

A Correlational Study of Iraqi ESP Teachers' Emotional Labor, Psychological Well-being and Professional Commitment

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Abstract

Recent research has focused on the factors of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers in order to determine their role in the process of language instruction. The present study strived to determine the interrelationships among Iraqi ESP teachers' emotional labor, professional commitment, and psychological well-being. To this end, first, the researchers selected 221 male and 241 female ESP instructors as participants at various universities in the context of Iraq. Moreover, they took advantage of three reliable and valid questionnaires to collect data on the above-mentioned teacher factors. In addition, they utilized Pearson's Correlation Test and Structural Equation Modeling to perform the data analysis. The results indicated that there were significant correlations among ESP teachers' emotional labor, professional commitment, and psychological well-being. Moreover, these teachers' emotional labor and professional commitment significantly predicted their psychological well-being. Lastly, the teachers' professional commitment was a significant factor in their emotional labor in their setting. The study discusses the implications of the results in foreign language contexts.

Keywords: Emotional labor, ESP teachers, Iraq, professional commitment, psychological well-being.

1- Introduction

As the demand for ESP grows in the global context, the effectiveness of language instruction becomes increasingly crucial to meet learners' specific needs. However, the challenges faced by Iraqi ESP teachers extend beyond pedagogy, encompassing their Emotional Labor (EL), Psychological Well-Being (PWB), and Professional Commitment (PC), all of which can significantly impact their instructional ability and overall occupational satisfaction. The teaching of ESP courses in Iraq is subject to diverse challenges, including limited resources, large class sizes, and students' varied academic backgrounds. These factors pose considerable hurdles for ESP teachers, potentially leading to their EL and stress. EL encompasses teachers' emotional efforts to manage their feelings to provide quality teaching and create a supportive learning environment (Hochschild, 1983) and can significantly impact their PWB. EL experiences can influence teacher stress levels and emotional exhaustion (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2018). The EL experienced by teachers can also shape their level of PC. Teachers who feel emotionally drained and unsupported in managing their emotions may experience reduced commitment to their profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Furthermore, PWB of teachers has emerged as a critical aspect influencing their effectiveness and job satisfaction (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2018). The accumulation of EL without adequate support can lead to teacher burnout, adversely affecting both teachers and their students (Farber, 2016). Therefore, understanding PWB of Iraqi ESP teachers becomes crucial in creating an environment that fosters both effective teaching and positive learning experiences. Language teachers' PC is essential for students' academic success and overall learning outcomes (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Committed teachers invest time and effort in their learners' language acquisition, which leads to enhanced language learning experiences (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Consequently, determining the interrelationships among EL, PWB, and PC can provide valuable insights into enhancing English language instruction and supporting teachers' overall well-being.

The significant role of EL in teachers' pedagogical efficacy has motivated researchers to focus on it in recent years. In this regard, Pfister (2015) carried out a review study of EL studies across the world and stated that most of them have been conducted in second-language contexts.

Moreover, Tsang (2014) reviewed the pertinent studies on PC and noted that a large number of them have focused on the roles of teachers' Job satisfaction (JS) and Collective Efficacy (CE) in their PC.

For instance, Akpan (2013) carried out a study to determine the extent to which EFL instructors' JS predicted their PC in the context of Nigeria. The results of this study indicated that the participants' JS constituted a significant predictor of their PC. Likewise, Bashir and Gani (2020) conducted a study to determine the role of teachers' JS in their PC. Accordingly, they adopted a predictive correlational design to answer the raised question. As they reported, teachers' JS significantly predicted their PC in their context. Moreover, Cansoy et al. (2020) made an effort to determine the extent to which EFL teachers' CE influenced their PC. The findings of Cansoy et al.'s (2020) study underlined the efficacy of teachers' CE in predicting their PC in school settings.

In addition, a number of studies have focused on teachers' PWB in different academic settings. In this regard, Li et al. (2022) conducted a study to determine the role of language learners' behavior in EFL teachers' PWB. Based on their results, these behaviors were significant factors in their PWB in their settings. Similarly, MacIntyre et al. (2019) scrutinized the role of teachers' personality traits in their PWB and reported that teachers' personality significantly influenced their PWB. Likewise, Greenier et al. (2021) strived to determine the relationship between teachers' PWB and their instructional satisfaction. The results of their study indicated that the instructors' teaching enjoyment was a main predictor of their PWB.

The perusal of the above-mentioned studies of EFL teachers' EL, PWB, and PC shows that they have disregarded certain research lines. First, few studies have focused on teachers' EL in foreign language contexts, including in the Iraqi context. Second, the studies of PWB have not focused on teachers' EL and PC. Third, most empirical studies have examined JS and CE as predictors of PC and disregarded the other teacher factors. Fourth, many of the related studies of the above-mentioned teacher factors have focused on general English courses and have not dealt with ESP courses. Lastly, there is a lack of research on the interrelationships between ESP teachers' EL, PWB, and PC in Iraqi context.

Specifying the relationships among these teacher factors can significantly positively contribute to language instruction in this context. More specifically, it can help teacher educators to redress the current education courses and to develop specific courses for ESP instructors. In addition, it may enable syllabus designers to develop specific manuals for these instructors that help them deal with various sources of stress by capitalizing on their inner resources.

Considering these issues, the present study strived to deal with the inadequacy of research on Iraqi ESP teachers' EL, PWB, and PC. To this end, it endeavored to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there significant relationships between Iraqi ESP teachers' EL, PC, and PWB?

RQ2: Do Iraqi ESP teachers' EL and PC significantly predict their PWB?

RQ3: Does Iraqi ESP teachers' PC significantly predict their EL?

2- Method

2.1. Participants

In the present study, the researchers had to utilize convenience sampling (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2012) to select the participants due to availability issues. Accordingly, they selected 221 male and 241 female ESP instructors as the participants at various universities in Iraqi context and obtained their consent. These instructors' experience ranged from 1 to 24 years. Moreover, they were in the age range of 21 to 53. In addition, these teachers' working hours ranged from 12 to 20 hours per week.

2.2. Design and Instruments

The researchers used the predictive correlational design (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2012) to conduct the present study. That is, to measure the variables of EL, PWB, and PC, they used well-established and validated instruments. The Emotional Labor Scale (ELS) questionnaire (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) assessed the EL experiences of ESP teachers, capturing the emotional efforts and demands they encountered in their daily interactions with students and colleagues. The Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS) (Ryff, 1989) measured the participants' PWB, exploring their overall mental and emotional state, life satisfaction, and positive affect. Furthermore, the Professional Commitment Scale (PCS) (Suddaby et al., 2009) gauged the ESP teachers' dedication to their profession.

The survey questionnaire was distributed to the participating ESP teachers through online platforms and in-person sessions. The researchers used secure and confidential survey tools for the online distribution to protect the participants' anonymity and privacy. To this end, they sent an email to the ESP teachers. It contained a link to the online survey, along with detailed instructions and informed consent forms. For the face-to-face sessions, the researchers scheduled meetings with the participants in suitable locations, such as educational institutions or professional development centers. During these sessions, the researchers explained the research objectives and procedures, clarified any questions raised by the participants, and obtained their informed consent. Moreover, they took several measures to ensure research integrity. To this end, they emphasized the importance of providing honest and accurate responses and encouraged the participants to respond thoughtfully and thoroughly. The survey questionnaires included attention-check items and validation checks to determine the inconsistent and unreliable answers.

2.3. Data Analysis

The researchers used descriptive statistics to expound on the teachers' attributes and determine the response distribution on the survey items. Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to examine EL, PWB, and PC relationships. Correlation analysis revealed the significance of the associations between the variables. Positive correlations indicate that higher levels of one variable are related to the higher levels of another variable, while negative correlations suggest an inverse relationship. The p-values of the relevant coefficients indicated the probability of observing such correlations due to chance.

Additionally, regression analysis was applied to specify the predictive power of EL and PWB regarding PC. Accordingly, multiple regression analysis was employed to analyze the data. Separate regression models were constructed, with PC as criterion variable and EL and PWB as predictor variables. Regression analysis provided insights into the unique contribution of these predictors to teachers' PC. In addition to correlation and regression analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to perform data analysis. It enabled the researchers to determine the complicated interrelationships among multiple variables simultaneously. SEM was especially well-suited for this study, as it enabled the investigation of direct and indirect effects among EL, PWB, and PC.

SEM involved specifying the model that represented the proposed interrelationships. The EL experiences served as the exogenous variable, influencing PWB and, in turn, PC. The model also

accounted for potential direct paths between EL and PC. The goodness-of-fit of the SEM model was examined based on various fit indices, including CFI. A well-fitting model demonstrated a satisfactory balance between model complexity and data fit and showed that the model adequately represented the examined relationships.

The analysis aimed to determine the interrelationships among these variables and to identify the predictors of ESP teachers' PC. The study employed quantitative methods to analyze the collected survey data, reflecting the complex interactions among EL, PWB, and PC.

Before conducting the data analysis, the researchers examined the completeness and accuracy of the responses, addressing any missing or inconsistent data points. Outliers and extreme values were identified and assessed for their potential impact on data analysis.

3- Results

The descriptive statistics on variables and their correlation coefficients are provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients

	M	SD	1	2	3
EL	3.22	0.812	1		
PC	3.33	0.817	0.363**	1	
PWB	3.87	0.787	0.578**	0.403**	1

According to Table 1, there were significant correlations among the teachers' EL, PC, and PWB ($p < .05$)

In addition, Table 2 shows the positive correlation between teachers' EL and their PWB.

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Analysis of EL and PWB

Variables	PWB	
	r	Sig.
EL	0.199	0.000

The increase in EL was associated with the increase in PWB. The results ($p < 0.05$) indicated that the relationship between these variables was significant. In addition, Table 3 shows the correlation test results of teachers' PC and PWB.

Table 3
Pearson Correlation Analysis of PC and PWB

Variables	PWB	
	r	sig.
PC	0.135	0.000

As shown in Table 3, there was a significant positive correlation between teachers' PC and their PWB. The increase in PC was related to the increase in PWB. Moreover, the results ($p < 0.05$) indicated a significant relationship between these two variables. Lastly, Table 4 shows the results of the correlation test of teachers' EL and PC:

Table 4

Pearson Correlation Analysis of EL and PWB

Variables	EL	
	r	sig.
PC	0.297	0.002

According to Table 4, the increase in EL was associated with the rise in PC. Moreover, there was a significant correlation between teachers' EL and their PC ($p < 0.05$)

3.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The utilized instruments were validated using EFA. The results of EFA showed that these instruments explained 4.7.16 of variance and constituted valid questionnaires.

3.4 Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFAs)

Table 5 shows the results of CFA:

Table 5

CFA Results

Models	χ^2	Df	CFI	GFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Single-factor	986.32	528	0.950	0.860	0.044	0.258
Two-factor	938.02	526	0.953	0.864	0.040	0.191
Three-factor	887.41	525	0.962	0.872	0.035	0.141

Based on Table 5, the fit of the three-factor model was more satisfactory than the other models (CFI = 0.962).

3.5. Reliability of Construct

Table 6 shows the Cronbach's Alpha (CA) analysis results and Item-Total Correlation (ITC).

Table 6

Construct Reliability Results

Construct	CA	ITC
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PC	0.840	0.77–0.87
EL	0.862	0.66–0.80
PWB	0.916	0.70–0.82

According to Table 6, the constructs were satisfactorily valid ($CA > .7$; $ITC > .5$).

3.6 Convergent Validity (CV) and Composite Reliability (CR)

Table 7 shows the results of CV and CR analyses:

Table 7

CV and CR

	AVE	CR
PC	0.59	0.932
EL	0.57	0.903
PWB	0.53	0.875

As shown in Table 7, the CV and CR of variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) were respectively larger than .5 and .6 and were satisfactory (Straub et al., 2004).

3.7 Discriminant Validity (DV)

Table 8 shows DV results:

Table 8

DV Results

	1	2	3
EL	0.861		
PC	0.731	0.841	
PWB	0.628	0.742	0.686

According to Table 8, the DV result was satisfactory and lower than AVE square root.

3.8 Structural Models

Table 9 shows the results of structural models:

Table 9

Structural Model Indices

M o d e l s	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	TLI	SRM
Direct Effect (C)	99.234*	53	—	0.842	0.902	0.052	0.909	0.177
Full Mediation (B)	78.526*	52	20.706	0.863	0.917	0.041	0.954	0.161
Partial	69.804	52	8.722	0.881	0.928	0.033	0.960	0.164

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As shown in Table 9, the fit of Model A was more satisfactory than the other models ($\Delta\chi^2 = 87.22$, $p < 0.05$).

3.9 Coefficients between Teacher's PC, EL, and PWB

Table 10 provides the path coefficients:

Table 10
Path Coefficients

	Coefficients and		
	Direct effects model	Full mediation model	Partial mediation model
PC → PWB	0.374 (4.97***)		0.421 (4.56***)
EL → PWB	0.158 (2.52*)		0.083 (0.49)
PC → EL		0.355 (4.56***)	0.342 (4.52***)

As shown in Table 10, teachers' PC (0.374, $p < 0.05$) and EL (0.158, $p < 0.05$) were significant predictors of their PC. Moreover, their PC significantly predicted their EL (0.355, $p < 0.05$).

4- Discussion

The first question of the study examined the interrelationships between Iraqi ESP teachers' EL, PC, and PWB. The results showed that there were significant positive relationships among these variables. These results corroborate the findings of some studies, including Billett et al., (2022), Helms-Lorenz and Maulana (2016), and Huang et al. (2019).

Zee and Koomen (2016) argued that teachers' EL and PC may be related to each other mainly because committed teachers are concerned about their learners' language acquisition and constantly make an effort to ameliorate it. As a result, they may suffer from high emotional stress. Moreover, Simbula et al. (2011) noted that the correlation between teachers' EL and PWB stems from teachers' PWB

empowers them to use affective strategies and rely on their positive emotions to deal with their negative feelings. Lastly, Li et al. (2017) noted that teachers' PC may be related to their PWB owing to the fact that their hard work assures them of the efficacy of their approaches and ameliorates their PWB. As a result, the significant interrelationships among Iraqi ESP teachers' EL, PC, and PWB may stem from the fact that their hard work relieves their stress and positively influences their satisfaction with their occupation.

The second question of the study focused on the role of ESP teachers' EL and PC in the production of their PWB. Based on the results, both of these affective factors were significant predictors of teachers' PWB in university settings. In general, these results are in line with the results of certain studies, including those of Zee and Koomen (2016), Xiyun et al. (2022), and Bing et al. (2022).

The existence of a positive relationship between teachers' PC and their PWB is in accordance with Bandura's (2006) assertion that commitment and self-efficacy positively influence individuals' satisfaction with their responsibilities. Moreover, it underpins Federici and Skaalvik's (2012) claim and Malinen and Savolainen's (2016) claim that commitment is likely to help teachers cast aside their inhibitions and deal with stressors in an acceptable way. In addition, it supports Goddard et al.'s (2004) claim and Betoret's (2006) view that teachers' belief in their capabilities and constructive relationships with their peers and learners will likely ameliorate their instructional satisfaction. Moreover, this result corroborates Huang et al.'s (2019), Leijen et al.'s (2022), and Liang et al.'s (2022) views that teachers' ability to exert control over contextual stressors increases their confidence and improves their PWB. Finally, this result corroborates Zeng et al.'s (2019), and Mercer's (2020) results and is in line with Derakhshan et al.'s (2022) view that EFL teachers' enjoyment in the context of the classroom ameliorates their ability to create a positive and constructive classroom environment.

Finally, the third question of the study examined the role of Iraqi ESP teachers' PC in the prediction of their EL. Based on the results, these teachers' PC was a significant predictor of their EL in their setting. This finding underpins the results of the studies that were carried out by Leijen et al. (2020), Peng (2021), Azari Noughabi et al. (2022), and Kazemkhah Hasankiadeh and Azari Noughabi (2022). Moreover, it supports Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth's (2014) claim that teachers' emotions depend on their sense of purpose in their workplace. Moreover, it is in accordance with Manasia et al.'s (2020) view that highlights the significant role of teachers' emotions in their responsiveness to their learners' needs. In addition, the finding is in line with Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2014) claim and Sudina et al.'s (2021a,b) view that teachers' emotions prompt them to take advantage of numerous strategies for dealing with stress-inducing factors in their instructional setting. Furthermore, the results are in line with Hsieh and Schallert's (2008), Duckworth et al.'s (2009), Dobbins's (2016), Keller et al.'s (2016), Moe's (2016), and Taxer and Frenzel's (2018) assertions that teachers' emotions have a major role in their instructional passion. Lastly, the result underpins Fredrickson's (2001) and Burić and Moe's (2020) views that teachers' positive emotions are strongly linked to their strategic repertoire and empower them to use various efficacious strategies in the process of second language instruction.

5- Conclusion

The present study strived to determine the relationships between Iraqi ESP teachers' EL, PC, and PWB. Furthermore, it made an effort to determine the extent to which these teachers' EL and PC significantly predicted their PWB. Finally, it scrutinized the role of the relevant teachers' PC in the prediction of their EL. The results showed significant positive relationships among ESP teachers' EL, PC, and PWB. Moreover, teachers' EL and PC significantly predicted their PWB. Lastly, teachers' PC was a significant factor in their EL in their settings.

The results may have implications for different stakeholders. First, they highlight the need to redress the current ESP teacher education courses in Iraqi context. These courses mainly focus on the

instruction of language skills and aspects in various ESP courses and predominantly disregard the teacher factors, including teachers' EL, PC, and PWB that are likely to have a major impact on their pedagogical efficacy. As a result, it is necessary to include a teacher-factor module in these courses that makes the teachers cognizant of the role of their factors in their instruction and enables them to take advantage of various affective strategies to ameliorate them in their classes. Second, it is essential to prompt ESP teacher educators to include the discussion of teacher factors in their courses.

In addition, the results underline the need for the development of teacher manuals for ESP courses. The relevant manuals should make the ESP teachers aware of the role of teacher factors in the process of instruction. Moreover, they have to empower the teachers to capitalize on their inner resources such as their self-efficacy to deal with stress-inducing factors and to ameliorate their PWB.

Finally, the study's results accentuate that ESP teachers in Iraqi context have to develop a satisfactory understanding of the factors, including their EL, PC, and PWB that are likely to influence their pedagogical effectiveness. To this end, teachers can attend national and international events, such as webinars and conferences that focus on these factors. Moreover, they can ask for advice from their peers and supervisors in order to stifle the factors that prevent them from dealing with the various aspects of language instruction effectively.

The present study suffered from two main limitations since it did not determine the effect of participants' age and experience on the results and could not select them randomly. Moreover, the researchers delimited the study by selecting the participants from university settings without dealing with the other academic settings. The future studies should address these issues. Additionally, these studies have to take advantage of mixed-methods designs to better understand the interrelationships among ESP teachers' EL, PC, and PWB. Lastly, the future studies should focus on the relationships among the other teacher factors such as grit and self-efficacy that were not examined in the present study.

6- References

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Author Statement

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Javad: Conceptualization and Design, Study Context Selection, redrafting and proofreading the manuscript, Discussion; **Huda:** Review of the literature, Material selection, Data analysis and coding, data categorization and crafting.