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Individual Differences in Teacher Hopelessness: Examining the Significance of Personal and Professional Factors

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Abstract

This research aimed to examine teachers' level of experienced hopelessness across diverse personal and professional characteristics. This survey study, with a sample of 297 English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers who were working in private language schools in Iran, was an attempt to understand whether there were significant individual differences in the hopelessness feelings of teachers. To this end, participants completed the Personal Information Scale and the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS) to collect their personal and professional information and determine the level of experienced hopelessness. The results indicated a mild level of hopelessness experienced by the study sample with different levels of experience in the BHS dimensions. Upon further data analysis, we found no significant differences between teachers' hopelessness level and their gender and education. However, significant results were found for the effects of teacher age, teaching experience, and the educational level they serve on the rates of experienced hopelessness. More precisely, older teachers with more than 16 years of professional experience who were teaching advanced adult students were more susceptible to experiencing hopelessness than their younger colleagues with less professional experience. Further implications are discussed.

Keywords: Hopelessness; English language teachers; Professional characteristics; Survey study

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Introduction

Our expectations and feelings toward the future are expressed in terms of hope and hopelessness. Hope is defined as a trait that gives an individual a sense of well-being and motivates him/her to act (Snyder et al., 1991; Syme, 2004). In other words, hopeful individuals have positive expectations about the future with a sense of trust arising from hope and can cope with the problems they may face in the future effectively (Eren & Yeşilbursa, 2019; Farran et al., 1995; Thurman et al., 2018). The most obvious and important characteristics of an individual with hope are (a) positive developments based on the individual and environmental factors, (b) coping with difficult situations with the belief that there is a way, and (c) the prediction that future goals will be achieved (Cheavens et al., 2006; Hankin et al., 2001). In this sense, it is possible to argue that hope is positive expectations and thoughts that positively enrich individuals' lives and increase their motivation for life. In a rather elaborate manner, Snyder (2000, p. 8) developed "Hope theory" and defined it as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals) [which depend on individuals' perceptions regarding their] capacities to (1) clearly conceptualize goals, (2) develop specific strategies to reach those goals (pathways thinking), and (3) initiate and sustain the motivation for using those strategies (agency thinking)." Briefly, while hope is associated with positive emotions and expectations about the future, despair or hopelessness is described as a decline in positive emotions about the future depending on various reasons and/or factors (Hankin et al., 2001; Uyanik et al., 2019).

As an affective condition, hopelessness could be an assessment of an individual's predictions and expectations of future conditions and events. For instance, by feeling that everything that may happen in the future would not be better than today, an individual could naturally enforce negative expectations and perspectives toward the future, which may give rise to hopelessness (Beck et al., 1975; Farran et al., 1995). Accordingly, hopelessness could be considered a negative belief, resulting from the individual's decreasing positive expectations about the future, as has been defined in Beck's cognitive model of hopelessness (Beck et al., 1975, 1976). In other words, hopelessness, revealing a psychological situation, is the pessimism in the individual's perspective towards life and the future (Farran et al., 1995; Lavender & Watkins, 2004), which gradually increases as the optimism decreases or disappears (Kashani et al., 1991). Therefore, hopelessness is the negative state of expectations for the future. More precisely, hope and hopelessness, as individual-specific concepts, are the personal status of expectations for the future and the phenomena that can either motivate individuals or negatively affect their motivation (Eren & Yeşilbursa, 2019). Hopelessness is also a void created by past events and the breakdown of the bridge that connects the moment to the future (Chang et al., 2010; Farran et al., 1995). When the definitions of the hopelessness construct are examined, it can be assumed that hopelessness causes individuals to use negative cognitive structures while evaluating their lives, as well as expressing their doubt and reluctance about the future (Beck et al., 1976; Hankin et al., 2001).

Some of the studies aimed at revealing the reasons for the individual's hopelessness argue that the origin of hopelessness is based on a negative event and/or trauma experienced by the individual in the past (Chang et al., 2010; Ngwenya et al., 2021). According to these studies, hopelessness emerges due to past events or the resulting negativities from those events. Also, according to this idea, psychological emotions such as helplessness, unhappiness, indecision, pessimism, and guilt that would negatively affect the life of an individual arise due to bad experiences or events in the past, and these feelings would lead the individual to hopelessness (Chang et al., 2010; Panagioti et al., 2012). The most common causes of hopelessness include ego weakening, loss of belief, and loss of meaning. In addition, factors such as exposure to a conflicting situation, loss of productivity, and physical disability may cause hopelessness (Beck et al., 1976; Chang et al., 2010; Ghasemi, 2022a; Kashani et al., 1991; Ngwenya et al., 2021; Panagioti et al., 2012; Syme, 2004). Due to the intensive interactions of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers with students in order to engage them in communicative activities (Gholami, 2021, 2022), teachers may be challenged by student misbehavior threatening their emotional and psychological well-being (Aldrup et al., 2018).

In general, hopelessness in individuals is a condition that occurs as a result of the interaction of some cognitive and affective processes. Belief in luck rather than one's own ability to achieve future goals and values, belief in independency between one's behaviors and outcomes, feeling of dependency on others, feeling a lack of control over the outcome of situations, and the interaction between these beliefs and feelings are expressed as cognitive/affective processes that lead an individual to experience hopelessness (Beck et al., 1975, 1976; Farran et al., 1995). These processes cause individuals to lose faith in their chief values of life and become more withdrawn and hopeless by attributing their failures to stable causes such as lack of ability (Au et al., 2009). This situation would affect individuals' environment, family, and workplace climate as well as themselves (Chang et al., 2010; Eren & Yeşilbursa, 2019; Ghasemi, 2022a). At last, they will not only be unhappy but also lose productivity undermining their occupational performance and efficiency (Ghasemi, 2022a).

Current Study

Due to some adverse contextual factors in public schools (e.g., student misbehavior, class oversize, lack of support, and work demands), teachers working in such settings are susceptible to using dysfunctional coping strategies and experience higher rates of mental issues, such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Ghasemi, 2022c). However, studies examining the prevalence of such mental issues in teachers are limited in Iran. For instance, teacher hopelessness has been reflected in a limited number of studies, which considered its associations with diverse factors, such as teacher self-efficacy (Eren & Yeşilbursa, 2019), perceived social support (Ghasemi, 2022a), self-esteem (Uyanik et al., 2019), resilience (Sezer & Kezer, 2017) and depression (McLaughlin et al., 1996). The results of these studies indicated negative associations between teacher hopelessness and teacher self-efficacy, perceived social support,

self-esteem, and resilience, and positive associations between teacher hopelessness and depression. Although past research suggests that teachers' demographic and occupational attributes may predict their hopelessness (Ghasemi, 2022a; Haatainen et al., 2004), the way teachers' professional and demographic characteristics may inhibit or contribute to hopelessness has not been thoroughly investigated in the private sector. This inquiry could help the policymakers, administrators, and teacher educators understand possible hopelessness risk factors associated with teachers' diverse characteristics to promptly diagnose, prevent, and intervene in such mental health crises. It has already been established that depression is associated more with females and older people (Beekman et al., 1999; Katona & Shankar, 2004; Ghasemi, 2022a); therefore, we expect to find similar results for hopelessness because of the higher association between hopelessness and depression (Au et al., 2009). As there were limited studies on the rates of experienced hopelessness in EFL teachers working in the private sector and the association of this construct with teachers' personal and professional characteristics, we aimed to launch a study to investigate how hopelessness levels differed across teachers' gender, age, and professional experience. In other words, the main purposes of this study were (a) to determine the level of teachers' experienced hopelessness and (b) to understand the extent to which teachers' perceptions of unhappiness and hopelessness differ in terms of their demographic and professional characteristics. More precisely, this study will address the following research questions:

- 1) What is the prevalence of experienced hopelessness in teachers working in the private sector in Iran?
- 2) Is there any significant difference in the levels of teachers' hopelessness in terms of their gender?
- 3) Is there any significant difference in the levels of teachers' hopelessness across their educational levels?
- 4) Is there any significant difference in the levels of teachers' hopelessness across their ages?
- 5) Is there any significant difference in the levels of teachers' hopelessness across their professional experience?
- 6) Is there any significant difference in the levels of teachers' hopelessness across the levels of education they serve?

Method

Research design

Since this study examines the level of experienced hopelessness of teachers and whether they differ according to some demographic and professional characteristics, a cross-sectional design was used in the study. In other words, the present cross-sectional survey study was an attempt to estimate the prevalence of hopelessness among the EFL teachers' community of Iran.

Participants and context

The working context of the research consisted of teachers working in Tehran, Iran. Regarding the study context and history of education in Iran, it is important to note that the secular education system in Iran was replaced by an Islamic system and all schools

were segregated based on gender after Iran's revolution in 1979. Education in Iran is centralized and divided into K-12 settings. In addition to public schools, which provide basic education free of charge, there are parallel private schools that charge high tuition fees and offer a better standard of teaching. While public schools are funded and equipped by the government, private schools run independently under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Several studies have reported better professional and mental conditions for teachers working at private schools compared to public schools (e.g., Kalantari & Gholami, 2012; Ghasemi, 2022b), indicating the effectiveness of such private institutions in managing and addressing their teachers' professional and emotional needs. In particular, studies have verified the superiority of private language schools in language education over state schools in Iran in terms of technology use, curriculum content, teaching methods, student-teacher relationship, and student engagement (Kalantari & Gholami, 2012).

The study sample was EFL teachers who were teaching in private language schools in Tehran, recruited through a non-probability convenient sampling method. The data regarding the participants' personal and professional attributes was collected by the Personal Information Scale. The relevant frequencies and distributions of the demographic characteristics of the participants are demonstrated in Table 1.

Tab. 1. Frequency and Distributions of Teachers' Demographic Characteristics (N = 297)

Demographic Characteristics	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	200	67.3
	Female	97	32.6
Education	B.A.	259	87.2
	M.A.	38	12.7
Age	20–28	160	53.8
	29–35	121	40.7
	>35	16	5.3
	0–5	89	29.9
Professional experience	6–10	104	35.0
	11–15	58	19.5
	>16	46	15.4
Educational Level	Beginner (kids)	135	45.4
	Intermediate (juveniles)	65	21.8
	Advanced (adults)	97	32.6
Total Participants		297	100.0

Measures

Personal Information Scale

There were five questions to capture data on teachers' gender, age, academic degree, professional experience, and educational level in the Personal Information Scale. We used this measure to collect teachers' personal and professional characteristics.

Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS)

The BHS was developed by Beck et al. (1974) in order to determine the negative expectation level of an individual about the future. This self-assessment scale consists of 20 items with 11 true and 9 false statements regarding an individual's feelings

and expectations about the future. The questions on the scale are answered in a right-wrong manner, and the scale reflects negative expectations. The total score obtained constitutes the “hopelessness” score. The scores that are obtained from the scale range from 0–20. A higher score demonstrates a higher level of experienced hopelessness. Hopelessness scores obtained from the BHS are interpreted with the following criteria; 0–3 means a lower level of hopelessness, 4–8 is mild hopelessness, 9–14 is moderate hopelessness, and 15–20 is severe hopelessness. The scale consists of three dimensions: “feelings about the future” (1, 3, 7, 11, 18), “loss of motivation” (2, 4, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 20), and “expectations concerning the future” (5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 15, 19). The scale has been shown to be internally consistent ($\alpha = 0.81$) (Kocalevent et al., 2017). Ghasemi (2022a) has also examined the factor structure of this measure with public school teachers in Iran to investigate three competing models: (1) a three-factor model, (2) an alternative two-factor model, and (3) another alternative one-factor model. The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated a good model fit for all models, indicating the feasibility of using all three models with teachers. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the current study was 0.78.

Procedure

After obtaining the required ethical approval, we met several private language school administrators to obtain the required permission to launch the study with the teachers working in those schools. Then, we invited teachers to participate in the study by distributing forms that contained information regarding the purpose and procedure of the study. Of the 311 teachers working in the schools, 297 admitted completing the measures and returning them through email. There was no missing data or incomplete measures, and all the teachers had completed and answered the items properly. The study was initiated in December 2018 and completed in April 2019.

Data Analysis

We used SPSS version 23 to analyze the data. In the analysis of the data, the arithmetic means and standard deviations were

calculated. We used an independent samples t-test to capture differences between the means of two independent groups and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the means of two or more independent groups in the study after meeting equality of variances and normality assumptions.

Results

Prevalence of Hopelessness

The results of descriptive analyses indicated that the arithmetic mean value was 1.10 ($SD = 1.21$) for the feelings about the future dimension, 3.26 ($SD = 1.39$) for the loss of motivation dimension, 2.39 ($SD = 1.24$) for the future expectations dimension, and 6.75 ($SD = 3.84$) for the total hopelessness. Based on the cut-off scores presented in the Measures section, it can be argued that the prevalence of hopelessness among teachers in our study was mild. In particular, the prevalence of hopelessness in the “loss of motivation” dimension was stronger than in the other dimensions. While “feelings about the future” were the least concern in this study, “future expectations” seem to be on the threshold of triggering hopelessness among the participants. Overall, the teachers seem to suffer from a mild level of hopelessness in the form of motivational deficits.

Individual Differences in terms of Gender

An independent samples t-test was conducted to understand whether there is a significant difference in the hopelessness levels of the teachers across their gender (Table 2). Based on the results, there was no significant difference between teachers’ gender and their hopelessness level: feelings about the future ($t(295) = .46, p > .05$), loss of motivation ($t(295) = -1.76, p > .05$), future expectations ($t(295) = .51, p > .05$), and total hopelessness ($t(295) = -.52, p > .05$). Therefore, it can be argued that teachers’ gender is not significantly associated with their level of experienced hopelessness.

Tab. 2. T-test Results of Differences in Hopelessness Level across Gender

Dimensions	Female		Male		df	t	p	Cohen’s d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Feelings about the future	1.131	1.12	1.065	1.36	295	.461	.631	.056
Loss of motivation	1.83	1.52	2.26	1.14	295	-1.76	.063	.320
Future expectations	1.83	1.09	1.79	1.63	295	.511	.611	.028
Total hopelessness	4.99	3.99	5.19	4.01	295	-.524	.601	.05

Note: Females $n = 200$; Males $n = 97$

Tab. 3. T-test Results of Differences in Hopelessness across Education

	BA		MA		df	t	p	Cohen’s d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Feelings about the future	1.10	1.15	.965	1.01	295	.651	.501	.124
Loss of motivation	2.08	1.82	2.31	1.32	295	-.716	.418	.144
Future expectations	1.98	1.12	1.69	1.08	295	.626	.531	.263
Total hopelessness	1.91	1.25	5.03	4.09	295	.139	.901	1.03

Note: BA $n = 259$; MA $n = 38$

Individual Differences across Education

We also tested the significance of differences in the hopelessness feelings of teachers and their academic degrees (Table 3). Based on the results, there was no significant difference in their hopelessness levels and education: feelings about the future ($t(295) = .65, p > .05$), motivation loss ($t(295) = -.72, p > .05$), future expectations ($t(295) = .63, p > .05$), and total hopelessness ($t(295) = .13, p > .05$). Therefore, it is clear that teachers' experienced hopelessness level does not vary by their education.

Individual Differences across Age

A one-way analysis of variance was performed to understand the significance of differences in the experienced hopelessness levels of the teachers across their ages (Table 4). The results revealed no significant difference in teachers' "feelings about the future" and their ages ($F(2,294) = .81, p > .05$). However, we found significant differences in "loss of motivation" ($F(2,294) = 2.96, p < 0.05$) and "future expectations" ($F(2,294) = 2.38, p < .05$) across teachers' age. More precisely, the results of the post hoc tests indicated that there were significant differences between younger teachers with an age range of 20–28 and teachers with >35 years of age. Upon analyzing the mean differences between these two groups of teachers (20–28 teachers ($M = 2.99$), >35 teachers ($M = 4.06$)), we found that older teachers with >35 years of age were more susceptible to losing motivation than

younger teachers. Also, there was no significant difference in total hopelessness across age factor ($F(2,294) = 1.46, p > .05$). Therefore, the results reveal an increasing trend with age, as the risk of experiencing hopelessness heightens with an increase in teachers' age.

Individual Differences across Professional Experience

A one-way ANOVA was performed to understand whether there is a significant difference in the experienced hopelessness levels of the teachers across their professional experience (Table 5). Similar to the age factor, there was no significant difference in teachers' "feelings about the future" across professional experience ($F(3,293) = .90, p > .05$). However, the results revealed significant differences in "motivation loss" ($F(3,293) = 3.04, p < .05$) and "future expectations" ($F(3,293) = 2.39, p < .05$) across teachers' professional experience. Upon conducting post hoc tests, it was found that there is a significant difference between teachers with ≤5 years of professional experience and teachers with >16 years of teaching experience. The mean differences between these two groups of teachers (≤5 teachers ($M = 3.05$), >16 teachers ($M = 4.17$)) indicated that teachers with more professional experience were more susceptible to losing motivation and experiencing hopelessness than novice school teachers in the private sector. Thus, there is an increasing trend with teaching experience, as hopelessness feelings increase with teachers gaining professional experience, similar to the age factor.

Tab. 4. ANOVA Results of Differences in Hopelessness across Age

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η ²	Meaningful differences
Feelings about the future	Between groups	2.65	2	1.32				
	Within groups	481.05	294	1.63	.810	.331	.005	
	Total	483.70	296					
Loss of motivation	Between groups	18.19	2	9.09				
	Within groups	901.23	294	3.065	2.965	.041	.020	20–28 >35
	Total	919.31	296					
Future expectations	Between groups	13.285	2	6.642				
	Within groups	819.123	294	2.786	2.384	.049	.016	20–28 >35
	Total	832.408	296					
Total hopelessness	Between groups	43.254	2	21.50				
	Within groups	4326.12	294	14.714	1.461	.126	.010	
	Total	4369.37	296					

Tab. 5. ANOVA Results of Differences in Hopelessness across Professional Experience

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η ²	Meaningful differences
Feelings about the future	Between groups	2.76	3	1.38				
	Within groups	453.19	293	1.54	.896	.360	.009	
	Total	456.49	296					
Loss of motivation	Between groups	19.14	3	9.57				
	Within groups	926.612	293	3.151	3.037	.039	.030	0–5 >16
	Total	945.75	296					
Future expectations	Between groups	14.142	3	7.07				
	Within groups	869.145	293	2.956	2.391	.048	.024	0–5 >16
	Total	883.28	296					
Total hopelessness	Between groups	51.024	3	25.512				
	Within groups	4512.35	293	15.351	1.661	.179	.017	
	Total	4563.37	296					

Individual Differences across Educational Level

To investigate meaningful differences in hopelessness rates of the teacher participants across the educational level in which they teach, a one-way ANOVA was performed (Table 6). The results indicated that there was no significant difference in teachers' "feelings about the future" ($F(2,294) = .63, p > .05$) across the educational level they serve. However, we found "motivation loss" ($F(2,294) = 2.80, p < .05$) and "future expectations" ($F(2,294) = 2.39, p < .05$) significantly differ by teachers' educational level. More specifically, we found significant differences between teachers working with beginners and those who were teaching advanced adult students through post hoc tests. Upon analyzing the mean differences between these two groups of teachers (advanced students' teachers ($M = 5.29$), beginner students' teachers ($M = 4.03$)), we found that advanced-level teachers were more prone to losing motivation and becoming hopeless than teachers working with beginner or intermediate-level students. Also, similar results were found for the "future expectations" dimension, with the same post hoc results for the teachers working with beginner and advanced-level students.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was an attempt to measure the prevalence of experienced hopelessness among Iranian EFL teachers with diverse personal and professional characteristics and to understand how these characteristics influence their levels of hopelessness feelings. According to the results of this study, it was observed that the teachers in this study experienced a mild level of hopelessness in their professional careers. Additionally, it was found that teachers' feelings of hopelessness significantly differ by their personal and professional characteristics such as age, teaching experience, and educational level they teach. More precisely, older teachers with more professional experience who were teaching adults at the advanced level were more prone to experience hopelessness in their careers.

Our findings are comparable with the results of Ghasemi (2022a) who found moderate hopelessness in teachers working in the public schools in Iran. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that

teachers working in the public sector in Iran are more susceptible to experiencing hopelessness than EFL teachers working in private language schools. Possible reasons for such results could also be associated with a relatively younger age range of teachers working in the private sector and a better school climate in such settings, leading to efficient performance, use of functional coping strategies, and lower rates of emotional issues (Ghasemi, 2022a; 2022c). Regarding the mild level of experienced hopelessness among the participants, similar findings have been found in other countries (Kumcagiz et al., 2014; Poch et al., 2004; Sezer & Kezer, 2017; Ekici, 2017). There are also similar findings for the students with a moderate level of experienced hopelessness (Coskun et al., 2019; Hankin et al., 2001), which may signify a bi-directional relationship between teachers and students (Au et al., 2009; Guo et al., 2010; Petersen & Barnes, 2020). In other words, a lack of a meaningful approach, hope, and optimism to empower students could negatively affect students (Jonker, 2006; Poch et al., 2004). Regarding the dimensions of the BHS, we found no significant results for the "feelings about the future" dimension, which may be related to teachers' experiences of happiness and joy when teaching children. In other words, teachers working in such contexts may have more positive feelings and hope about the future (see Eren & Yeşilbursa, 2019; Guo et al., 2010; Ekici, 2017). However, the findings were significant for the other two dimensions of the BHS, demonstrating the significant influences of diverse demographic and professional factors (e.g., teaching experience) on these dimensions. These findings are in line with previous study results that consider adverse consequences of hopelessness, including burnout (Cowie, 2011; Gençay & Gençay, 2011; Kumcagiz et al., 2014; Ghasemi, 2022b). We observed heightened level of motivational loss and deficit in the participants, which could be attributed to diverse factors such as low self-esteem (Uyanik et al., 2019), low job satisfaction (Kumcagiz et al., 2014), low efficacy beliefs (Eren & Yeşilbursa, 2019), negative past event and loneliness (Chang et al., 2010), and depression (Au et al., 2009; Coskun et al., 2019; Poch et al., 2004). In particular, the results of a study with Iranian public school teachers (Ghasemi, 2022a) indicated that perceived social support could be another significant factor in predicting teacher hopelessness. As collegial/superior support for teachers in the private sector is higher than for teachers working in the public sector, hopelessness feelings were milder in teacher participants of the private sector.

Tab. 6. ANOVA Results of Differences in Hopelessness across Educational Level

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2	Meanful differences
Feelings about the future	Between groups	3.99	2	1.33	.627	.412	.004	
	Within groups	624.19	294	2.12				
	Total	628.18	296					
Loss of motivation	Between groups	15.53	2	7.76	2.801	.040	.021	Beginner Advanced
	Within groups	815.821	294	2.77				
	Total	831.35	296					
Future expectations	Between groups	12.15	2	6.07	2.391	.044	.016	Beginner Advanced
	Within groups	1069.14	294	3.636				
	Total	1081.65	296					
Total hopelessness	Between groups	53.28	2	26.64	1.673	.128	.011	
	Within groups	4681.14	294	15.92				
	Total	4734.42	296					

The results indicated no significant effect for the gender variable in determining the hopelessness level of the teachers, which was in line with past studies (Kocalevent et al., 2017; Gençay & Gençay, 2011; Ghasemi, 2022a). Therefore, we can argue that teacher gender is not significantly associated with the hopelessness level. Similarly, the education of teachers did not show any significant difference in their hopelessness level. The literature also confirms our results (Sezer & Kezer, 2017; Gençay & Gençay, 2011). However, the role of education should not be deemphasized, as Mitchell et al. (2018, p. 1) “highlight the importance of education for a sense of control and hopelessness in older adulthood and demonstrate the cumulative advantage of higher levels of education for psychosocial functioning.” We also had significant results for the effect of the age variable in determining hopelessness level. Additionally, we found that the levels of experienced hopelessness of novice and experienced teachers were significantly different. More specifically, experienced teachers with more than 16 years of teaching experience were more prone to experience a higher level of hopelessness. As expert teachers may experience burnout and depression because of dissatisfactions and different factors associated with students and the school environment (Helou et al., 2016; Kumcagiz et al., 2014; Ghasemi, 2022c), an increase in teachers’ professional experience may also give rise to hopelessness in some teachers (see Cowie, 2011; Ghasemi, 2022a; Poch et al., 2004). Similar results were found for teachers’ educational level they were teaching. Teachers working with beginner students experienced less hopelessness than teachers working with advanced adult students. It appears that children could share their joy and happiness in life with teachers and increase their hope and positive feelings about the future (Mitchell et al., 2018). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that teaching children works as a balancing role in teachers’ feelings, hopes, and expectations.

In light of the presented results of the study, it is suggested that more attention should be paid to the aged teachers by providing further support and help in their professional careers because of the higher risk of experiencing hopelessness in these teachers than their younger counterparts. According to a recent study with Iranian teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ghasemi et al., 2022), while younger teachers were more prone to experience stress and anxiety, aged teachers were susceptible to experiencing depression, indicating age as a significant risk factor for hopelessness feelings. Therefore, experienced teachers with >16 years of professional experience also need further preventive interventions in their profession to effectively avoid, reduce, or treat the risk of hopelessness. It appears that administrators should be more concerned with teachers working with advanced-level adult students than teachers working with children. Thus, further empowering interventions are recommended for teachers working with higher education students. Overall, as teachers are aging and gain more experience in their careers, they may need more professional help to remain hopeful and have positive feelings and expectations about the future.

However, the presented results should be considered with caution because of the low generalizability of the results, which were based on the data gathered from a non-representative (convenience) small sample. Also, the study was limited by the

context/participant-specific outcomes and cross-sectional nature of the study. As this study aimed at determining the prevalence of experienced hopelessness of teachers and examining the significance of different personal and professional variables in their hopelessness, it is not sufficient to reveal the causal factors and situations that give rise to experienced hopelessness. Thus, in-depth interviews with teachers could contribute to our understanding of their perceptions by allowing them to describe the situation in a more comprehensive and detailed way. Future research could be conducted utilizing the mixed methods design by considering the relationships between hopelessness and different organizational variables, such as conflict, burnout, job satisfaction, and organizational stress.

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Conflicts of interest:

We wish to confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication, and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

Informed consent:

Written consent to conduct the study and publish potentially identifying information was obtained from the subjects and their legal guardians.

Ethics approval:

We further confirm that any aspect of the work covered in this manuscript that has involved human patients has been conducted with the ethical approval of all relevant bodies and that such approvals are acknowledged within the manuscript. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Authors Contribution:

Farshad Ghasemi contributed to conceptualization and design, literature review, methodology and validation, formal analysis, investigation and data collection, data analysis and interpretation, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review & editing. Zhila Mohammadnia contributed to conceptualization and design, data analysis and interpretation, writing—review & editing. Zahra Gholami contributed to conceptualization and design, data analysis and interpretation, writing—review & editing.

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