capital cultivates resilience, enabling teachers to rebound from setbacks and positively adapt to stressors (Luthans *et al.*, 2007; Siu *et al.*, 2014; Wu *et al.*, 2022). Resilient teachers engage in self-regulation strategies that mitigate burnout effects by reframing negative experiences, seeking social support, and employing coping mechanisms effectively (Wang *et al.*, 2022).

Highly self-regulated teachers persist amidst challenges, developing coping strategies against workplace negativity, leading to reduced job burnout (Klusmann *et al.*, 2008; Freire *et al.*, 2020). While psychological capital is vital for burnout reduction (Xie *et al.*, 2022), our results suggest that without self-regulation, even teachers with high psychological capital may experience burnout. In the realm of EFL teaching, facing various demands, psychological capital alone is insufficient—self-regulation skills are crucial (Gaeta González *et*

al., 2023). Our mediation model indicates that psychological capital significantly enhances teachers' self-regulation skills, encompassing action planning, self-evaluation, strategy use, self-monitoring, and performance control. Consequently, self-regulated EFL teachers can shield themselves from emotional exhaustion and burnout risks (Kavgaci & Öztürk, 2023).

Psychological capital's impact on self-regulation might be associated with self-efficacy, a key component. Teachers with self-efficacy exhibit confidence in managing mental processes and emotional intelligence amid teaching challenges (Wang & Wang, 2022). Their adeptness in regulating emotions and behaviors aligns with higher self-regulation, echoing previous findings linking teacher self-efficacy and self-regulation (Ghonsooly & Ghanizadeh, 2013; Kazemkhah Hasankiadeh & Azari Noughabi, 2022). This alignment could potentially lead to reduced burnout among EFL teachers. Thus, it's plausible to suggest that teachers' positive psychological capital negatively impacts burnout through teacher self-regulation (psychological capital → self-regulation → burnout).

While this study yields valuable insights into the interplay of professional identity, psychological capital, self-regulation, and burnout among EFL teachers, it has inherent limitations. Firstly, it constitutes an initial exploration of these variables within the applied linguistics context, warranting further investigation with larger and more diverse samples for validation and expansion. Secondly, reliance on self-report measures introduces potential response biases. Future research can enhance robustness by incorporating multiple data sources and methodologies. Thirdly, the cross-sectional design hinders causal inferences, underscoring the potential value of longitudinal studies to illuminate dynamic relationships over time. Lastly, the study's focus on EFL teaching may limit generalizability to other educational settings, emphasizing the importance of replicating this research in diverse language teaching contexts and cultural environments for a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing teacher burnout.

6. Conclusions

The study explored complex connections among psychological factors—professional identity, psychological capital, self-regulation, and job burnout—in EFL teaching. Findings highlighted the significant negative impact of professional identity and self-regulation on job burnout. Additionally, it unveiled that psychological capital mitigates burnout through its mediation of self-regulation. This research pioneers such investigations in applied linguistics.

Implications from our research hold value for EFL administrators, teacher development professionals, and researchers. Firstly, it deepens comprehension of key factors that can alleviate or prevent burnout among language educators, emphasizing the need for further exploration to offer support and resources. Secondly, it proposes a strategic approach: enhancing motivation-related aspects within self-regulation strategies to potentially reduce burnout among language instructors. This suggests the effectiveness of tailored preparation programs to manage fatigue and stress in teaching. Moreover, it underscores the importance of fostering professional identity among language instructors, a factor that can shield against burnout. Thus, teacher educators are urged to prioritize the cultivation of professional identity in training programs, empowering teachers for success in their roles.

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