



Emotion Labor Across Demographic Factors and Teaching Aspects: The Case of Iranian EFL Teachers in Public and Private Sectors

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Introduction

Emotional labor was first coined by Hochschild (1983) to describe the tensions that Delta Airlines flight attendants went through as a result of following the feeling rules prescribed by their airliner's top managers. Accordingly, the flight attendants were expected to show unwavering kindness to the passengers throughout the flights. This job requirement was later revealed to cause serious conflict between the flight attendants' assigned and authentic selves (Hochschild, 1983). Applying the concept to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), Benesch (2017) began to employ emotion labor to refer to the discrepancies between institutional demands and teachers' preferences. Benesch challenged Hochschild's dichotomization of the selves as assigned and authentic on the grounds that unequal power relations at work would prompt some individuals to speak up for change. She also preferred using emotion labor (over emotional labor) to mitigate against the negativity associated with the word emotional. Relatedly, she has been vocal in proposing that emotion labor could serve as a catalyst for agency enactment (Benesch, 2018). Sharing Benesch's opinion, we purposefully employ the term emotion labor throughout this report.

Recent years have witnessed a burgeoning interest in qualitative case studies on language teachers' emotion labor (e.g., Aminifard et al., 2023; Nazari & Karimpour, 2022; Song, 2016, 2021). However, there has been a dearth of quantitative studies investigating if the demographic characteristics of language teachers exert a significant effect on the extent of their felt emotion labor. Moreover, the field requires exploring which aspects of teaching English generate a greater demand for emotion labor. Therefore, in this paper, we adopted a quantitative approach to address the aforementioned issues with regard to Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. The research questions were:

1. Do Iranian EFL teachers' gender, career length, and affiliation cause them to experience significantly different degrees of emotion labor?
2. Which aspects of ELT in Iran generate more demand for emotion labor on the part of EFL teachers in public schools and private language institutes (PLIs)?



Methods

Participants

A total of 128 Iranian English teachers, who were selected through snowball sampling, completed a questionnaire on emotion labor. All participants had completed a degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The demographic characteristics of the teachers who completed the questionnaire are shared in Table 1. For clarity, in this study, we understand ‘novice teachers’ as teachers who have between one and five years of teaching experience (see Farrell, 2012), and ‘veteran teachers’ as those whose length of career exceeds eight years.

TABLE 1
The Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents of the Questionnaire

Affiliation	Public School	61
	Private Language Institute	67
Gender	Male	86
	Female	42
Career length	Novice	45
	Veteran	83

Data Collection and Analysis

A five-point Likert scale questionnaire (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) comprising 24 items was shared via Google Forms with the participants. The questionnaire was developed based on the observation and interview data from a larger ongoing study (see Aminifard, 2023), as well as the literature on emotion labor. All the emotion words contained in the questionnaire were derived from the transcribed interviews of the core participants of the larger study, hence reflecting the current emotional landscape of ELT in Iran to a great extent.

The questionnaire explored four aspects of teaching English in Iran: namely, the textbook, classroom management and methodology, assessment, and work conditions. Benesch and Prior (2023) have recently argued that while power relation is a contributory factor in emotion labor, it is conspicuously absent from the emotion labor scales. Thus, in the present questionnaire, there are items denoting unequal power relations within Iranian public schools and PLIs. For instance, as far as class management and methodology were concerned, an item like *“I feel frustrated because the manager meddles in my teaching”* denoted the managerial transgressions that might intensify teachers’ emotion labor. Similarly, another item, *“I feel frustrated because I am supposed to always be nice to students even when they misbehave,”* also reflects teachers’ frustration with an unreasonable institutional feeling rule.

Importantly, absent from the previous teacher emotion surveys (e.g., Acheson & Nelson, 2020) were items on language teachers’ satisfaction with their salary or the recognition of their diligence by their institutions since both factors were revealed to be central to teachers’ wellbeing (see Martínez-Alba et al., 2023; Mercer, 2020). Hence the socioeconomic concerns of teachers were also addressed, as Feryok (2019) asserted that teachers may fail to fulfill their job commitments satisfactorily due to economic and social challenges.

The questionnaire initially comprised 28 items. To validate its content, wording, and comprehensibility, it was distributed to three experts within the field. After the experts’ initial screening, the number of items was reduced to 24 because of the overlap that existed between some of them. The questionnaire was then piloted on fifty Iranian EFL teachers who were similar to the target population. The Guttman Split-Half Coefficient was run, showing a satisfactory reliability index of .84 for the questionnaire (Table 2).

TABLE 2

The Estimated Reliability of the Developed Emotion Labor Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Part 1	Value	.802
		<i>N</i> of items	12a
	Part 2	Value	.859
		<i>N</i> of items	12b
	Total <i>N</i> of items		24
Correlation Between Forms			.73
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient			.84

Participants were assured that their responses would be automatically recorded and their identities would remain anonymous even to the researchers so that they would feel comfortable selecting the options that best represented their emotions at their workplace. A three-way ANOVA was run to find out if teachers' demographic characteristics significantly affected the degree of their engagement in emotion labor. Then, two separate Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFAs) were run to determine which aspect of ELT significantly accounted for the participants' emotion labor in both the public and private sectors.

Results

As shown in Table 3, teachers' length of career and their affiliation significantly affected the extent of the emotion labor that they experienced, $F(1, 849.179) = 4.109, p < .05$. and $F(1, 858.403) = 4.154, p < .05$ respectively. However, teachers' gender did not reach statistical significance, $F(1, 4.538) = .022, p < .05$, meaning that there was not a significant difference between Iranian male and female EFL teachers with regard to the extent of emotion labor that they performed, as shown by the very slight mean difference in Table 4. Also, as depicted in Table 3, the interaction between the independent variables did not reach statistical significance either.

TABLE 3

Three-Way ANOVA Statistics of Emotion Labor across Teachers' Demographic Factors

	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Effect Size	<i>Sig.</i>
Gender	1	4.538	.022	.001	.882
Length of career	1	849.179	4.109	.028	.045
Affiliation	1	858.403	4.154	.061	.044
Gender * Career Length	1	38.199	.185	.003	.668
Gender * Affiliation	1	600.239	2.905	.02	.091
Career Length * Affiliation	1	81.501	.394	.005	.531
Total	128				

Also, as shown in Table 4, there was a significant difference in the amount of felt emotion labor reported by novice Iranian EFL teachers ($M = 79.557, SD = 14.92$) and their veteran counterparts ($M = 72.979, SD = 14.73$), $F(127) = 4.109, p < .05$, but the magnitude of the difference in the means was very small (eta squared = .028). In addition, when it comes to teachers' affiliation, the statistics depict that Iranian EFL teachers who were working in public schools ($M = 79.575, SD = 15.01$) engaged in more emotion labor than those who were affiliated with PLIs ($M = 72.961, SD = 13.84$), $F(127) = 4.154, p < .05$. However, the magnitude of the mean difference was small (eta squared = .061), which means that the results should be interpreted quite cautiously.

TABLE 4

Comparisons of Felt Emotion Labor among Teachers' Gender, Length of Career, and Affiliation

		Mean	SD	F	Sig.	Effect size
Gender	Male	76.027	15.23	.002	0.89	.001
	Female	76.508	13.72			
Length of career	Novice	79.557	14.92	4.109	0.045	.028
	Veteran	72.979	14.73			
Affiliation	Public school	79.575	15.01	4.154	.044	.061
	Private institute	72.961	13.84			

Emotion Labor Across ELT Aspects

Since emotions are closely intertwined with the particular sociocultural context in which they emerge (Song, 2021), and also different factors might contribute to emotion labor in different teaching contexts, two separate CFA tests were run in order to determine which aspects of ELT accounted for a higher degree of emotion labor in each workplace.

Emotion Labor in Public Schools

As seen in Figure 1, the estimates of the latent construct of emotion labor on four aspects of ELT, namely work conditions, assessment, class management and methodology, and textbook, range from .66 to .76. It indicates that all the aforementioned factors significantly brought about emotion labor as far as teaching English in public schools is concerned.

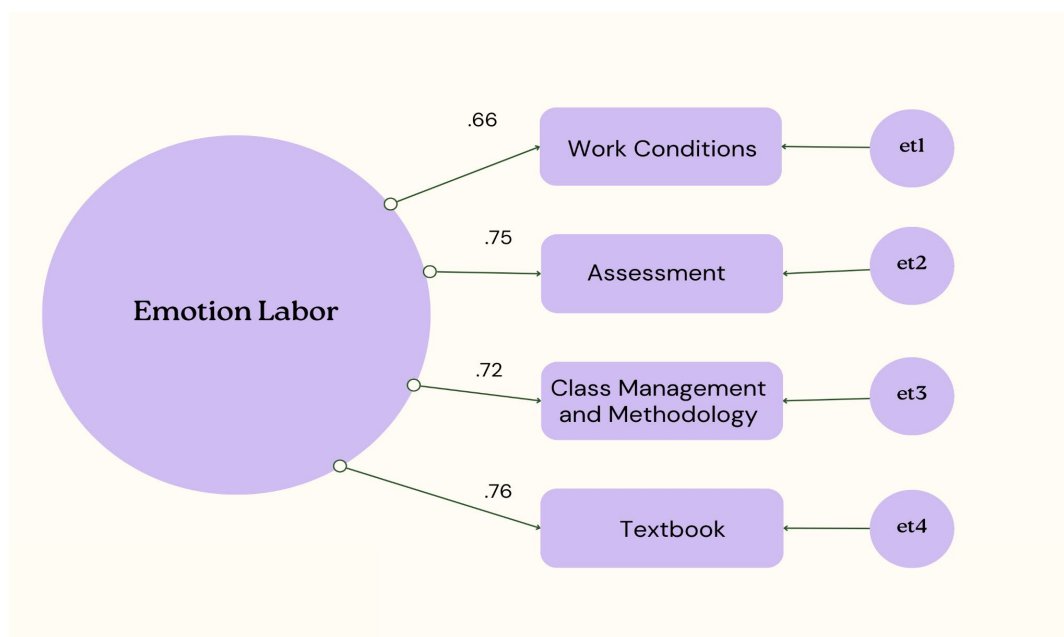


Figure 1. The prediction of felt emotion labor by ELT aspects in public schools.

Also, Table 5 shows that all factors reached statistical significance in causing emotion labor for Iranian public school EFL teachers, with the textbook predicting the highest estimate of .762. Following closely behind is *assessment* with .748, then *class management and methodology* with .723; and finally, *work conditions* recorded an estimate of .661.

TABLE 5

Estimated Regression Weights of ELT Aspects on Emotion Labor in Public Schools

Aspects of teaching English		Estimate	<i>p</i>
Work conditions	Emotion labor	.661	***
Assessment	Emotion labor	.748	***
Class management and methodology	Emotion labor	.723	***
Textbook	Emotion labor	.762	***

Note. *** $p < .0001$

In addition, fitness indices of NFI, RFI, GFI, and CFI in Table 6 shows that the values exceed .80. It suggests that there is an acceptable fit between the constructed model of emotion labor above and the statistics pertaining to the contributory causes of emotion labor as reported by Iranian public school EFL teachers. Additionally, the value of RMSEA is less than .08, hence representing a perfect fit between the constructed model of emotion labor above and the data concerning the ELT aspects that caused emotion labor for public school EFL teachers.

TABLE 6

Fitness Indices of Emotion Labor Model on Four Indicators of ELT in Public Schools

Fitness indices	NFI	RFI	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	χ^2/df	<i>p</i>
Constructed model	.98	.96	.99	1	.001	.45	.63

Emotion Labor in PLIs

The developed model below (Figure 2) shows the estimates of four emotion-labor-inducing aspects of ELT in PLIs, which have ranged from .56 to .88. The data reveals that all factors significantly contributed to emotion labor reported by the Iranian PLI teachers, however with different degrees.

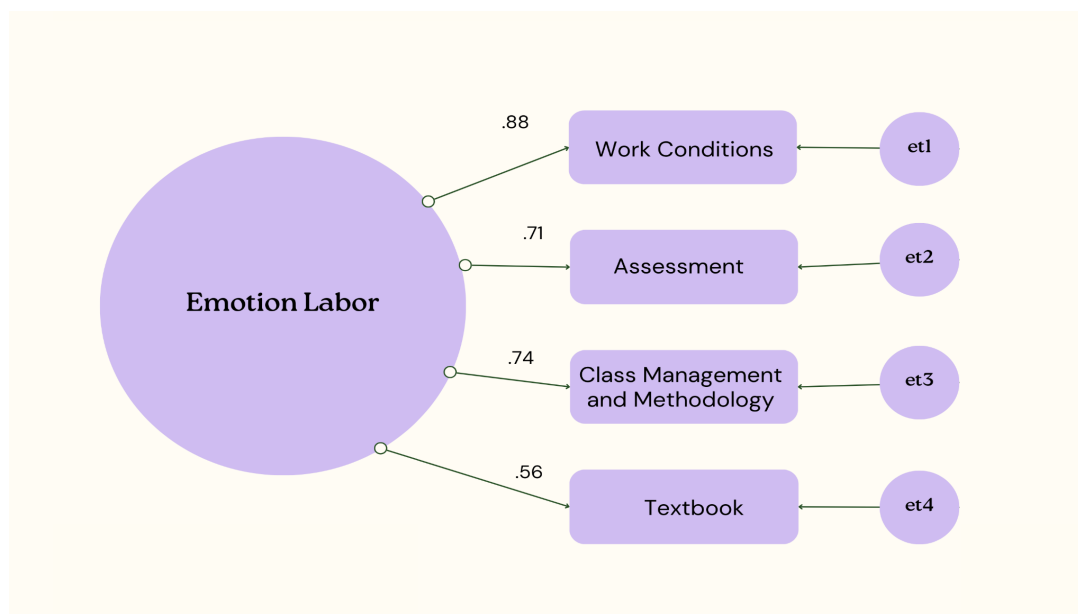


Figure 2. The prediction of felt emotion labor by ELT aspects in PLIs.

Not unlike the data concerning the emotion labor in Iranian public schools, a glance at Table 7 also suggests statistical significance of all ELT aspects in causing emotion labor on the part of Iranian PLI teachers, with *work conditions* accounting for the highest estimate of .878. This is followed by *class*

management and methodology with .742, and then *assessment* with .710. Finally, the *textbook*, albeit a significant factor in causing emotion labor, recorded the lowest estimate of .556—most probably because, generally, authentic textbooks are used in PLIs in Iran; thus, teachers at those institutes are quite satisfied with them.

TABLE 7
Regression Weights of ELT Aspects on Emotion Labor in PLIs

Aspects of teaching English		Estimate	<i>p</i>
Work conditions	Emotion labor	.878	***
Assessment	Emotion labor	.710	***
Class management and methodology	Emotion labor	.742	***
Textbook	Emotion labor	.556	***

Note. ****p* < .0001

Also, as depicted in Table 8, the fitness indices are all more than .80, suggesting that there is a perfect fit between the constructed model above and the data pertaining to the aspects of ELT which led to emotion labor on the part of Iranian PLI teachers. In addition, the RMSEA value is less than .08, which is representative of a perfect fit between the constructed model of emotion labor for PLI teachers and the obtained results.

TABLE 8
Fitness Indices of Emotion Labor Model on Four Aspects of ELT in PLIs

Fitness indices	NFI	RFI	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	χ^2/df	<i>p</i>
Constructed model	.99	.95	.98	1	.001	.50	.68

Discussion

In the next two sections, we discuss the research questions in light of the presented results as well as the literature on language teacher emotion labor.

RQ1: Do Iranian EFL Teachers' Gender, Career Length, and Affiliation Cause Them To Experience Significantly Different Amounts of Emotion Labor?

Results showed that except for gender, the other two demographic factors, namely teachers' length of career and affiliation, exerted a statistically significant effect on the extent of the emotion labor that they experienced. More specifically, Iranian novice EFL teachers performed more emotion labor compared to their veteran counterparts. In addition, Iranian public school EFL teachers reported a higher engagement in emotion labor than the teachers at PLIs. The fact that emotion labor was not gendered echoes Benesch's (2017) implicit contention in the introduction of her book that emotionality is no longer a characteristic reserved for females. In the same vein, Benesch argues that ELT entails "affect and intellect, body and work, passion and rationality" (p. 12) that is notably influenced by power relations irrespective of teachers' gender. This finding is also in line with that of Acheson and Nelson (2020) who, in their study of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and foreign language teachers at public schools in the US, found that gender was not a statistically significant factor in causing emotion labor. On a similar note, previous studies have also revealed that both male and female ESOL/EFL teachers undergo emotion labor in their teaching contexts (e.g., Nazari & Karimpour, 2022; Song, 2016).

Teachers' length of career, however, yielded a statistically significant difference in the extent of felt emotion labor—that is novice Iranian EFL teachers experienced more emotion labor than veteran teachers. This is backed up by previous research claiming that language teacher identity (LTI) construction is not a

smooth transition for novice teachers (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). In the same vein, Veneman (1984, as cited in Farrell, 2012) argued that novice teachers experience reality shock in the first years of their careers due to the fundamental contradictions they perceive between ideal teaching principles and the harsh realities of their teaching contexts. In line with this piece of finding, the literature on LTI abounds with studies highlighting that early-career language teachers often experience undesirable emotions due to different reasons. Some of them include:

- complying with prescribed teaching policies (Liu & Xu, 2011)
- contending with exam-oriented criteria for teacher promotion (Gu & Benson, 2014)
- experiencing dissonance between their beliefs and emotions (Golombek & Doran, 2014)
- managing heavy workloads (Loh & Liew, 2016)
- adhering to a spurious scoring criterion (Mirzaei & Aliakbari, 2018)
- balancing parental expectations (Feryok & Askaribigdeli, 2019)
- dealing with fellow teachers who neglect their duties (Song, 2021)

Teachers' affiliation also brought about a statistically significant difference, with public-school teachers reporting a higher degree of emotion labor in comparison to PLI teachers. A revealing argument could be that although Iranian public school EFL teachers enjoy job security and are paid a comparatively generous salary, their work is intrinsically less rewarding than that of PLI teachers due to the materials they are required to teach, as acknowledged by previous research (Eslamdoost et al., 2019). This argument is also traceable in the sentiment of Brazilian public school EFL teachers in Barcelos (2015), who reported that they preferred classes in private English institutes because of their pleasant atmosphere and the ample exposure to the target language and culture.

QR2: Which Aspects of ELT in Iran Generate Demand for Emotion Labor on EFL Teachers in Public Schools and PLIs?

The results of two CFAs also showed that while textbooks inflicted the highest degree of emotion labor on public school EFL teachers, work conditions were identified as the main contributor to emotion labor for PLI teachers. The same source of emotion labor caused by limited textbook content has been reported by Iranian EFL teachers regardless of their career length (e.g., Aminifard, 2023; Eslamdoost et al., 2019). Dewaele et al. (2018) have raised a relevant concern that ritualized classroom activities and emotionally uninteresting materials lead to ineffective teaching and learning experiences. Similar findings in other EFL contexts have also been reported. In Hiver and Whitehead (2018), for example, one of the Korean public school EFL teachers had to supplement the textbook after he felt that the textbook failed to engage the students in using the language communicatively. Likewise, in Mercer's (2020) study of Maltese EFL teachers, one of the teachers reported that teaching repetitive materials over the years impeded his teaching authority and creativity.

On the other hand, work conditions were found to be the most contributory factor in emotion labor for PLI teachers. This finding reflects the debilitating emotion labor on the part of Farzaneh, a novice Iranian EFL teacher in Aminifard et al. (2023), who repeatedly complained about poor work conditions in her institute, resulting in her imminent resignation. Research has indicated that Iranian EFL teachers are not highly restricted by a specific type of dress code at PLIs (Eslamdoost et al., 2019), and that the primary motivation for TEFL graduates teaching in PLIs is financial (Abednia, 2012). Given these findings, it can be argued that the challenges of low salary and the undervalued status of teaching in the Iranian society are likely contributors to the increased emotion labor experienced by PLI teachers—both of these challenges were key aspects within the work conditions section of the questionnaire. This argument sounds fairly reasonable since PLI teachers in Iran do not enjoy the same job security as their counterparts in public schools. Expressing concern for English teachers' wellbeing and success, Pennington (2015) warns that employment uncertainty and low economic status could have a detrimental effect on teachers' identity

construction. Other work conditions reflected in the questionnaire data, such as low appreciation of teachers' hard work, paucity of the facilities, and managers' inclination towards parents' expectations, could be instances of emotion labor proliferation fuelled by the profit-driven nature of PLIs, as both evidenced in Iran (see Aminifard et al., 2023) and reported in other contexts (e.g., Martínez-Alba et al., 2023; Mercer, 2020).

Conclusions

This article presented the results of a questionnaire exploring if demographic characteristics of Iranian EFL teachers exerted a significant effect on their felt emotion labor. Results revealed that emotion labor is not gendered. However, respondents' length of career and their affiliation brought about significant differences in the amount of emotion labor that they performed. Accordingly, novice teachers performed more emotion labor than veteran teachers. Also, in terms of affiliation, public school EFL teachers encountered more emotion labor than PLI teachers.

Building on these results, we recommend that teacher preparation programs provide appropriate education for TEFL/TESL majors so that they would get well-prepared for inevitable emotion-labor-inducing incidents of their career in order to capitalize on those moments for their personal and professional growth.

A more probable reason behind public school teachers' higher engagement in emotion labor in comparison to PLI teachers—despite their rather generous salary—is the teaching of ritualized materials (see Aminifard, 2023), as this could severely restrict their adopting favorable identities (Hadfield, 2017). Thus, we recommend that material developers in the Iranian MoE revise English textbooks with an international outlook in order to decrease the teachers' excessive engagement in emotion labor emanating from teaching less engaging materials. No doubt, this recommendation is easier said than done in the Iranian context, where exposure to authentic materials is tantamount to the intrusion of national culture and identity. Thus, teachers could subtly act on the available affordances to win their school principal's support so that they can perform their desired instruction (see Feryok, 2012). Also, the important message that this report has for the managers of PLIs in Iran is that teachers are facing increasing emotion labor caused by unsatisfying work conditions. Therefore, it is recommended that they create pleasant work conditions for the teachers so that they would invest enthusiastically in their teaching.

As a final point, we deem it relevant to mention that half of the respondents were single; thus, their cost of living—though nowadays exorbitant for the majority of Iranians considering the country's runaway inflation—is normally lower than that of married teachers. From these findings, we hypothesize that teaching-related emotion labor could intensify with increasing life expenses and family commitments. Therefore, future research could explore the effects marital status exerts on the emotion labor of (Iranian) English teachers.

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