

# A Mixed-Methods Investigation of Mindfulness, Teacher Self-Efficacy, and Job Satisfaction: Toward a Process Model in EFL Higher Education

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**Received:** February 13, 2024; **Accepted:** May 30, 2024

## Abstract

Because job satisfaction plays a crucial role in teacher attrition, numerous scholars have investigated the predictive variables for occupational well-being in educational contexts. However, this research area has been relatively ignored in higher education contexts. To fill this lacuna, this research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to examine the predictive roles of teacher mindfulness and self-efficacy in impacting the job satisfaction of English instructors in various Iranian universities. In the quantitative phase, data from 226 EFL instructors were analyzed following a rigorous screening of an initial pool of 234 participants who completed measures of the focal constructs. Structural equation modeling (SEM) confirmed that teacher mindfulness and self-efficacy significantly predicted job satisfaction, with self-efficacy emerging as the strongest predictor. Furthermore, mindfulness exerted a significant indirect effect on satisfaction through the mediation of self-efficacy. In the subsequent qualitative phase, follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive subsample of 12 instructors to clarify the mechanisms underlying these statistical paths. Thematic analysis revealed that mindfulness facilitates a "psychological pause" through affective detachment, while self-efficacy provides the pedagogical agency necessary to maintain value-action congruence despite institutional stressors. These results suggest that mindfulness acts as a cognitive precursor that enhances pedagogical presence and professional resilience. The implications for developing targeted onboarding strategies and mindfulness-based interventions in higher education are discussed.

**Keywords:** Teacher mindfulness, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, mixed-methods, affective detachment, EFL higher education

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## INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession has always been especially demanding, and work-related stress has long been a defining feature of this occupation (Spilt et al., 2011). Consequently, due to the exhausting stressors in the work place, attrition has become prevalent among instructors (Harmsen et al., 2018). Discouraging teacher attrition rates are known to be one of the primary causes of teacher shortages around the globe. For instance, Weldon (2018) maintained that nearly half of teachers leave the teaching profession earlier than the first five years of their job experience. As UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2016) demonstrated, in order to provide school education for the children around the world, approximately 69 million new teachers will be required by the year 2030. However, a mounting number of countries are suffering from teacher shortage due to teacher turnover and attrition (Toropova et al., 2021). Furthermore, second language (L2) teachers are also prone to teacher attrition and turnover due to their decreased enthusiasm and emotional exhaustion at work (De Costa et al., 2020; Greenier et al., 2021; Yuan & Zhang, 2017). As Faskhodi and Siyyari (2018) suggested, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers are also at risk for burnout since they experience work-related emotional exhaustion. EFL teacher burnout and attrition can have disruptive effects on students' academic achievement and language learning process and make teachers leave the teaching profession (Bing et al., 2022).

Given the critical nature of these issues globally, teacher attrition has been the focus of attention of many countries and governments to tackle this problem by integrating effective strategies and incentive packages (Madigan & Kim, 2021). In addition, with the emergence of positive psychology (Seligman et al., 2005), researchers have paid particular attention to not only understanding the factors that underpin why teachers leave the teaching career but also promoting the positive experiences like self-efficacy and job satisfaction in the realm of education in general and EFL contexts in particular (Mercer et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2021).

One possible way for alleviating the effects of negative experiences like teacher shortage and attrition is to increase teachers' level of job satisfaction (Madigan & Kim, 2021). In fact, studies have evinced that teachers with higher levels of job satisfaction are less inclined to give up their work (e.g., Kelly et al., 2019). According to Boyd et al. (2011), job dissatisfaction is viewed as the most significant factor impacting leaving intentions of teachers. Hence, teacher job satisfaction has recently become a focal point of research in the L2 context (Chaaban & Du, 2017). Given the fact that teacher job satisfaction will not only impact EFL teachers' performance (Afshar & Doosti, 2016) but can also affect the language learning process and L2 learners' academic achievement (Safari et al., 2020), it is fundamental to enhance professional fulfillment at work and to investigate the underlying antecedents of this psychological state. In addition to the EFL context, a diverse range of studies in general education investigated teacher job satisfaction and reported various aspects and psychological resources affecting occupational well-being, such as teacher self-efficacy (e.g., Moè et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2015), and teacher mindfulness (Song et al., 2021).

Although a myriad of research was previously conducted on teacher job satisfaction in various fields of study (e.g., Capone & Petrillo, 2020), there is a paucity in the EFL literature exploring the positive experience of teachers' work-related satisfaction particularly in higher education, which creates a need for more investigations to fill this research void. In addition, empirical evidence on the actual mechanisms through which mindfulness and self-efficacy function as antecedents of EFL teachers' job satisfaction is still fairly limited. While existing studies have identified statistical correlations between these constructs, they often fall short of explaining how these psychological resources are activated within the specific sociocultural and institutional constraints of the Iranian higher education context. As such, the present research set out to shed light on the teaching profession by investigating the predictability of EFL teachers' job satisfaction level in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs and mindfulness status using an explanatory sequential

mixed-methods design. The current study is innovative in that it simultaneously attends to the associations among teacher self-efficacy, mindfulness, and job satisfaction among EFL teachers in a context of higher education through both structural equation modeling and follow-up qualitative inquiry to triangulate the findings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Teacher job satisfaction

Despite the fact that teachers experience high levels of job stress, a large number of teachers are satisfied with their profession (Zhao et al., 2022). Job satisfaction denotes one's feeling of fulfilment or pleasurable emotional states derived from his/her profession (Judge et al., 2001). Considered as a psychological and motivational concept, job satisfaction is the positive or negative evaluations individuals develop regarding their job (Weiss, 2002). According to Spector (1997), job satisfaction occurs when one's expected and obtained outcomes are in harmony with each other. Job satisfaction is a multidimensional construct divided into two dimensions: (a) intrinsic dimension referring to satisfaction related to the job itself, fulfilment of the goals, and potential for development, (b) extrinsic dimension referring to the satisfaction related to salary, interaction with colleagues and peers, and potential for promotion (Luque-Reca et al., 2022). Locke (1976) introduced two factors impacting job satisfaction: (a) *agents*, which lead to the occurrence of an event (e.g., managers, peers, and colleagues); and (b) *events*, which cause individuals' satisfaction or dissatisfaction (e.g., promotion, salary, failure, organizational environment, and stress). Within the education context, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) defined teacher job satisfaction as "teachers' affective reactions to their work or to their teaching role" (p. 183). According to Zeinabadi (2010), teacher job satisfaction is conceived as how teachers can positively evaluate their profession and professional condition. As Torres (2019) maintained, teachers who are more satisfied with the teaching profession are less inclined to depart. Also, Tait (2008) concluded

that teachers who are satisfied with their job are more likely to experience motivation, commitment and intent to stay in teaching despite the challenges. Conversely, however, according to Evans (2001), teachers who experience high levels of job dissatisfaction are less committed and are expected to leave the profession. If teachers are not able to accomplish what is perceived as critical in the teaching profession, their feelings of dissatisfaction will not only intensify, but crystallize (and vice versa; Santoro, 2015).

Rooted in the work of Herzberg et al. (1959), teacher job satisfaction can exert a strong influence on enhancing students' achievement, teachers' well-being, job performance, organizational commitment, and the effort they invest in working with learners (Burić & Moe, 2020; Richter et al., 2022). Job satisfaction has also been found to act as a significant predictor of teachers' life satisfaction (Demirel, 2014). In addition, previous research clearly points to the significant impact of job satisfaction on preventing teacher burnout, turnover, and emotional exhaustion (e.g., Capone & Petrillo, 2020; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). For instance, Madigan and Kim (2021) conducted a study to investigate the relationship among teachers' job satisfaction, teachers' burnout and intention to quit. Analyzing data through meta-analysis, the results indicated that burnout had a positive and satisfaction had a negative association with teachers' intentions to quit. Additionally, the results of multiple regression and relative importance analyses revealed that job satisfaction was negatively related to teacher burnout and intention to quit. Capone and Petrillo (2020) investigated the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy, job satisfaction, burnout and depression among 285 high school teachers. Their results demonstrated that teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction were related to depression and burnout of teachers. In a study carried out in Spain, Luque-Reca et al. (2022) probed the link between teachers' job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Collecting data from a sample of 404 teachers, the researchers reported a negative relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction of teachers. In another study, Baluyos et al. (2019) determined the influence of teachers' job satisfaction on their work performance. The authors found the

significance of teacher job satisfaction in affecting teachers' work performance. In another study, Dicke et al. (2020) investigated the association between teachers' job satisfaction and student achievement. Results of structural equation modeling indicated that teacher job satisfaction and student achievement were significantly related.

Despite the myriad of research conducted in general education, a limited number of studies have focused on teacher job satisfaction in the EFL context (e.g., Afshar & Doosti, 2016; Rezaee et al., 2018; Zhang, 2022). Zhang (2022) reported a significant effect of (English language) EL teachers' job satisfaction on their commitment. In another study, Afshar and Doosti (2016) explored the influence of job satisfaction/dissatisfaction of EFL teachers on their job performance. Administering surveys to 64 teachers, they outlined that as far as job performance was concerned, satisfied teachers significantly differed from the dissatisfied ones. In another study in Iran, Rezaee et al. (2018) conducted mixed-method study to examine the potential association between job satisfaction and job performance of EFL teachers. To this end, a sample of 440 EFL teachers were selected via random sampling. Employing Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and thematic analysis, their results demonstrated that EFL teachers' job satisfaction positively correlated with their job performance.

The aforementioned literature points to the significance of teacher job satisfaction in the realm of education in general and EFL context in particular. However, extant work is limited by a lack of clarity about the nature of job satisfaction, especially in the context of L2 learning and teaching (Afshar & Doosti, 2016). Additionally, notwithstanding the limited empirical evidence on determinants of EFL teachers' job satisfaction (e.g., Chaaban & Du, 2017), EFL researchers have failed to properly bring to light the catalysts of this construct. Hence, as an attempt to enrich the existing literature on EFL teachers' job satisfaction, the current study delved into the role of self-efficacy and mindfulness as potential antecedents of EFL teachers' job satisfaction in the higher education context.

## Teacher Self-efficacy

As Bandura (1997) maintained, attitudes and beliefs have a stronger effect than objective realities in shaping one's life. Conceived as one's belief in his/her capability, self-efficacy is a construct "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Grounded in the concept of human agency and social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997), self-efficacy is affected by behavioral, environmental, affective, and psychological factors which can contribute to one's sustained effort in reaching his/her goals. Self-efficacy can have significant impacts upon expectations, choices, endurance and sense of responsibility with respect to one's actions (Moè et al., 2010). Pintrich et al. (1993) evinced that completing a task is shaped by individuals' level of self-efficacy rather than by their skills.

Self-efficacy for teachers has recently made its way into the research domain (Fathi & Saeedian, 2020). Teacher self-efficacy is conceived as teachers' confidence in their capacities to effectively complete particular teaching assignments (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2019). Viewed as a situation-specific concept, teacher self-efficacy pertains to teachers' confidence in terms of their capabilities to help students learn and to shape their achievement and engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). According to Milner and Hoy (2003), the extent to which teachers invest effort in teaching, their persistence in the face of difficulties, and the teaching objectives are crucially affected by teacher self-efficacy. Self-efficacious teachers often report less job stress, reduced quitting intentions, and more job satisfaction (Huang et al., 2020). However, teachers holding lower levels of self-efficacy are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion and job-related stress while teaching (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Kim & Burić, 2020). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) conceptualized teacher self-efficacy as a three-dimension concept constituting (a) efficacy for student engagement which refers to teachers' confidence in terms of engaging students in learning

activities, (b) efficacy for instructional strategies which has to do with teachers' belief regarding their capacities to employ effective teaching strategies for a fruitful learning, and (c) efficacy for classroom management which denotes teachers' believing in their capabilities to establish the classroom discipline atmosphere and maintain classroom management.

According to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is recognized as one of the most important predictors of human motivation which can positively affect teachers and teaching (Friedman & Kass, 2002). Hence, it is of paramount importance to broaden the understanding of the interplay between teacher self-efficacy and other factors which can co-efficiently result in positive outcomes (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Xiao et al., 2022). There exist well-documented studies indicating the influential role of teacher self-efficacy in predicting desirable job-related constructs associated with learning process, learner achievement, and teacher well-being (e.g., Burić & Kim, 2021; Huang et al., 2019; Moyano et al., 2021). More specifically, teacher self-efficacy has often been found as a significant determinant of a myriad of teachers' job-related outcome, namely teacher job satisfaction and wellbeing (e.g., Bao et al., 2021; Burić & Moe, 2020; Edinger & Edinger, 2018; Granziera & Perera, 2019; Fathi et al., 2021; Richter et al., 2022; Troesch & Bauer, 2017; Wang et al., 2015; Xiyun et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2022). For instance, Klassen and Chiu (2010) investigated the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction among a sample of 1,430 teachers. Their results demonstrated that self-efficacy had a positive impact on teachers' job satisfaction. In another study, Avanzi et al. (2013) reported a positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. In Norway, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) conducted a study to test whether teacher self-efficacy is related with work engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion of teachers. Administering a survey to a total of 2,569 teachers, they indicated that self-efficacy positively predicted both teacher engagement and job satisfaction and negatively affected emotional exhaustion. In the same vein, Viel-Ruma et al. (2010) outlined that self-efficacy had a positive impact on teacher job satisfaction. In another

study with 523 teachers in the context of Canada, Wang et al. (2015) pinpointed a positive impact of self-efficacy on teachers' job satisfaction. Also, Troesch and Bauer (2017) investigated the role of self-efficacy in affecting teacher job-related satisfaction and stress. Based on the response of 297 teachers, the authors concluded that self-efficacy had a positive effect on job satisfaction and a negative influence on teachers' level of stress.

More recently, Zakariya (2020) aimed to validate the potential impact of teacher self-efficacy on job satisfaction. Administering surveys to 3951 teachers, the results revealed that teachers with higher level of self-efficacy may experience greater job satisfaction. Similarly, Granziera and Perera (2019) probed the link between teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Their results evinced that teacher self-efficacy significantly predicted job satisfaction. Edinger and Edinger (2018) explored whether teacher sense of self-efficacy could enhance job satisfaction. Collecting data from a sample of 122 teachers, they indicated that self-efficacy had a positive effect on teacher job satisfaction. The positive relationship between teachers' level of self-efficacy and their job satisfaction is widely supported by the literature in general education (e.g., Richter et al., 2022). However, empirical evidence for the assumed relationship is greatly lacking in the realm of EFL (e.g., Chaaban & Du, 2017; Fathi & Savadi Rostami, 2018), particularly in the context of EFL higher education. In fact, Chaaban and Du (2017) outlined that high self-efficacy beliefs positively and significantly predicted teacher job satisfaction.

## Teacher Mindfulness

Derived from the Pali word *Sati*, mindfulness is conceived as a Buddhist contemplative practice which means memory (Grabovac et al., 2011). Bodhi (2000) refers to this construct as “presence of mind, attentiveness to the present, rather than the faculty of memory regarding the past” (p. 86). Mindfulness, as a psychological construct, was first applied as a clinical intervention mostly relating to medicine (Baer et al., 2006); however, it was

soon applied to various occupations and fields of study such as educational psychology (Birchinall et al., 2019). In contemporary research, mindfulness is defined “as moment to moment, nonjudgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as nonjudgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). A mindful person can often have a stable attention and be in control of his prompt responses to thoughts, affections, and behavior such as his internal bodily sensations (Liu et al., 2020). As Martin (1997) suggested in his study, mindfulness is a psychological resource by which one can detach from and observe his/her thoughts and get free by focusing on the set goal or aim while remaining non-biased and nonjudgmental. Mindfulness consists of two interventions: firstly, intrapersonal mindfulness which denotes gaining non-judgmental insight into individuals’ own thoughts, feelings, and physical stimuli (Molloy Elreda et al., 2019). Secondly, interpersonal mindfulness denoting individuals’ awareness and attention towards others (e.g., listening to others with keen attention, gaining insight into one’s own emotions and others, being open to and accepting others’ thoughts and emotions, self-regulating one’s reactivity in responses to others’ behaviors, and exhibiting sympathy for the self and others (Molloy Elreda et al., 2019).

It is postulated that when mindfulness is used within the educational context, its contemplative approaches can be of significant value to both students and teachers in school settings by referring to the states of reducing stress and burnout and promoting academic achievement and teacher-student interactions (Braun et al., 2019; Fathi & Aghamirzaei, 2026; Zhang & Fathi, 2024). As Flook et al. (2013) maintained, integrating mindfulness approaches into classroom can result in teachers’ renewed connection to the classroom and their enhanced relationships with learners. Mindful teachers are able to anchor their attention and awareness in the present and are likely to recognize their students’ needs, engage them in the learning process, optimize the intrinsic motivation of those who are reluctant, as well as provide the necessary supports their learners need (Hwang et al., 2017). According to Pan

and Liu (2022), mindfulness can be conducive to teachers' conscious of their idle pedagogical competencies in a way that they are aware of what goes around in the surrounding. Given that teacher well-being can address the shortage and turnover of teachers (Fu et al., 2022), it is important to find ways which best can facilitate the well-being of teachers, namely mindfulness (Hwang et al., 2019). In addition, mindfulness is argued to demonstrate a range of benefits for the well-being and professional development of teachers (i.e., job satisfaction) (e.g., Hülshager et al., 2013; Jha, 2021; Kim & Singh, 2018; Song et al., 2021; Zarate et al., 2019). Song et al. (2021) investigated the potential relationship between teachers' mindfulness and their job satisfaction. Administering surveys to a sample of 398 teachers, they demonstrated that teacher mindfulness has a predictive role in affecting job satisfaction. In another study, Hülshager et al. (2013) examined the influential role of mindfulness in impacting the emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction of employees. To this end, 219 employees with different occupations, including teachers took part in this study. Utilizing multilevel structural equation modeling, the authors concluded that mindfulness was negatively associated with emotional exhaustion and was positively linked to job satisfaction of participants. In another study, Kim and Singh (2018) found that there was a positive correlation between teacher mindfulness and job satisfaction among 243 teachers. Similarly, Zarate et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis to explore the impact of mindfulness on teachers' wellbeing. Their results revealed that mindfulness can increase the job satisfaction of teachers. In another study outside of the education context, Fortney et al. (2013) also reported an influential role of mindfulness in increasing job satisfaction.

In addition to job satisfaction, it is supported by literature that mindfulness can contribute to other personal resources of teachers such as self-efficacy (e.g., Akpan & Saunders, 2017; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Poulin et al., 2008). For instance, Meiklejohn et al. (2012) maintained that teacher mindfulness can promote the self-efficacy of teachers. In Canada, Poulin et al. (2008) indicated that mindfulness could predict improved teaching self-

efficacy. Likewise, Moyano et al. (2021) demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between mindfulness and teacher self-efficacy among 425 teachers.

In summary, the reviewed literature underscores the pivotal roles of teacher self-efficacy and mindfulness as psychological resources that foster professional well-being and counteract the detrimental effects of occupational stress. While these constructs have been extensively explored within general education, a significant research gap persists concerning their synergistic impact on job satisfaction in the specific context of EFL higher education. Despite evidence linking self-efficacy and mindfulness to improved teacher outcomes, empirical clarity regarding how these factors interact to catalyze job satisfaction among university-level L2 instructors remains limited. To address this lacuna, the present study investigates the predictive relationships among mindfulness, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction within the Iranian university context, utilizing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to provide a comprehensive understanding of these psychological mechanisms.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Participants**

A total of 234 English instructors from different state and private universities in Iran took part in the survey phase. To ensure a representative sample, instructors were recruited from various institutional types, including public (state) universities, Islamic Azad University, and Payam-e-Nour University. The sample was geographically diverse, with approximately 45% of participants based in metropolitan hubs like Tehran and Isfahan, while 55% were recruited from provincial branches. Regarding employment status, 38% held tenured or tenure-track positions, while 62% were employed on a contractual or adjunct basis. In terms of pedagogical focus, 60% primarily taught General English (GE) courses, whereas 40% were involved in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) for

graduate students. The participants were teaching general or specialized English courses for both graduate and undergraduate students. Convenience sampling was used for the quantitative phase.

Among the participants, 128 were male and 106 were female. All held either a PhD or were PhD candidates in English-related fields. Their ages ranged from 28 to 58 ( $M = 38.45$ ,  $SD = 6.24$ ). Regarding their professional background, participants reported between 3 and 25 years of total English language teaching experience ( $M = 12.30$ ,  $SD = 5.12$ ). It is important to note that this figure encompasses their entire career in TESOL, including experience in private language institutes and secondary education, which often precedes university-level appointment in the Iranian context. On average, the participants had 7.4 years of specific experience teaching in higher education settings.

For the second phase of the study, a purposive subsample of 12 instructors was selected for semi-structured interviews. This subsample was chosen based on their quantitative scores to include “extreme cases”—specifically, those who scored exceptionally high or low on both the mindfulness and job satisfaction scales—to better understand the mechanisms linking these variables.

## **Instruments**

### ***Mindfulness Scale***

EFL teachers' level of mindfulness was measured using the abridged version of the mindfulness scale designed by Bohlmeijer et al. (2011). This questionnaire contains 24 items which measure five sub-scales of mindfulness skills including: 1) observing (OBS), 2) describing (DES), 3) active awareness (AA), 4) nonjudgement (NJ), and 5) nonreactivity (NR). Each item is assessed on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Almost Never) to 5 (Almost Always). The greater global score derived from this scale shows higher level of mindfulness. The internal consistency in this study was  $\alpha =$

.81, and the CFA results confirmed a good fit to the data:  $\chi^2/df = 1.94$ ,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $TLI = .95$ ,  $RMSEA = .05$  [.04, .06],  $SRMR = .03$ .

### ***Job Satisfaction Scale***

In order to measure teachers' job satisfaction, ten items taken from the Work Satisfaction Scale (Taormina & Kuok, 2009) were used. The items assess respondents' degree of satisfaction with their job. The teachers were requested to express their level of agreement with description of their jobs. Every item is evaluated on a 3-point scale, varying from 1 (yes) to 3 (no), with the middle point of 2 (not sure). The reliability of the scale was  $\alpha = .93$ , and the validity was substantiated by the CFA fit:  $\chi^2/df = 1.81$ ,  $CFI = .97$ ,  $TLI = .96$ ,  $RMSEA = .03$  [.02, .04],  $SRMR = .02$ .

### ***Teacher Self-efficacy Scale***

Participants' degree of self-efficacy in teaching was assessed using the questionnaire developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). This questionnaire consists of 24 statements which measure teachers' efficacy in three sub-scales of student engagement (SE), instructional strategies (IS), and classroom management (CM). The items are measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (nothing) to 5 (a great deal). This self-report questionnaire is a reliable and valid scale which has been widely used in various contexts (Klassen et al., 2009). In the current study, the scale showed acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .78$ ) and acceptable construct validity through CFA:  $\chi^2/df = 2.14$ ,  $CFI = .92$ ,  $TLI = .91$ ,  $RMSEA = .06$  [.05, .07],  $SRMR = .04$ .

### ***Semi-structured Interview Protocol***

The qualitative interview guide was developed based on a review of existing literature on teacher psychology and was specifically aligned with the emerging findings from the quantitative phase. To ensure content validity, the protocol was reviewed by two experts in applied linguistics and educational

psychology, and subsequently pilot-tested with two instructors who were not part of the final subsample. The interview structure moved from broad introductory questions regarding the instructors' general teaching philosophy to more targeted inquiries into the intrapsychic mechanisms of the studied variables. For instance, to explore "affective detachment," participants were asked: "Can you describe a recent high-stress classroom incident and walk me through your internal response at that moment?" To investigate "pedagogical presence," questions included: "How does your level of awareness in the moment influence your choice of instructional strategies?" Probing questions were utilized to elicit deeper reflections on the "value-action congruence" between their professional beliefs and their daily teaching reality in the Iranian higher education context.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The nature of this study was a mixed-methods investigation utilizing an explanatory sequential design. This approach prioritized the quantitative data while using the qualitative phase to clarify and expand upon the statistical relationships identified (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative data collection was initiated in March 2022 via an online survey shared through academic networks and Telegram/WhatsApp channels. The scales were administered in a counterbalanced order (Mindfulness → Self-efficacy → Job Satisfaction) to prevent order effects. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained via a digital form that detailed the study's aims, the right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure data anonymity.

Following the preliminary analysis of the survey data and the identification of significant paths in the SEM model, the qualitative phase was conducted in May 2022. Using an extreme case sampling strategy, twelve participants who exhibited either high or low levels of both mindfulness and satisfaction were invited for one-on-one interviews. This allowed the researchers to contrast the lived experiences of those for whom the model was

most representative. Interviews were conducted in English or Persian, depending on the participant's preference, via Zoom or WhatsApp call. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. To maintain the integrity of the data, transcripts were shared with the participants for member-checking, allowing them to verify or amend the content to accurately reflect their perspectives.

## Data Analysis

This study employed a two-phase data analysis procedure consistent with an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). After data collection, the data were fed into SPSS (Version 22) for initial screening and descriptive analysis. During the preliminary screening, response patterns were scrutinized for careless responding, including failed attention checks and straight-lining, to ensure the quality of the dataset before further analysis (Meade & Craig, 2012). Concerning the reliability, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficients were utilized for measuring the internal consistency of the used scales. For the quantitative phase, we adopted a two-step approach to Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to substantiate the validity of the measurement models. Next, the structural model was examined to test the interplay between the constructs using Mplus (version 7.4). To account for potential multivariate non-normality in the teacher response data, the robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimator was employed to ensure more accurate standard errors and chi-square statistics (Byrne, 2016). Ultimately, the model fit was assessed using a number of fit indices including Chi-square divided by degree of freedom ( $\chi^2/df$ ), Comparative Fit Index (*CFI*), Tucker–Lewis Index (*TLI*), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (*RMSEA*). Following the rigorous benchmarks set by Kline (2011), we considered a model to have a good fit if  $\chi^2/df < 3$ , *CFI* and *TLI*  $> .90$ , and *RMSEA*  $< .08$ .

For the qualitative phase, thematic analysis was employed following the six-step framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved: (1) data familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) generating initial codes for segments related to teacher agency and mindfulness, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes against the entire dataset, (5) defining and naming themes such as “affective detachment,” and (6) producing the final report. To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, we adhered to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Beyond member checking, which was performed by sharing the transcripts and findings with the participants for verification, peer debriefing was utilized where a second researcher reviewed the coding scheme to minimize individual bias and enhance the “interpretive rigor” of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Results: Model Testing and Validity

Prior to testing the hypothesized model, rigorous data screening was conducted. The initial screening indicated no missing data in the collected responses. However, to ensure data integrity, we first evaluated the response quality. Three cases were identified as having failed more than one attention check or exhibiting clear “straight-lining” patterns (i.e., providing the same response throughout entire sub-scales) and were subsequently excluded from the analysis. Univariate outliers were then identified via Z-scores ( $Z > |3.29|$ ), resulting in the elimination of two cases. Multivariate outliers were assessed using Mahalanobis distance ( $D^2$ ); three cases exceeding the critical  $\chi^2$  value of 27.88 ( $p < .001$ ,  $df = 9$ ) were omitted. Normality was confirmed as all skewness values were within  $\pm 1.5$  and kurtosis values were below  $\pm 3$ . Furthermore, Mardia’s normalized estimate of multivariate kurtosis was 5.12, which is well below the threshold of 8.0, justifying the use of Maximum Likelihood (MLR) estimation (Byrne, 2016). Following these screening

procedures, eight cases were removed, resulting in a final sample of 226 for analysis.

### Measurement Model: Reliability and Validity

Following the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the measurement model was evaluated before the structural model. Standardized factor loadings for all items were significant ( $p < .001$ ) and ranged from .62 to .89. As displayed in Table 1, reliability was assessed through Composite Reliability (CR), with all values exceeding the .70 benchmark. To ensure convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated; all constructs surpassed the .50 threshold (Hair et al., 2019). Additionally, discriminant validity was confirmed as the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlation with any other construct.

**Table 1.** CFA Fit Indices, Reliability, and Convergent Validity

Construct	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	CR	AVE	$\alpha$
Self-efficacy	2.14	.92	.91	.06 [.05, .07]	.04	.84	.58	.78
Mindfulness	1.94	.96	.95	.05 [.04, .06]	.03	.88	.61	.81
Job Satisfaction	1.81	.97	.96	.03 [.02, .04]	.02	.91	.66	.93

Following the confirmation of the measurement model's fit and convergent validity, we examined the descriptive statistics and the relationships between the latent variables. To evaluate discriminant validity, we compared the square root of the AVE for each construct against its correlations with other factors. This ensures that each psychological resource (mindfulness, self-efficacy, and satisfaction) represents a distinct construct within the Iranian higher education context. These results, along with the means ( $M$ ) and standard deviations ( $SD$ ), are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics and Discriminant Validity

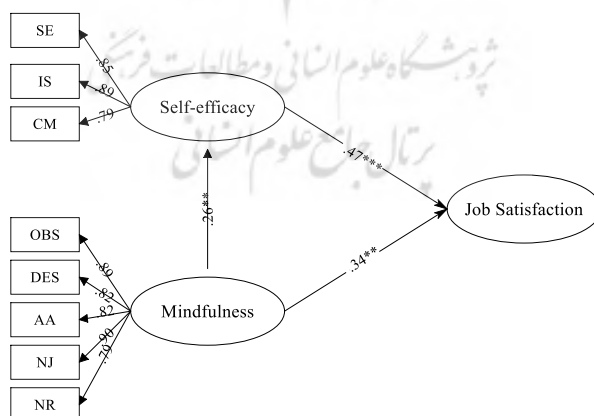
Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Self-efficacy	4.03	1.28	(.76)		
2. Mindfulness	3.58	0.92	.31**	(.78)	
3. Job Satisfaction	3.21	0.95	.53**	.41**	(.81)

Note. Diagonals in bold parentheses represent the square root of the AVE.

## Structural Model and Mediation Analysis

The structural model exhibited a robust fit to the data:  $\chi^2 = 184.42$ ,  $df = 92$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.00$ ,  $CFI = .95$ ,  $TLI = .94$ ,  $RMSEA = .05$ , and  $SRMR = .04$ . As displayed in Figure 1, mindfulness had a significant direct effect on job satisfaction ( $\beta = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and self-efficacy ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Self-efficacy exerted a strong positive effect on job satisfaction ( $\beta = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

To further investigate the mechanism of these relationships, a mediation analysis was performed using 5,000 bootstrap resamples to calculate 95% biased-corrected confidence intervals (CIs). The results revealed a significant indirect effect of mindfulness on job satisfaction through the mediating role of self-efficacy ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $SE = .04$ , 95%  $CI = [.06, .19]$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This suggests that while mindfulness directly enhances satisfaction, it also functions by boosting teachers' perceived capabilities, which in turn elevates professional fulfillment. The model explained 32% of the total variance in job satisfaction ( $R^2 = .32$ ).



**Figure 1.** The finalized structural model with standardized path coefficients and factor loadings.

## Qualitative Phase: Explaining the Mechanism

To explain the "how" behind the statistical paths identified in the SEM, we conducted follow-up semi-structured interviews with a purposive subsample of 12 instructors ( $n=12$ ) representing high and low scorers. To ensure participant anonymity and maintain confidentiality, each instructor was assigned an alphanumeric code (P1 through P12), which is used throughout the reporting of the qualitative data. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) revealed three primary mechanisms that connect mindfulness and self-efficacy to job satisfaction.

### Theme 1: Affective Detachment and the "Psychological Pause"

High-mindfulness participants described a process of "affective detachment" that prevents daily classroom incidents from eroding their long-term professional contentment. Rather than achieving a passive state of "calm," these instructors utilized mindfulness to create a "psychological pause" between a stressor and their reaction. For instance, P7 noted that when a lesson fails, their *"immediate reaction is a sense of failure,"* but mindfulness allows them to view that feeling as *"just a mental event rather than a fact."* This prevents them from getting *"stuck in the frustration,"* ensuring that a single *"bad hour"* does not define their entire day. This sentiment was echoed by P2, who observed that by *"observing irritation without instantly acting on it,"* they felt less emotionally drained by the end of the semester. Consequently, as P5 explained, this detachment leads to higher satisfaction because teachers *"no longer feel like a victim of the classroom atmosphere."* This suggests the path from mindfulness to satisfaction is mediated by a reduction in emotional exhaustion through real-time cognitive reappraisal.

### Theme 2: Pedagogical Presence as a Catalyst for Efficacy

The interviews clarified how mindfulness "fuels" self-efficacy by enhancing "pedagogical presence." Instructors reported that being fully present allowed them to detect subtle student cues that they previously ignored. P3 shared that mindfulness transformed their interaction from *"just waiting for my turn to*

*speaking* to *actually listening to the students.*" This heightened awareness enabled them to *"catch confusion early"* and *"adjust strategies on the fly."* The resulting successful interventions reinforced their professional confidence; as P9 remarked, *"when you see your adjustments working in real-time, your belief in your own teaching capability skyrockets."* Furthermore, P10 suggested that being *"grounded in the moment"* reduced the anxiety associated with classroom management, making them feel *"more in command of the pedagogical space."* These accounts provide a practical explanation for the quantitative link between mindfulness and self-efficacy: mindfulness provides the data (awareness), which efficacy then uses to execute successful actions.

### **Theme 3: Value-Action Congruence and Professional Integrity**

The final theme highlighted how self-efficacy and mindfulness interact to create satisfaction through "professional integrity." In the challenging context of Iranian higher education, where institutional support may be inconsistent, instructors rely on internal resources to maintain motivation. P12 emphasized that satisfaction does not require a *"perfect university environment,"* but rather the knowledge that one has the *"tools to help students regardless"* of external constraints. Mindfulness helps these instructors stay *"focused on the why of teaching,"* while self-efficacy provides the *"how."* P1 shared a similar view, stating that *"knowing my values (mindfulness) and knowing I can implement them (efficacy)"* creates a sense of *"internal alignment"* that protects against burnout. P6 added that this congruence allows them to *"find meaning in small classroom wins"* even when larger administrative issues are discouraging. This theme indicates that job satisfaction in the EFL context is a proactive state of alignment achieved when mindfulness and efficacy co-exist to facilitate value-driven teaching.

## **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the associations among mindfulness, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction among EFL university

instructors in a higher education context. By adopting a mixed-methods lens, this study not only confirms statistical predictions but also provides a nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms—such as affective detachment and value-driven agency—that sustain Iranian EFL instructors in demanding academic environments. Theoretically, the results lend further credence to the recent advent of positive psychology in EFL research.

First, the quantitative results indicated that mindfulness was a significant and positive predictor of job satisfaction ( $\beta = .34$ ). This finding adds support to the growing body of literature (e.g., Hülshager et al., 2013; Jha, 2021; Song et al., 2021; Zarate et al., 2019). However, the qualitative data extended this finding by identifying a “psychological pause” as the primary mechanism for satisfaction. This outcome can be justified in light of Affective Events Theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), where mindfulness may function as a secondary appraisal mechanism. Rather than workplace “events” dictating immediate emotional outcomes, mindfulness acts as a distal trait that allows instructors to “neutralize” negative affective events before they translate into job dissatisfaction. Our participants (e.g., P7, P2) revealed that mindfulness facilitates “affective detachment,” allowing them to view classroom failures as transient mental events rather than personal indictments. This ability to “decouple” from immediate stress prevents the emotional exhaustion often seen in EFL contexts (Faskhodi & Siyyari, 2018). By decreasing the automaticity of mental processes and allowing for cognitive reappraisal (Sobczak & West, 2013), mindfulness helps instructors maintain a baseline of satisfaction despite the “emotional rollercoaster” of L2 teaching (De Costa et al., 2020).

Second, it was found that self-efficacy was the strongest significant positive predictor of teacher job satisfaction ( $\beta = .47$ ). This accords with previous research (e.g., Granziera & Perera, 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Zakariya, 2020) and clarifies the “internal drive” required in the Iranian higher education context. Following Bandura’s (1997) notion of mastery expectations, the present researchers found that high self-efficacy leads teachers to seek and enjoy tasks because they believe they can execute the

necessary courses of action. The qualitative findings (Theme 3) enriched this by highlighting “value-action congruence.” Participants (e.g., P12, P1) explained that satisfaction arises when they have the agency to act on their professional values, even in resource-constrained environments. As suggested by Richter et al. (2022), satisfaction is significantly attributable to work-related adjustment. Our data suggests that self-efficacy provides the “how” of this adjustment; when instructors feel capable of achieving pedagogical goals, they perceive their work as meaningful, which acts as a buffer against institutional stressors.

Third, the SEM analysis confirmed that mindfulness positively predicted teacher self-efficacy ( $\beta = .26$ ). The qualitative phase uniquely clarified this link through the concept of “pedagogical presence,” revealing a critical synthesis in our process model. Participants (e.g., P3, P9) noted that being “grounded in the moment” (Mindfulness) allowed them to capture the “raw data” of the classroom—subtle student cues—that would otherwise be ignored. This heightened awareness enables instructors to execute successful teaching interventions which, in turn, provide a continuous stream of enactive mastery experiences—the most powerful source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). By fulfilling professional values through these effective actions, mindfulness indirectly fuels the primary engine of job satisfaction. As stress and self-efficacy are negatively correlated (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), the “psychological pause” provided by mindfulness reduces the interference of anxiety, allowing teachers’ actual skills to manifest as perceived capability. Thus, we argue that mindfulness is not just a “relaxation” tool, but a cognitive precursor to efficacy that enables teachers to maintain a sense of command over the pedagogical space (Moyano et al., 2021).

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

By integrating structural equation modeling with in-depth thematic analysis, the current study revealed significant and positive associations among mindfulness, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction among EFL university

instructors. The quantitative phase confirmed that teachers with high mindfulness were more likely to experience job satisfaction directly and indirectly through the enhancement of self-efficacy. The correlation between teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction was found to be significant, indicating that higher levels of self-efficacy predicted higher levels of teacher job satisfaction in the higher education context. Crucially, the qualitative findings clarified the “how” behind these statistical paths, identifying specific mechanisms such as “affective detachment” and “pedagogical presence.”

Regarding the cruciality of self-perceived beliefs, our data suggests that self-efficacy serves as a form of “pedagogical agency.” This allows instructors to plan and perform specific work-related activities to attain desired outcomes, even when faced with the institutional constraints inherent in the Iranian higher education system. This facilitates the extent to which they invest attentional, affective, and physical efforts into their work (Granziera & Perera, 2019). Moreover, the study highlights that teachers with greater levels of mindfulness were more inclined to be self-efficacious because their “groundedness” in the present moment allowed them to capture subtle classroom cues, thereby creating more opportunities for successful teaching interventions. Following that, the present research suggests an agenda for theoretical and empirical research on the strategic implications of teachers’ work-related well-being. In terms of theoretical significance, the results go beyond merely supporting the recent mainstream of positive psychology in EFL research; they provide a process-oriented model of how “inner resources” buffer against “outer stressors.” By identifying the “psychological pause” as a mediator, this study offers a more granular look at teacher resilience. Our data pinpointed the significance of both mindfulness approaches and self-efficacy beliefs in affecting critical cognitive judgments, namely teacher job satisfaction.

Taken together, our results should encourage university administrators and policy makers to develop more targeted individual onboarding strategies and set development priorities. Rather than generic stress-reduction workshops, we recommend mindfulness interventions that specifically focus

on “affective detachment” and “value-driven instruction” to foster the well-being process of the EFL teachers. Furthermore, more viable steps should be taken to add to our understanding of what can truly turn a good teacher into a satisfied one.

Notwithstanding the integral findings of this study, a number of limitations should be kept in mind. The sample is relatively small, making the findings lack adequate generalizability to other higher education contexts. Moreover, the researchers used one-shot data. However, instructors’ attitudes regarding their mindfulness, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction are likely to alter over time. As such, future researchers are suggested to draw upon longitudinal research designs to trace the changes of these constructs across time. Finally, although this study employed a mixed-methods design to increase depth, the data remain reliant on self-reported measures. Future research could benefit from incorporating classroom observations or “ecological momentary assessment” (EMA) to capture the real-time application of mindfulness and efficacy during actual teaching sessions.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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