The Study of Student-Centered Approach Focused on Burnout by Mixed Method among EFL Learners by Gholam – Reza Parvizi

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Abstract

Burnout has been recognized as a major concern for individuals in different educational areas. However, little attempt has been made to explore it among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Accordingly, the present study employed a mixed method approach to identify: a) the burnout profiles of Iranian EFL learners; b) the relationship between the EFL learners' burnout profiles and their demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, marital status, and educational degree); and c) the EFL learners' burnout sources. A sample of 100 Iranian EFL students participated in this study. Each participant filled in a biographical questionnaire and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS). Three burnout profiles were identified using clustering methodology: the laissez faire, the well-adjusted, and the distressed. Moreover, the results from Chi-square discovered that there was a significant relationship between cluster memberships and the demographic characteristic educational degree. The follow-up semi-structured interview revealed personal and organizational factors as the underlying sources of Iranian EFL students' type of burnout.

Keywords: EFL students, burnout profiles, clustering methodology

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1. Introduction

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

Student burnout is defined as "a three-dimensional syndrome of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy" (Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002, p. 465). The emotional exhaustion is described as the exhaustion from the study demands, and the cynicism refers to the students' negative behaviors and attitudes toward the academic tasks. The professional efficacy also relates to the students' evaluation of oneself as unsuccessful in the educational settings. Student burnout has serious consequences on the students' academic life. As Mostert, Pienaar, Gauche, and Jackson (2007) state, student burnout may result in a loss of enthusiasm to participate in academic study; it can also endanger students' academic future. Due to the serious consequences of student burnout, finding ways to identify what factors result in burnout among the students is of paramount importance for the researchers and educators.

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2. The Value of Student-centered Approach (i.e., Cluster Analysis)

The student-centered approach is a statistical process that utilizes a class of techniques "to classify cases into groups that are relatively homogeneous within themselves and heterogeneous between each other, on the basis of a defined set of variables" (Jin, Noh, Shin, & Lee, 2015, p. 313). Initially, Block (1971) proposed this approach in the milieu of personality psychology, and later, it was expanded to other contextes, such as Swedish developmental psychology (Bergman, Magnusson, & El-Khouri, 2003; Magnusson, 1988). According to Bergman and Lundh (2015), the student-centered approach is distinct from the variable-centered approach both in theory and methodology. On the theoretical level, the student-centered approach employs a holistic-interactionistic outlook on the development of the individual; it views the individual as a well-organized entity which is composed of a set of interactive components working together. Therefore, the primary focus of the student-centered approach is the identification of the arrangement of factors distinguishing a specified individual's functioning (Magnusson, 1988). In spite of that, the variable is regarded as the basic conceptual unit in the variable-centered approach and the main focus is on the generalizable laws which are in accordance with the standard of natural sciences (Bergman & Lundh, 2015).

Methodologically, both the person- and variable- centered approaches make use of quantitative data; however, they are different in their main purposes and the employed analyses. While the main focus of interest in the student-centered approach is the grouping of variables within the individual, the variable-centered approach seeks to investigate the associations between variables (Bergman et al., 2003). As mentioned by Laursen and Hoff (2006), the variable-centered analytic methods are based on the assumption that the population is homogeneous regarding the studied phenomena. Thus, they seek to investigate the interindividual variations. The common statistical methods utilized in a variable-centered approach are the mean level comparisons via analysis of variance and correlation, and regression anlyses. However, the basic assumption of the student-centered methods is the heterogeneity of the population with respect to the mean levels and modifications in the studied phenomenon. Class and cluster analyses are typically utilized in this approach; the commonality of these statistical methods is that the

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number of classes is not known and classes are determined based on theoretical and statistical consideration rather than predetermined values, such as group means and cut-off points (Bergman et al., 2003). As stated by Makikangas and Kinnunen (2016, p. 12),

Student-centered analyses are typically used for two purposes, that is, to identify types of individuals and individual trajectories. In both cases, typical and atypical types and trajectories can be identified. Therefore, the purpose is not that every person forms his/her own type or trajectory; instead the interest is in how individuals are similar and how they are different from others and in what respects.

Since the early twenty-first century, the student-centered approach has been employed in various contexts, such as physical education, teacher and student motivation in general education, and burnout which is the focus of the present study (Carson & Chase, 2009; Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Sierens, Luyckx, & Lens, 2009). In the burnout context, the student-centered approach is able to show the growth of burnout syndrome over time and its intra-individual heterogeneity, that is, "identifying potential types or patterns of burnout within individuals and individual developmental trajectories" (Makikangas & Kinnunen, 2016, p. 12). A student-centered approach clarifies the association between the three burnout dimensions and shows the way these dimensions constitute various burnout patterns by merging together at the intra-individual level. However, the potential of such burnout patterns is not restricted to identifying the mere correlation between burnout dimensions; they also show the levels (i.e., low, mid, and high) at which the burnout dimensions occur together. For instance, they reveal that despite the high correlation of burnout dimensions, especially emotional exhaustion and cynicism, there is a possibility that individuals may experience these dimensions at different levels.

3. Review of Literature

Though the concept of burnout had been ignored in the educational settings for a long time, it has attracted the attention of the researchers recently and become the focus of an extreme amount of investigations in the field of study. So far, some studies have explored the contributions of different organizational factors to the students' burnout. For instance, Moneta (2011) explored the relationship between the need for achievement (students' tendency to succeed in difficult

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tasks in competition with their peers) and burnout in a sample of 226 university students in London. The results revealed that the students' need for achievement was negatively correlated with the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and positively associated with the professional efficacy. He proposed the need for achievement as one of the academic factors that may result in burnout among students. Also, Pilkauskaite-Valickienea, Zukauskienea, and Raiziene (2011), in a cluster analytic approach, investigated the causes of burnout in a sample of 1741students from five high schools in the Lithuania, an administrative region of Klaipeda. According to the results, school's atmosphere, students' attachment to school, and open classroom climate for discussion were among the factors majorly resulted in burnout among high school students. Based upon this finding, Pilkauskaite-Valickienea et al. (2011) suggested the development of positive attachment and opportunity for democratic discussion as strategies for preventing burnout. In another study, Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Pietikïnen, and Jokela (2008) reported negative school climate and negative motivation received from teacher as the factors contributing to burnout among high school students.

Moreover, several studies explored the individual-related causes of burnout among students. For example, Capri, Ozkendir, Ozkurt, and Karakus (2012), in a correlational study, explored the relationship between students' general self-efficacy, life satisfaction, and burnout among 354 students from Mersin University. The results showed that the students' self-efficacy was positively correlated with the life satisfaction and professional efficacy. Life satisfaction was also found to be the best predictor of burnout. Besides, Sulea, Van Beek, Sarbescu, Virga, and Schaufeli (2015), in a study with 255 Romanian economic and social science university students, examined the relationship between burnout, personality, and basic need satisfaction. The results showed that three personality traits (i.e., neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion) were related to the experience of different levels of burnout among the students. Also, the fulfillment of psychological need was negatively correlated with the emotional exhaustion. As mentioned by Aypay (2011), feeling of inadequacy and lack of interest could be the other sources of burnout among students. Quite a few studies have conducted on this topic in EFL contexts. In a study on 147 English language teachers from Mashhad's private schools, Pishghadam and Sahebjam

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(2012) investigated the association between burnout and personality types. The results revealed significant relationships between burnout dimensions and personality types. Besides, extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientious were found to be the best predictors of the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

Moreover, there are studies exploring burnout patterns in different professions. In one of those considerable studies, Lee, Cho, Kissinger, and Ogle (2010) adopted a clustering methodology to identify burnout profiles in professional counselors. The cluster analyses demonstrated three burnout profiles: disconnected, preserving, and well-adjusted counselors. Job satisfaction and self-steem were also recognized as good discriminators between the three burnout clusters.

In the educational setings, Farber (2000) utilized a cluster analysis to identify the appropriate treatment strategies for different types of teacher burnout. Using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey, Farber's study demonstrated three clusters of burnout (i.e., wearout, classic, and underchallenged). To clarify, a wearout teacher was one who surrendered soon in dealing with excessive amount of stress and felt exhausted and depleted. A classic teacher is refered to one who did not give up in the face of stress and worked harder. Lastly, an underchallenged burned-out teacher was one who is not faced with excessive amount of stress but works in a tedious and tiresome condition. The results of this study indicated that each burnout type needed a specific type of treatment.

Similarly Jin, Noh, Shin, and Lee (2015) employed a cluster analysis procedure to identify different burnout patterns among 345 Korean school teachers. Running a two-stage cluster analysis approach, three types of burned-out school teachers were identified (i.e., distressed, well-adjusted, and laissez-faire teachers). To illustrate, the distressed teachers were those who scored moderate to high on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low on the personal accomplishment. The well-adjusted burned-out teachers were characterized by low scores on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and high scores on the personal accomplishment. Finally, the laissez-faire teachers are refered to thoes with low scores on the three dimensions of burnout. The results from this study called for an awareness of the unique burnout profiles of the school teachers and the development of specfic interventional programs.

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While research has widely addressed student burnout in different educational settings, little is known about student burnout in the EFL context. No study, to the best knowledge of the researchers, has so far explored burnout among the EFL students employing a student-centered approach. Thus, the present study was intended to investigate the EFL students' burnout profiles and their associations with demographic characteristics. In line with these objectives, the following research questions are presented:

1. What are the Iranian EFL students' burnout levels?
2. Are there any significant differences among the emerged burnout profiles (clusters) of the Iranian EFL students?
3. Are there any relationships between EFL students' burnout profiles (clusters) and their demographic characteristics?
4. What are burnout sources for Iranian EFL students?

4. Method

4.1. Quantitative Phase
The quantitative section of the present study sought to determine the Iranian EFL students' burnout profiles employing both the person- and varaible-centered approaches. Furthermore, this phase was intended to explore the relation between the EFL students' burnout profiles and demographic characteristics.

4.1.1. Participants

One hundred EFL students (29 males and 71 females) from two provinces in Iran participated in this study. Among the participants 66 were single and 34 were married. Their age ranged from 17 to 35. The sample consisted of M.A. and B.A. undergraduates (35 M.A. and 65 B.A.) majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language and English Translation.

4.1.2. Instruments

To assess the EFL students' academic burnout, The MBI-SS (Schaufeli et al., 2002) was utilized. It is a modified version of the Maslach burnout inventory-general survey (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996), which is used to evaluate the students' feeling of burnout. The

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questionnaire consists of 15 items representing three components: the emotional exhaustion (5 items); the cynicism (4 items); and the professional efficacy (6 items). In this questionnaire, the professional efficacy is coded reversely and described in terms of professional inefficacy in the analysis. The questionnaire is a Likert-type scale coded on the 7-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). The students' high scores on the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and their low scores on the professional efficacy are indicative of burnout.

Another questionnaire was also used to measure the EFL students' demographic information. The participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, educational degree, and marital status.

4.2. Qualitative Phase

In the second phase of the study, the qualitative data were collected to determine the EFL students' burnout sources.

4.2.1. Participants

In this phase of the study, 20 EFL students, including 10 participants with low scores on the MBI-SS, and 10 participants with the high scores on the MBI-SS, were selected in order to be interviewed. From these 20 students, 9 students were male and 11 were female students. Also, 14 students held bachelor's degrees, and six students held master's degrees.

4.2.2. Instrument: Semistructured Interviews

The perspectives of the EFL university students regarding the sources of burnout were investigated using a semistructured interview with 20 EFL university students. The purpose was to find in-depth information on factors which could majorly result in burnout among the EFL students. Accordingly, the EFL students were asked 10 open-ended questions which were developed by the current researchers touching on the primary themes in the burnout, such as: "Have you ever felt that you have lost your interests in your studies? Why yes/no?", "Do you consider yourself as a good student? Any reason?" and "Have you ever used up at the end of a university day?"

4.3. Procedures

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This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) state, the mixed-methods research is composed of two phases in which a qualitative study follows a quantitative phase. In a sequential explanatory design, the quantitative data are collected and analysed initially. Afterwards, a researcher gathers and analyses the qualitative data to gain more insights of the quantitative results. Following Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), the method of this study was composed of two different phases. Initially, the quantitative data were gathered and analysed so as to determine the participants' burnout profiles and their associations with demographic characteristics. Afterwards, the qualitative data were collected and analysed to help take a better understanding of the obtained findings in the quantitative phase. To this end, prior to the study, the participants were presented with a very brief introduction of the purpose of the research. After that, the construct of the study, student burnout, was briefly explained to them. All the participants were assured that their participations would be confidential and anonymous, and the questionnaires would be assigned codes. Then, one of the researchers distributed the MBI and demographics questionnaires among 100 Iranian EFL university students, who were selected nonrandomly.

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

4.4. Data Analysis

Running the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 23), the present study drew on descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the collected data in the quantitative phase. Initially, descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha for MBI-SS, and correlation coefficients were calculated. Subsequently, a two-stage cluster analysis procedure was used (Gore, 2000). According to Jin et al. (2015), the cluster analysis is a class of techniques used to classify cases into groups that are relatively homogeneous within themselves and heterogeneous between each

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other. It is also claimed that cluster analysis is "more adaptive than the typical median or mean-split procedures where much of the variance is lost in the process of creating groups" (Nicolas Gillet, Vallerand, &Rosne, 2009, p. 52). Then, to examine the differences among the three clusters on EFL learners' burnout profiles, one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with a follow-up univariate analysis (ANOVA) and post-hoc Turkey comparison tests were used. Finally, to identify the relationships between demographic characteristics and EFL learners' burnout profiles, Chi-square tests were conducted.

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

5. Results

5.1. Quantitative Phase

First, internal reliabilities for each of the MBI-SS subscales were calculated using standardized Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The reliability of the MBI-SS in this study was satisfactory (α =.68). The MBI-SS also indicated appropriate internal consistency with all subscales ranging from .81 to .89. Second, all data were subjected to descriptive analyses, computed in the form of means, standard deviations, and scale mean. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of all the MBI-SS subscales.

Table 1.Descriptive Statistics for MBI-SS Subscales/Dimension

Variables	N of items	Min	Max	M	SD	Scale Mean
Emotional exhaustion	5	0	30	11.52	5.85	2.30
Cynicism	4	0	24	8.07	5.79	2.01
Professional efficacy	6	0	26	23.57	6.17	3.92

As displayed in Table 1, the greatest mean score belonged to the professional efficacy (M = 23.57, SD = 6.17), and the lowest one belonged to the cynicism (M = 8.07, SD = 5.79). The emotional exhaustion dimension had the mean score of 11.52 (SD = 5.85) and the scale mean of

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2.30, which was not large (below the mdeian on a 7-point Likert scale). Similarly, the scale mean for cynicism (2.01) was not large. As mentioned by Maslach et al. (1996), the individuals' low scores on the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and high scores on the professional efficacy are indicative of low levels of burnout. In this study, the professional efficacy obtained the largest mean score and scale mean, and the mean score and scale mean for the emotional exhaustion and cynicism were lower. Thus, the researchers came to the conclusion that the burnout level of the participants of the present study was low.

The correlational statistics between burnout and demographic variables demonstrated that burnout subscales were differentially related to the demographic variables. It was found that emotional exhaustion and cynicism had significant negative correlations with educational degree ($r = -.34$ and $r = -.29$, respectively) and age ($r = -.21$ and $r = -.23$, respectively). They also had nonsignificant negative associations with gender (($r = -.02$, $r = -.09$, respectively) and marital status ($r = -.17$ and $r = -.09$, respectively). On the other hand, there were significant positive correlations between professional efficacy with educational degree and age ($r = .27$ and $r = .31$, respectively). There were also nonsignificant positive associations between professional efficacy with gender and marital status ($r = .009$ and $r = .16$, respectively). Table 2 shows the correlation results between burnout dimensions and demographic variables.

Table 2. The Correlation Rsultsbetween Burnout and Demographic Variables

Variables	Gender	Age	Educational degree	Marital status
Emotional exhaustion	-.022 (.825)	-.344** (.000)	-.292** (.003)	-.177 (.079)
Cynicism	-.099 (.326)	-.218* (.030)	-.234* (.019)	-.093 (.358)
Professional efficacy	.009 (.930)	.315** (.001)	.273** (.006)	.167 (.097)

The second research question was intended to identify Iranian EFL students' burnout clusters on the basis of their scores for three burnout subscales (i.e., emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy). It was hypothesized that three burnout patterns would be identified using a clustering methodology. Three clusters were expected to emerge: (1) a cluster characterized by

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high scores on the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and low scores on the professional efficacy; (2) a cluster characterized by low scores on the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and high scores on the professional efficacy; and (3) a cluster characterized by low scores on three burnout subscales.

Cluster analysis is sensitive to outliers. Thus, the researchers standardized the students' scores on burnout dimensions, initially. However, the results revealed no outliers for the burnout dimensions. Then, cluster analysis was run in two steps. In the first step, in order to obtain the optimal number of clusters and identify burnout patterns, scores on emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy were included in a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method of linkage with the squared Euclidian distance measure. In this study, Ward's method was used to reduce the within clusters variance. Subsequently, in the second step, a non-hirarchical k-means cluster analysis was conducted to identify a three cluster solution and to confirm the initial cluster centers resulting from the hierarchical cluster analysis. The results of the hierarchical method were confirmed because the final cluster solution in the k-means analysis were similar to the one in hirarchical analysis. Therefore, a three-cluster solution was selected because it explained better the variance in burnout dimensions. Means and standard deviations of the burnout subscales for the three groups are reported in Table

Table 3.Descriptive Statistics for the Three-Cluster Solution

Variables	Cluster 1 "Distressed students" (n=26)		Cluster 2 "Well-adjusted students" (n=31)		Cluster 3 "Laissez-faire students" (n=43)		F	p	η2	C1 vs. C2	C1 vs. C3	C2 vs.C3
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD						
Emotional exhaustion	18.73	4.47	9.23	3.64	8.81	3.96	56.92	.00 0	.54	9.50*	9.91*	.41
Cynicism	15.92	3.37	6.94	2.98	4.14	3.34	109.63	.00 0	.69	8.98*	11.78*	2.79*
Professional efficacy	6.42	2.48	16.45	4.06	7.12	3.03	62.59	.00 0	.56	-.02	9.30*	9.33*

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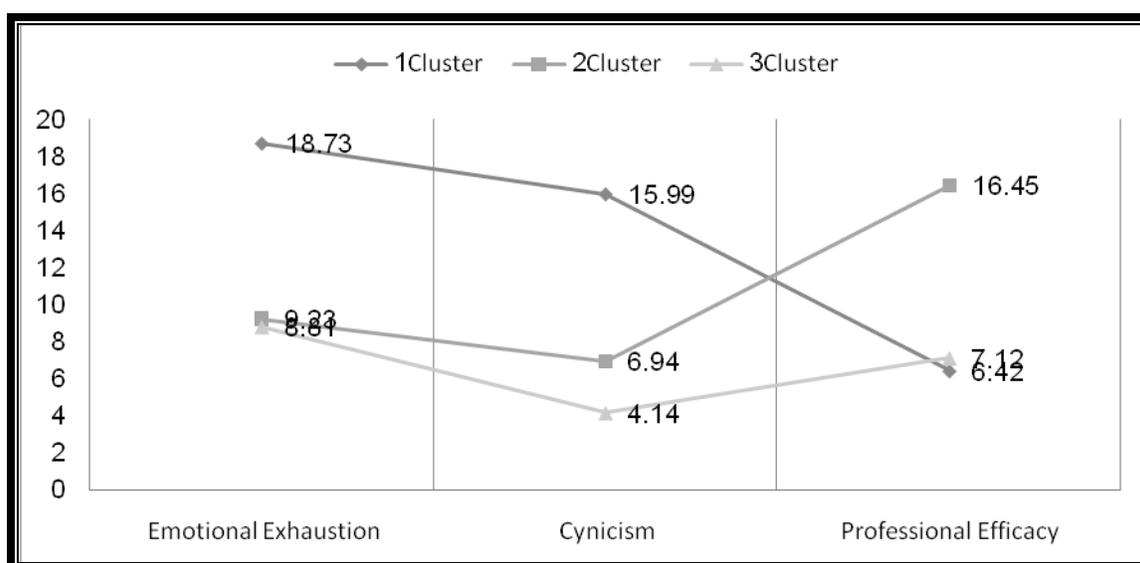
Figure 1. Burnout patterns identified by cluster analysis

The first cluster included 26% of the sample (n = 26) and was labeled the *distressed students*. This cluster included EFL students whose burnout profiles were characterized by high scores on the emotional exhaustion and cynicism and low scores on the professional efficacy. The second cluster was labeled the *well-adjusted students* and represented 31% of the sample (n = 31). The students in this cluster showed a high level of professional efficacy and low levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Finally, the participants in the third cluster represented 43% of the sample (n = 43) and included EFL students who displayed low levels of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy. The students classified into this cluster were labled the *laissez-faire students*. As Figure 1 indicatedthewell-adjusted students (cluster2) and the laissez-faire students (cluster3) almost shared the same levels of emotional exhaustion and professional efficacy. However, cynicism made a distinction between the two groups.

To examine whether differences existed among the three clusters on the three burnout dimensions, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was run. According to the

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results, there were significant differences between the three clusters on the three burnout dimensions, $F(6, 190) = 49.544$, $p = .000$. The follow up univariate analyses with post-hoc Tukey were conducted to identify where significant differences lie. Univariate F values showed a significant effect of cluster membership on each burnout dimension (see Table 3 above for the results of these univariate analyses as well as cluster size and mean scores). The results of post-hoc comparison revealed significant differences between the three clusters on burnout subscales ($p < .05$).

The third research question was evaluated using Chi-Square analyses. The purpose was to investigate the association between demographic variables (i.e., gender, age, educational degree, and marital status) and the EFL students' burnout. The dependant variable was EFL students' cluster membership; demographic variables were also selected as independent variables.The results revealed that only educational degree ($p = .003$) had made a significant relationship with burnout patterns in EFL learners. The Chi-square statistics are manifested in Table 4.

Table 4.The Comparison of the Three Clusters in Terms of Demographic Characteristics

Clusters		Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Total	χ^2	P
Demographic variables			%f				
Gender	Male	9	9	11	29		
	Female	17	22	32	71	.64	.72
Age	Below 20	6	6	3	15		
	21-25	12	12	15	39		
	26-30	5	8	19	32	7.80	.25
	Over 30	3	5	6	14		
Educational degree	BA	21	22	22	65		
	MA	5	9	21	35	6.94	.03*
Marital status	Single	20	20	26	66		
	Married	6	11	17	34	2.0	.36

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5.2. Qualitative Phase

The quantitative data analysis revealed the EFL students' burnout level and their main burnout clusters employing both person- and variable-centered approaches. In order to answer the fourth research question, the qualitative analysis was conducted. In the qualitative part, the data from the interviews revealed several sources for the experience of burnout. Table 5 provides the underlying themes and subthemes emerged from the analysis of the interviewees responses.

Table 5.The List of Emerged Subthemes for Burnout

Outside influences

- Future job-related concerns
- Financial difficulties
- Family problems

Instructors' attitudes and behaviors

Inside influences

- Class materials
- Class environment

Individual motivation

The themes determined from the interviewees' responses are explained as followings:

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

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

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

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

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

Inside influences. Another source of burnout for the EFL student in this study was the impact of the academic setting. About 70 percent of the EFL interviewees with high levels of burnout mentioned that the *class material* was the main source of their frustration. They believed that the quality of the materials that they received had lessened their eager to study and made them bored. *Shiva*, one of the senior undergraduate, explained her feeling in this way: "*Before I entered the university…I thought I would be busy with studying different interesting and*

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inspiring books. [But], I soon found that I was wrong about this…Here, we are just stuck with the old-fashioned books that the instructors suggest. ”

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

Personal motivation. The interviewees with high levels of burnout also talked about lack of motivation. They agreed with the fact that most of the students had no interests in their studies. One of them, *Reza*, mentioned that: “*Sometimes I feel depressed [because] participating in most of the classes doesn't give me the sense of accomplishment that I seek for…*”

6. Discussion

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

Deriving from a cluster analysis in the Iranian EFL student sample, three disparate burnout clusters were determined. The first cluster was labeled as the distressed students and identified by high scores on emotional exhaustion and cynicism and low scores on professional efficacy. The students grouped into this cluster did not feel confident in their capabilities. Moreover, they were exhausted from the study demands and developed negative attitudes toward the academic

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settings. As the emotional exhaustion is identified as the central feature of burnout (Park & Lee, 2012), the EFL students in this cluster were characterized by high levels of burnout. The second cluster was labeled as thewell-adjusted students and characterized by high scores on the professional efficacy and low scores on the emotional exhaustion and cynicism. The students in this group had low levels of burnout in comparison to the students in the first cluster. They were confident toward their capabilities and ready to invest as much time and efforts as needed into their academic tasks and study. The third type of cluster, labeled as the laissez-faire students, was recognized by students' low scores on the three dimensions of burnout. The students grouped into this cluster shared some features with the students in the first and second clusters. The laissez-faire students, like the well-adjusted students, were not exhausted from academic workloads and demands; yet, they did not have enough confidence, like the distressed students, to consider themselves as successful in the academic settings. The highest percentage of EFL students belonged to this cluster which was indicative of the moderate levels of burnout. The results of the students' burnout profiles in the current study are in line with those of Jin et al. (2015) who identified three types of burnout (i.e., laissez-faire teachers, well-adjusted teachers, and distressed teachers) for Korean teachers.

In terms of the relationship between the EFL students' burnout profiles and demographic variables, the results of the present study indicated that among the demographic variables, educational degree was related to EFL students' burnout cluster membership. Whether the students were graduates and undergraduates impacted their burnout dimensions; this implies that students with high academic ability are less burned-out. In a sense, this result is in opposition to the results of some other studies (e.g., Richardson &Watt, 2005; Watt & Richardson, 2008) which indicated that demographic variables had no role in cluster memberships. Accordingly, it is recommended to carry out further investigations adopting complex methodologies in probing the EFL students' burnout profiles and their association with other demographic characteristics.

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

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instructors' attitudes and behaviors, inside influences, and personal motivation. This is in agreement with the previous studies (e.g., Cushman & West, 2006), which revealed the same sources for burnout. Outside influences were found to be the major causes of burnout. That is, factors outside the educational settings were identified to spill over into the EFL students' academic life and result in the experience of high levels of burnout. Moreover, instructors' attitudes and behaviors along with students' motivation were related to the EFL students' burnout. This finding indicated that the students may put off studying due to the instructors' behaviors in the classroom. It also confirmed that the students' participation and attendance in class may be negatively influenced by the perceived aggression, sarcasm, contempt, inappropriate language, and outbursts in instructors' behavior.

The students also referred to class materials and environment as factors contributing to their burnout. The results confirmed that the quality of class materials and the students' relationships with their classmates could influence students' motivation and interest in college. This is in line with the findings of a study by Dobranksy and Frymier (2004), who contended that the students' in-classroom relationships and the suggested books by the instructors would have direct influence on the students' interest and sense of efficacy.

In sum, by employing a student-centered approach (cluster analytic), this study revealed how complex the EFL students' burnout profiles might be. Additionally, this study showed that the individual characteristics, such as educational degree might influence their burnout levels.

7. Conclusion, Implication, and Limitation

The mixed methods sequential explanatory design of the current study has made a contribution to the literature on the Iranian EFL students' burnout status.The results of this study have revealed the type of burnout that EFL students experienced, discovered their burnout sources, and uncovered the role of the demographic characteristics of the EFL participants on their burnout profiles. Thus, these findings can help the EFL students to enhance their realization of burnout looking at their burnout type from a student-centered perspective and eventually, influence their personal welfare and efficacy as the EFL learners. The cluster analytic approach demonstrated the quality of the EFL students' burnout within each profile. Therefore, the findings of the

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present study can pave the way for the experts in the field to distinguish the highly burned-out students from students with low levels of burnout.The results of the qualitative data analyses revealed personal and organizational factors as the major sources of burnout among the EFL students in the present study. The major causes involved outside influences, instructors' attitudes and behaviors, inside influences, and personal motivations. Since this has been the first attempt to empirically recognize the EFL students' burnout profiles, the findings obtained from the present study can raise the EFL students' self-awareness and provide the opportunities for the introduction of interventional programs helping the prevention and attenuation of student burnout.

In this study, the use of the student-centered approach for identification of the EFL students' burnout profiles may pave the way for some burnout interventions. Due to the high scores of the distressed students on emotional exhaustion, it is assumed that students in this group were emotionally exhausted. Park and Lee (2012) refer to the emotional exhaustion as the unique feature of burnout which can lead to the appearance of cynicism and professional efficacy. Thus, it is recommended in the current study to develop some interventional programs focusing on the EFL students' emotional domain. Besides, in the educational environment, the emotionally drained students in order to get free from the emotional exhaustion and achieve their goals usually employ detached and cynical reactions. Thus, it is necessary to put into practice some individual and group counseling programs that can help these students. Furthermore, the emotional exhaustion can be prevented by dedicating some times in the educational schedule to the introduction of self-regulating strategies to EFL students. These factors may play a role in helping students scoring lower on the emotional exhaustion and cynicism.

On the other hand, in the present study, both the distressed and laissez-fair students had low scores on the professional efficacy subscale. It is assumed that these EFL students neither accomplished more nor invested much time in their study. Thus, the present study encourages motivational-based interventional programs for these students to increase their sense of professional efficacy. First, these implemented motivational strategies enable the EFL students to identify themselves as competent and successful students. Second, if these students have

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difficulty for effective learning, the officials and policy makers can pay attention to the students' problems and provide useful tools for the betterment of the students' quality of education.

The current study has some limitations. This study was carried on a sample of EFL students from two provinces in Iran. Thus, the generalization of the results to the other EFL settings should be exercised with caution. Besides, this study utilized clustering methodology in relation to the EFL students' burnout and explored the EFL students' burnout profiles and the distinction among groups. Thus, future studies are required to investigate the associations of these profiles with other individual and learning variables.

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