

Exploring Iranian ESP Instructors' Immunity: General English Instructors vs. Content Instructors

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Research Paper

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Abstract: Language teacher immunity (LTI) develops in language teachers as a protective reaction to high-threatening disturbances. Teaching English for specific purposes (ESP) at university might place instructors in highly challenging and critical situations. This study aims to ascertain the dominant type of LTI among Iranian ESP instructors and the triggering disturbances that contribute to its development. To this end, an explanatory mixed-method approach was adopted. The Hiver's LTI questionnaire was administered and 44 university ESP instructors who were convenient responded to the questionnaire to explore the dominant type of LTI in Iranian ESP instructors. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview with 10 ESP instructors was conducted to find out the triggering disturbance leading to LTI and the coping strategies adopted by ESP teachers to deal with them. Clustering of the data gathered by the questionnaire revealed that adaptive LTI among EGP instructors teaching ESP was the dominant type, while content instructors tended to exhibit the maladaptive form. Analyzing the interviews demonstrated that regardless of instructors' classification to content and EGP types, there are some common disturbances among most ESP instructors including students' low proficiency level in general English, paltry payment for a highly demanding job, and insufficient time to teach ESP during a course. However, other disturbances were specific to teachers' expertise type. The coping mechanisms that were most commonly utilized to manage stress-inducing factors by ESP teachers in both groups were embracing the stressor without taking any action, incorporating fresh teaching materials, and evading challenges by declining situations that could result in challenges. The findings of this research can be beneficial for macro policymakers, educational managers, curriculum developers, and instructors themselves to create conducive environments promoting the development and maintenance of adaptive LTI.

Keywords: Content Instructors, English for General Purposes Instructors, ESP Instructors, Language Teacher Immunity

Introduction

Teaching is acknowledged as a highly stressful profession, resulting in a significant attrition rate and a low level of well-being among its practitioners (Greenier et al., 2021). In struggling with professional hardships, teachers need to be equipped with some level of immunity (Hiver, 2017). Inspired by the concept of *biological immunity*, Hiver and Dörnyei (2017), proposed the "language teacher immunity" term. Language teacher immunity (LTI) is conceptualized as "a robust armoring system that emerges in response to high-intensity threats and allows teachers to maintain professional equilibrium and

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instructional effectiveness” (Hiver, 2017, p. 669). Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) believe that teacher immunity is a mediator linking an individual’s perturbations with broader environmental issues and plays a central role in various fundamental aspects of the teaching profession. This concept is closely connected to language teachers’ emotional disposition, instructional efficiency, and professional identity (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). Endeavoring to discover more about LTI, Hiver (2017) incorporated seven subconstructs of teachers into LTI, encompassing; *attitudes to teaching, coping, openness to change, burnout, classroom affectivity, teaching self-efficacy, and resilience*. Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) perceived language teacher immunity as a “double-edged sword” since it could act in two opposite directions; adaptive (positive) and maladaptive (negative) forms. On the positive side, it could lead teachers to higher levels of self-efficacy, emotional regulation, resilience, and openness to change (Noughabi et al., 2020). However, on the negative side, it may lead to teachers’ burnout and attrition by inhibiting their ability to apply innovative approaches in their teaching practices (Rahimpour et al., 2020).

While language teaching in essence is a highly demanding and challenging occupation, teaching English for specific purposes (ESP) in an academic context could be perceived even as a more challenging area for English language teachers (ELT), since teaching ESP requires not only English teaching expertise but also a deep understanding of the specific context in which the language is used. In Iran's academic setting, ESP courses are taught by either English for General Purposes (EGP) instructors or content teachers with little or no collaboration between them (Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2017). Both content teachers and EGP teachers might encounter challenges and critical incidents (CIs), which are stated to be unexpected and clearly memorable incidents occurring inside or outside the classrooms (Brookfield, 1990). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out that one of the challenges in ESP classes is the new domain of the related discipline’s knowledge that teachers are required to obtain. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) note that EGP teachers in ESP classes lack essential awareness of the content and materials, unlike the learners who are educated in the subject matter and wish to apply that knowledge. The hardship of not being omniscient in the class, while learners are experts in the content, is the major challenge for EGP teachers who teach ESP. As Atai and Nejatghanbar (2017) stated (25%) of all the reported CIs that teachers experienced in ESP classes were related to EGP teachers’ lack of knowledge about the content of the disciplines. Furthermore, there are other adversities that face ESP teachers with significant challenges: for instance; ESP teachers’ lack of professional training and ready-made materials to teach (Estaji & Nazari, 2015).

Conversely, while content teachers possess considerable expertise in the field of ESP classes, they may lack the competency in teaching second/foreign languages and the associated methods and techniques. Accordingly, they could encounter the same difficulties and challenges that an untrained language teacher might experience while teaching a language. Nezakatgoo and Behzadpour (2017) explored ESP teaching challenges in the medical field and declared the lack of teachers’ certain language teaching skills and teachers’ unfamiliarity with principles of language testing methods as two of the major challenges that content teachers encounter in teaching ESP. In the other study, Sherkatolabbasi and Zafargandi (2012) compared ESP teaching in different contexts and indicated that the content teachers’ context is the least effective teaching context which stems from the disability of content teachers in transforming technical material in the other language.

Considering the challenging nature of ESP classes, it seems that ESP teachers like EGP teachers may protect themselves with a level of teacher immunity. However, there has been an increasing focus on the study of LTI with particular attention directed towards EGP teachers. (Azari Noughabi, et al., 2020; Dobakhti et al., 2022; Gooran, et al., 2022; Haseli Songhori et al., 2018; Malmir & Bagheri, 2019; Rahimpour, 2020; Rahmati, 2019; Wang, et al., 2022; etc.). Despite the challenging nature of ESP teaching, there has been limited exclusive investigation into ESP teachers. Hence, the current study is an attempt to investigate teacher immunity in ESP teachers and compare teacher immunity in EGP and content teachers who are involved in teaching ESP, to achieve an insight into the issue and identify the dominant immunity types in them. Furthermore, exploring the factors that contribute to triggering those immunities would be aimed in this paper.

Literature Review

Language Teacher Immunity

Attempting to disclose the reasons behind the maintenance and prosperity of some teachers in the practice, while other teachers quit the profession after futile rounds of effort, led Hiver (2015) to conduct a study on Korean EFL teachers. He discovered that the teachers who experienced disturbances such as receiving discouraging evaluations and rejection of teacher initiatives, felt vulnerable and unstable. As a coping mechanism, while encountering disturbing situations, teachers try to reflect on what they experienced and constantly modify their contextual reactions. The memory of these experiences manifests in a part of teachers' professional identities and helps them to cope with future disturbance in a less insecure status. Hiver (2015) addressed this phenomenon as "teacher immunity" (p.225). He introduced this newly specified aspect of teachers' identity in two main forms; the first is adaptive immunity, which helps teachers to flourish in practice, and the other counter form is maladaptive immunity which hinders growth and progress. According to Rahmati et.al (2019), maladaptive immunity acts like chemotherapy, which destroys healthy cells simultaneously with cancer cells. A teacher who is maladaptively immunized, in a conservative way, avoids innovations and adheres to rigid and unenthusiastic practices (Hiver, 2015, 2017; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). Furthermore, the stealthy of maladaptive immunity resulting in teachers' awareness of its development, was warned by Hiver & Dörnyei (2017).

In an attempt to detect LTI emergence, Hiver & Dörnyei (2017) applied complexity theory (CT), to inspect the self-organization of sample teachers. They identified four emerging stages of adopting the process of LTI, including; "triggering, linking, realignment and stabilization" (p.214). They also posited that high-threat events in a classroom may eventuate in the triggering stage. These threats are located on a broad spectrum from adverse students' behavior to punitive measurements and blameworthiness. Such threats, if not trigger teacher immunity, would lead to burnout, exhaustion, and cynicism of teachers. Exposure to triggering factors, L2 teachers strive to devise a coping strategy repertoire to favor themselves in undesirable situations to act productively, this stage is termed the linking stage. During the third phase, the realignment stage, teachers' reaction system functions productively along with the encountered disturbance as a result of previous experiences of frequent adversaries. Finally, in the fourth phase, the stabilization stage, L2 teachers strengthen the new pattern of response to disturbance, and they foster it as a part of their professional identity.

Researchers have strived to uncover possible affinities between LTI and different aspects of teachers' personality traits. Dobakti et al., (2022) scrutinized the influence of affective factors of EFL instructors on LTI. He claimed that emotional intelligence together with neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness characteristics could be considered as remarkable predictors of LTI. Furthermore, another study conducted by Azari Noughabi et al. (2020) proposed that teachers' autonomy, emotional well-being, and level of engagement may also play noteworthy roles in predicting LTI. In a panoramic view, LTI appears to be an inalienable part of language teachers' personalities which is highly impressionable by other professional traits and external factors during its development. In a mutual effect, LTI may also impact teachers' vocational environment by leading them toward selecting a specific manner of reacting to disturbances.

ESP Teachers

According to Dudley-Even and St John (1998), ESP serves the exclusive demands of the learners through the application of the underlying procedures and enterprises that the discipline obliges. On the other hand, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) perceived ESP as an approach that does not encompass any special types of language instructional methodologies or materials in a comparative sense. In a thorough and up-to-date examination of trends, directions, and traditions in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Salamani-Nodoushan (2020) asserts that ESP will persist with its foundation resting on four key elements: (1) Needs analysis, (2) Learning objectives, (3) Materials and methods, and (4) Evaluation.

Nevertheless, the popularization of specialized knowledge is expected to streamline intricate content, making it more accessible to the general public by presenting it in simpler language.

In the comparison of EGP and ESP, Richards and Schmidt (2013) considered ESP as a teaching program with predetermined content and purposes aiming at the needs of a specific group of learners, in contradiction with an EGP course, which aims for general language proficiency regardless of any specific subject or disciplines' needs. The discrepancy between ESP and EGP courses is also evident in the distinct concerns of their respective teachers. As stated by Day and Krzanowski (2011), EGP teachers' focus of concern is on selecting and applying proper materials and methodologies for their classes, while ESP teachers have to cope with subject-specific knowledge problems in addition to addressing all these concerns.

The daunting challenge of EGP teachers, who teach ESP has been reflected in the results of various studies exploring teaching ESP and the challenges faced by its instructors. In one such study, Alsolami (2014) identified and listed several main barriers to EGP teachers teaching ESP including their lack of functional and academic knowledge in the specific subjects, inadequate training, insufficient suitable teaching materials, and limited access to ESP sources of knowledge, such as libraries. Likewise, in another study by Estaji and Nazari (2015), challenges faced by Iranian EGP teachers who teach ESP courses were found to include a lack of specific knowledge like functional academic literacy and field knowledge, inadequate ESP training, and a shortage of suitable teaching materials leading to their reluctance to teach ESP. Experiencing this pressure by EGP teachers teaching ESP might aggravate, considering the fact that students in ESP classes are experts in the specific subjects, though they may not be skillful in the English language, then, in some challenging situations, even competent teachers may experience CIs. Korthagen and Kessels (1999) argue that teachers reflect on and assess experienced CIs they encounter in their classes, and their impact could affect and alter their future behaviors. Undergoing CIs inclines teachers to pause, assess, and scrutinize the lasting effects of the incidents (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Then EGP teachers, as a natural reaction, may instinctively attempt to shield themselves against forthcoming CIs and threatening situations in the future, which in turn, foster the development of their LTI.

Moreover, Isnawati and Rahayu (2023) explored how EGP instructors teaching ESP in higher education deal with their emotional geography while teaching ESP. They defined emotional geography as a concept that refers to the intricate interplay of emotions within the educational setting, exploring how educators navigate and manage emotional connections in their interactions with students, colleagues, and the learning environment. This concept encapsulates the development of emotional attachments and educational insights influenced by varying degrees of emotional distance or proximity during the teaching process, providing a theoretical framework for understanding and enhancing the overall quality of the educational experience. Ultimately, in addressing the complexities related to the physical aspect of emotional geography, an EGP teachers highlighted the necessity for additional efforts to foster physical closeness with students to ensure ongoing engagement in the classroom. The teacher conveyed a sense of feeling adrift upon entering the class, attributing this to the fact that the students were not pursuing English as their primary major. Similarly, Meihami and Krajka (2023) explore the transitional journey of Iranian ESP teachers within the third space. Their research reveals that these teachers grapple with identity challenges in this space, with a prominent aspect being the uncertainty and lack of clarity regarding their sense of belonging and professional roles.

In the case of content teachers, who teach ESP, the classroom would not be supremely peaceful either. While content teachers, who are well-versed in their respective fields of expertise, may possess extensive knowledge of the subject matter they teach, they lack the normal training of language instructors. Consequently, they might struggle with conveying the content effectively in a different language. They could potentially encounter the same challenges faced by untrained language teachers in a language classroom (Nezakatgoo & Behzadpour, 2017). These particularly intense instances could even provoke language teaching insecurity. Hence, considering the challenging context of ESP classes for both EGP and content teachers, the current study endeavors to investigate LTI in these two groups of teachers to answer the following research questions.

Research Question One: What is the dominant LTI type among Iranian EGP instructors teaching ESP courses?

Research Question Two: What is the dominant LTI type among Iranian content instructors teaching ESP courses?

Research Question Three: What are the triggering disturbances of EGP teachers teaching ESP in the Iranian EFL context?

Research Question Four: What are the triggering disturbances of content teachers teaching ESP in the Iranian EFL context?

Research Question Five: What are the coping strategies employed by Iranian EGP teachers to address the triggering disturbances in ESP classes?

Research Question Six: What are the coping strategies employed by Iranian content teachers to address the triggering disturbances in ESP classes?

Methodology

Design of the Study

The current research employs an explanatory mixed-method design. First, Hiver's (2017) questionnaire on language teachers' immunity was customized for ESP instructors, translated into Persian, and subsequently translated back into English. To establish the final Persian version of the questionnaire, two reviewers, one with a Ph.D. in TEFL and the other in translation studies, assessed and provided feedback on the translated questionnaire to ensure the items aligned conceptually with the original version. Ultimately, the researchers' team deliberated on the feedback and formulated the definitive version of the questionnaire. Subsequently, to address the initial two research inquiries and identify the predominant LTI types employed by content teachers and EGP teachers, a cluster analysis was conducted. This analysis categorized ESP instructors into two clusters: those who employ productive LTI and those who adopt maladaptive LTI. Next, in order to address research questions 3 through 7 and delve into the factors that provoke disturbances among EGP instructors and content instructors teaching ESP courses, the researchers devised a semi-structured interview. This questionnaire was developed with consideration for relevant literature and the foundational theory of LTI. Subsequently, a total of 10 ESP teachers, comprising 5 content teachers and 5 EGP teachers, participated in interviews taken 40 to 50 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and subsequently subjected to coding by two experts in TEFL. The reliability assessed through intercoder agreement, was manually calculated to be 0.97. To culminate the analysis, MAXQDA software version 2020 was employed to scrutinize the coded content from the transcriptions. The outcomes yielded visual matrix reports distributing factors which provoke LTI among ESP teachers, as well as the coping strategies they employed.

Participants

The study involved a total of 44 participants, comprising 22 content teachers and 22 EGP teachers who specialized in teaching ESP. A convenient sampling technique was employed in order to select the participants based on their accessibility and availability. All participants were actively engaged in teaching ESP across various subject areas within Iranian universities. The gender distribution among the participants was diverse, and their educational backgrounds included either a Master's (MA) or Doctoral (Ph.D.) degree. Detailed demographic information about the participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1*Participant Demographics (N= 44)*

Demographic characteristic	n	Percentages
Gender		
Male	15	34.09 %
Female	29	65.90%
Experience of teaching ESP		
1-5 years	12	27.27%
6-10 years	16	36.36%
11-15 years	10	22.73%
More than 15 years	6	13.64%
Major of background education		
TEFL/related field to English	22	50.00%
Other major than English or related to English	22	50.00%
The level of background education		
MA/MS	13	29.55%
PhD	31	70.45%

Instrument

Two instruments, including a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, were applied to gather the data. The L2 teachers' immunity questionnaire developed by Hiver (2017) was employed to gather quantitative data. This questionnaire was divided into eight sections. The initial section aimed to gather participant demographic information, encompassing details such as gender, educational background level and major, as well as teaching experience duration in ESP. The remaining seven sections of the questionnaire consisted of 5-point Likert-scale questions, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." These questions were used to explore different facets of LTI: teaching self-efficacy (7 items), burnout (5 items), resilience (5 items), attitude toward teaching (5 items), openness to change in practice (6 items), classroom affectivity (6 items), and coping mechanisms (5 items). The questionnaire was customized for ESP teachers. That is, the phrase English teacher in the original questionnaire was changed to ESP instructor and the whole questionnaire was translated into Persian and then reverse-translated back into English. The intention behind the back translation is to obtain a linguistically accurate and fluent translation that maintains the same understanding of the survey questions. However, relying solely on back translation falls short of adequately gauging the quality of the translation and doesn't guarantee that the translated version captures the same concepts as the original. Following this, two reviewers were involved, one holding a Ph.D. in TEFL and the other in Translation Studies, to evaluate the translated questionnaire. Each reviewer meticulously compared the translated version against its original counterpart. If any issue was identified, they provided comments for that question considering five categories including meaning, missing information, added information, consistency, text/questionnaire conventions, register/wording (improved style, flow of item), grammar/syntax, spelling, and layout. Then, the comments of two reviewers were checked by the researchers and the final briefing session was held to discuss the translation of some psychological terms and finalize the translated version. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire in the target population of this study, Cronbach's alpha value was calculated for the subconstructs of LTI, as well as for the entire questionnaire. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2*Reliability Analysis*

Subconstructs of LTI	Cronbach's alpha value
Teaching self-efficacy	.608
Coping	.691
Resilience	.725
Attitudes to teaching	.611
Openness to change	.650
Burnout	.744
Classroom affectivity	.613
Total	.606

The second instrument to collect the qualitative data was a semi-structured interview which lasted for (40 to 50 minutes). Interview questions were developed through collaborative discussions among researchers considering the background theory of LTI and the related literature, research goals and questions. The initial segment of the interview involved giving participants a concise overview of the interview's topic and ensuring the confidentiality of the gathered data. The subsequent section aimed to uncover the factors contributing to professional stress among ESP teachers. To achieve this, a set of seven questions was formulated. The third section aimed to understand how ESP instructors manage stressful situations in their profession. It explored whether they view stress as an inevitable part of their job, using it as a catalyst for change, or if they prefer to avoid stress and maintain equilibrium. This part consisted of four questions. The fourth section, closely linked to the third, aimed to identify the coping strategies employed by ESP teachers to navigate disturbances. It encompassed six questions in total.

Results

The Dominant Type of LTI among Content and EGP Instructors

The primary and secondary inquiries of this study pertain to the dominant type of LTI among EGP instructors and content instructors engaged in teaching ESP. To uncover responses to these queries, a data cluster analysis was conducted. The most fitting method for this analysis was a two-step cluster analysis. The clustering aimed to categorize participants into two clusters: one encompassing instructors exhibiting high coping skills and low burnout (termed adaptive LTI), and the other containing teachers with low coping abilities and high burnout (termed maladaptive LTI). Burnout and coping constitute the two subcomponents of LTI that function as the criteria for classification. To facilitate the clustering analysis, the five additional subcomponents of LTI that bear substantial predictive role (as outlined by Hiver, 2017), namely teaching attitudes, receptiveness to change, emotional state within the classroom, teaching self-efficacy, and resilience, were designated as clustering variables. As evident from Table 3, the outcome of the cluster analysis was the formation of two clusters, characterized by maximum homogeneity among the components inside the clusters and the maximum heterogeneity between the two clusters.

Table 3*Determined Clusters*

	Cluster 1 (n =21) (47.73%)		Cluster 2 (n =23) (52.27%)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Openness to change	3.34	.71	3.10	.77
Classroom affectivity	2.69	.23	2.41	.91
Teaching self-efficacy	3.88	.59	2.74	.84
Resilience	4.17	1.20	3.97	1.03
Attitude to teaching	4.01	.85	3.58	1.11

Table 3 demonstrates that 21 instructors, constituting 47.73% of the respondents, belong to Cluster 1, while 23 instructors, making up 52.27% of the respondents, are associated with Cluster 2. Additionally, Table 4 presents the *M* and *SD* of the clustering parameters for both clusters. Notably, it is evident that the means of all clustering variables within Cluster 1 surpasses those of Cluster 2.

In this survey, the two subconstructs of LTI; coping and burnout, which were not included in determining cluster types, were considered as criterion variables. They served as confirming indicators of differences between the two clusters. Then, to assess the clusters' discrepancies in relation to the criterion variables, a T-test was employed. The result of this test could be used to indicate significant differences between instructors in two clusters regarding their coping ability and burnout. Table 4 represents this test's result as well as the *M* and *SD* of the two criterion variables.

Table 4*T-test results in comparing burnout and coping of two clusters*

Criterion variable	Cluster	N	Mean	SD	t	p	η^2	df
Coping	Cluster 1	21	4.32	.88	1.73	.011	.515	42
	Cluster 2	23	2.89	1.21				
Burnout	Cluster 1	21	2.31	.58	-1.50	.040	.622	42
	Cluster 2	23	3.63	.64				

Table 4 illustrates that the mean of coping in Cluster 1 is higher than the mean of coping in Cluster 2 ($M=4.32 > M=2.89$). Furthermore, the T-test result showed that the difference between the two clusters is statistically significant $t_{(42)}=1.79, P=0.011 < 0.05, \eta^2=0.515$. Additionally, The mean of instructors' burnout in Cluster 1 is less than the mean of instructors' burnout in Cluster 2 ($M= 2.31 < M=3.36$). This difference in burnout scores is also statistically significant, as evidenced by $(t_{(42)} = -1.50, p=0.04 < 0.05, \eta^2=0.622$. Therefore, these two distinct clusters can be effectively categorized: one comprising instructors with high coping ability and low burnout rates (adaptive LTI), and the other containing instructors with low coping ability and high burnout rates (maladaptive LTI). Once the clusters were formed, an analysis of the participants' demographics, including gender, teaching experience, educational background, and ESP teacher status, was conducted in conjunction with the determined clusters. The summarized breakdown of participants based on these attributes is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Composition of the Two Clusters

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Sum
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Gender			44 (100%)
Male	9 (42.86%)	6 (26.09%)	15 (34.09%)
Female	12 (57.14%)	17 (73.91%)	29 (65.90%)
Experience of teaching			
1-5 years	4 (19.05%)	8 (34.78%)	12 (27.27%)
6-10 years	8 (38.10%)	8 (34.78%)	16 (36.36%)
11-15 years	5 (23.80%)	5 (21.74%)	10 (22.73%)
More than 15 years	4 (19.05%)	2 (8.70%)	6 (13.64 %)
Level of background education			
MS/MS	7 (33.33%)	6 (26.09%)	13 (29.55%)
PhD	14 (66.67%)	17 (73.91%)	31 (70.45%)
ESP teacher type			
EGP teachers who teach ESP	14 (66.67%)	8 (34.78%)	22 (50.00 %)
Content teachers who teach ESP	7 (33.33%)	15 (65.22%)	22 (50.00%)

Table 6 indicates the numbers and percentage of instructors in each cluster. Referring to the data presented in Table 6, it becomes evident that among EGP teachers engaged in teaching ESP, a significant majority, precisely 63.64%, have exhibited adaptive LTI. Conversely, the remainder, accounting for 36.36%, have displayed maladaptive LTI. Thus, it can be inferred that the dominant type of immunity within this cohort of EGP instructors is of the adaptive variety. In the context of content instructors engaged in teaching ESP, the scenario takes a different shape. A notably smaller proportion, specifically 31.82%, falls into the category of possessing adaptive immunity that stands in contrast to the larger segment of these instructors (68.18%) who exhibit maladaptive immunity. Therefore, the dominant type of immunity among this subset of ESP instructors is of a maladaptive nature.

Table 6*Composition of ESP Teachers Along with LTI Clusters*

	Cluster1 (adaptive LTI)	Cluster2 (maladaptive LTI)	Sum
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
EGP teachers who teach ESP	14 (63.64%)	8 (36.36%)	22 (100%)
Content teachers who teach ESP	7 (31.82%)	15 (68.18%)	22 (100%)

Triggering Disturbances and Coping Strategies Employed by ESP Teachers

Questions 3, 4, and 5 of the present study were addressed using the data obtained from conducted interviews. The focus was on analyzing the responses provided by the participants. Specifically, the interviews aimed to explore the triggering factors that lead to the development of LTI in ESP teachers. The information collected from these interviews was then categorized and organized through a coding process. The resulting matrix of codes has been visually presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Triggering Disturbances Resulting LTI in ESP Teachers

Code System	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	SUM
Frequent change of ESP materials							■				1
Lack of rich exams' bank							■			■	2
Teachers' lack of sufficient English language ability						■		■	■	■	4
Teachers' lack of ability to transfer content in English						■		■			2
Students' requirement for focusing only on one skill				■					■		2
Inappropriate tests for students' level			■				■			■	4
Insufficient time			■	■	■		■	■	■		7
Cheating in exams							■				2
Unsupportive educational system		■	■				■				3
Lack of rich ESP exam bank			■								1
Demotivated students		■	■		■	■	■		■		9
Insufficient teaching materials	■		■	■		■	■			■	7
Paltry payment for a highly demanding work	■		■	■	■	■		■		■	10
Teachers' insufficient training and knowledge in content of ESP	■	■		■	■						7
Out of date ESP teaching materials	■			■					■		3
Students' frequent question asking	■				■						2
Oversize class	■									■	2
Heterogeneous class	■		■		■	■			■		5
students' low proficiency level in general English	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	18
SUM	12	8	9	8	14	7	12	5	9	7	91

Figure 1 presents the interview data, with columns 1 to 10 representing individual interviewees. The first five interviewees (1 to 5) are EGP instructors teaching ESP, while the subsequent five (6 to 10) are content instructors engaging in ESP teaching. The rows in the figure correspond to coded instances of triggering disturbances mentioned by the interviewees. By examining the SUM column, we can identify the most recurrently cited factors contributing to disturbances in ESP classes. The prominent disturbing factors in ESP classes, as indicated by the SUM column, include students' low proficiency in general English, inadequate compensation for a demanding job, student demotivation, insufficient time allocated for ESP teaching within a course, lack of proper training for ESP content instruction. Below are three extracted instances (Extracts 1 to 3) that serve to illustrate certain complaints frequently raised by ESP instructors in the interviews.

Extract 1: some of the present students in ESP classes are unable to read, write, and understand even the simplest basic words and sentences. It's quite surprising how they passed general English courses..... sometimes considerable time in a class is wasted to help students with poor general English to catch up, other students get bored or distracted by the frequent questions of these students (Interviewee 5).

Extract 2: During years of teaching ESP, I have dealt with lots of demotivated students, they just see ESP as a compulsory course that needs to be passed. Many times, they have questioned me why they have to learn specialized English when they are sure that they would not use it in the future. And focuses some of them are so demotivated in the classes because they are very poor in English and this disability makes class tedious and hard to bear (Interviewee 2).

Extract 3: ESP classes in bachelor are 32 hours, it's equal to 2 study units. During this short time, an ESP teacher has to cover all the sections of the ascertained book. With low level of students' general English, causing very slow pace in class and need of step-by-step help of a teacher to students, it is a very hard job.....I doubt the fruitfulness of this compact timing, it puts pressure on both students and teachers. (Interviewee 9).

Furthermore, certain disturbances, specifically the inadequacy of teachers' English language proficiency and their challenges in effectively conveying content in English, were exclusively raised by content instructors during the interviews. This indicates that content instructors uniquely identify and express these issues as significant hurdles within the context of teaching ESP. Extract 4 serves as a compelling example of the disturbances reported by content teachers.

Extract 4: I'm very good at English, in fact, I got my Ph.D. degree in Australia, but when it comes to teaching English, I get stuck, I always try to adjust my language and accent to be intelligible, but it still sometimes doesn't work..... when it fails to transfer the lesson in English, I find no other way than talking and translating in Farsi. Some classes are translation classes than ESP. and wonderfully most students are more satisfied with these classes (Interviewee 8).

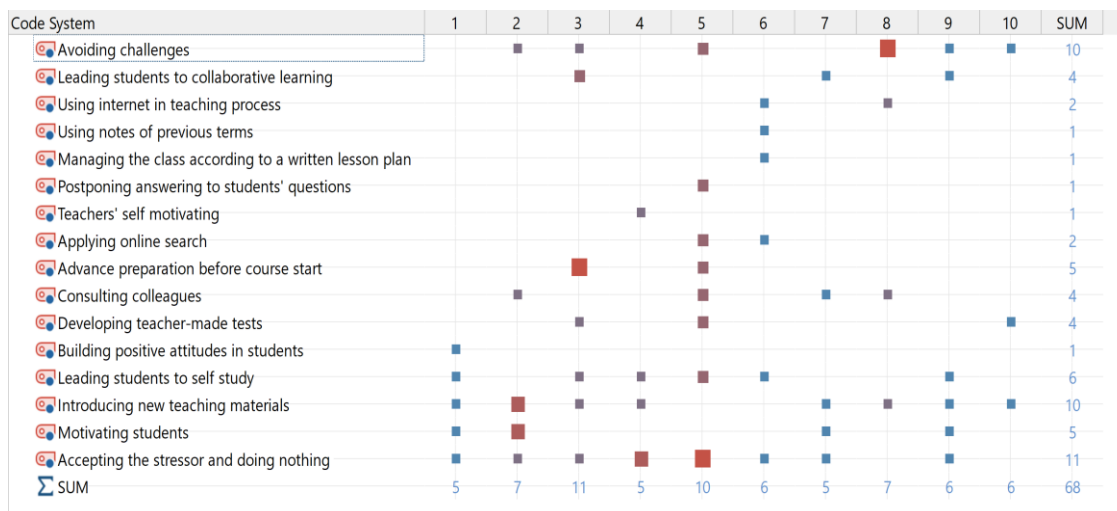
In contrast, EGP teachers identified a lack of content knowledge as a disruptive issue within ESP classes. This specific concern was raised exclusively by EGP teachers, indicating its relevance and impact on the teaching environment for ESP.

Extract 5: When the first time an ESP class in a specific field is handed to me, which I haven't taught its specific English before, I should spend a long time preparing myself to get the minimum knowledge of the field. Most of the time I just study the determined ESP book. Sometimes I find the meaning of the terms and jargon in the book but later in the class I understand that what I found was not even close to the intended meaning, it makes me feel bad at the class. When it happens, I feel students underestimate my literacy in English. Once it happened in an ESP class in the physical education field, in a session students ask me frequent questions about the names of different macules, I could answer less than half of the questions correctly. At that moment I felt my body was melting... (Interviewee 1).

As depicted in Figure 1, certain triggering disturbances are prevalent among most ESP teachers, irrespective of their categorization as content or EGP teachers. However, there are also triggering disturbances that are distinctly associated with teachers' expertise. For example, the lack of content knowledge is identified among EGP instructors, while the challenge of conveying content in English is exclusive to content instructors. Figure 2 portrays the coping strategies that were employed by the interviewed EGP instructors to address these triggering disturbances. The layout of the figure maintains the same number of columns as presented in Figure 1, corresponding to the individual interviewees.

Figure 2

Coping Strategies Adopted by ESP Teachers



Based on the information presented in Figure 2, the coping mechanisms that are most commonly utilized to manage stress-inducing factors within ESP classes include: embracing the stressor without taking any action, incorporating fresh teaching materials, and evading challenges by declining situations that could result in challenges. Extracts 6 and 7 provide examples illustrating the utilization of these coping strategies, with Extract 6 highlighting the utilization of new teaching materials and Extract 7 exemplifying the avoidance of challenging circumstances that may lead to unpleasantness.

Extract 6: I always search on the internet to find short and rich materials to make up for the shortage of the ESP book. These short passages are more up-to-date and interesting to the students..... sometimes I replace some sections of the ESP book with other printed materials (Interviewee 2)

Extract 7: After a long time of teaching when a student starts to ask a series of questions, I can tell whether those are real questions or are a trap to challenge me. I would not let the questioning student drag me into the trap. I tell them to ask the questions later or as a counterattack I require them to search for the answer as an assignment.

Discussion

The focus of the present study is on the dominant type of LTI among Iranian EGP and content instructors who teach ESP, disturbances that trigger LTI in ESP instructors and coping strategies that ESP instructors adopt against those disturbances. The survey results indicated that 63.64% of EGP instructors who teach ESP have developed adaptive LTI, while 36.36% of them have exhibited maladaptive LTI. Therefore, the dominant form of immunity in EGP instructors who teach ESP is adaptive. On the other hand, among content instructors teaching ESP, 31.82% indicated to possess adaptive immunity which was lower than the percentage of these instructors with maladaptive immunity (68.18%). Thus, the dominant type of immunity in content teachers who teach ESP is found to be maladaptive. Likewise, in a study by Saydam (2019) at a Turkish University, the investigation centered on the immunity of university teachers engaged in teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) within two departments, namely basic language and modern language. The outcomes of the study revealed that a significant number of teachers exhibited a high degree of productive immunity. Furthermore, the research delved into the potential influence of demographic characteristics on instructors' levels of immunity. The results indicated that factors such as teachers' educational background, age, and years of experience did not directly impact their levels of immunity.

In the present study, the process of clustering the burnout of content and EGP instructors was also established. Instructors displaying productive LTI traits, identified as cluster 1, exhibited a notably lower burnout rate compared to instructors with maladaptive LTI characteristics (cluster 2). As posited by Pedrabissi et al. (1993), burnout represents a psychological state that corresponds to affective fatigue in an individual's psychological reserves, coupled with a sense of powerlessness. Burnout is also defined as a "syndrome resulting from the experience of prolonged stress" (Maslach and Jackson 1981 cited in Canbay & Sönmez, 2023). Similar to the findings of the present study, Saricoban and Kirmizi (2021) in studying LTI among L2 teachers claimed that language teachers with adaptive and positive immunity display a lower level of burnout. In fact, burnout is indicative of a flawed work environment within a profession or institution, while personal characteristics also play a role in its emergence (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2011). Therefore, the significant burnout experienced by ESP instructors, a key factor in their developing maladaptive LTI, could influence both the characteristics of the instructors themselves and the context of teaching specialized subjects (ESP). Sek (2009) identified the official reward system as a major factor driving teachers toward burnout. This stems from the expectation for teachers to achieve more despite receiving the same or reduced external rewards. In the case of Iranian ESP instructors, paltry payment for a highly demanding job emerged as the second most frequently cited factor causing disruptions in both groups of instructors. Furthermore, this issue also disturbed EGP instructors. In fact, both groups of ESP instructors highlighted that the payment for teaching an ESP class isn't significantly different despite its higher demands compared to teaching an EGP class.

Looking at the flip side of burnout, the concept of coping stands as a key element in determining LTI. In the process of clustering, the coping strategies of ESP teachers in both clusters were identified. The average coping ability of the ESP teachers with positive LTI (productive) was notably higher than that of content teachers with maladaptive LTI. To comprehensively understand the coping concept, it's necessary to examine the strategies that teachers employ to handle disturbances in educational settings. According to Skinner et al.'s (2003) classification, teachers' coping strategies can be grouped into problem-solving, support-seeking, avoidance, distraction, and positive cognitive restructuring, all aimed at dealing with stressors. The coping strategies adopted by ESP teachers, as illustrated in Figure 2, seem to align well with this categorization. For instance, problem-solving strategies for ESP teachers involve fostering collaborative learning, self-study, and introducing innovative teaching materials. Seeking guidance from colleagues is indicative of a support-seeking approach, while evading challenges reflects an avoidance strategy. Delaying responses to students serves as a distraction strategy, and self-motivation showcases positive cognitive restructuring among ESP teachers. Notably, ESP teachers frequently mentioned adopting passive-avoidance strategies such as accepting stressors and avoiding challenges. Interestingly, this contrasts with the assertion by Dick and Wagner (2001) that educators employing passive-avoidance coping methods in stressful situations are more susceptible to

burnout. The findings of the present study diverge from this perspective. EGP teachers who teach ESP with productive LTI and exhibit lower burnout rates frequently emphasized the practice of accepting stressors intensely and more often.

The other finding resulted from analysis of the interviews is that there are some common disturbing factors in both groups of ESP teachers. These factors include students' low proficiency in general English, paltry payment for a highly demanding job, demotivated students, and lack of time to adequately teach ESP during a course. Skaalvik and Skaalvik, (2011) have previously highlighted how scarcity of available time can lead to emotional stress and increased workload for teachers. Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers feel frustrated due to time limitations in ESP classes.

Furthermore, EGP teachers who instruct ESP raised specific concerns that were not mentioned by other educators. One such concern pertains to the inadequate training in the content of ESP teaching. This finding stands in line with previous studies that have identified challenges faced by EGP teachers when teaching ESP, as seen in the works of Alsolami (2014), Estaji, and Nazari (2015). Some other disturbing factors including teachers' lack of appropriate level of language proficiency and teachers' lack of ability to transfer content in English exclusively relate to the content teachers who teach ESP. It seems perfectly expected while most of the content teachers who teach ESP have not been trained in English language teaching, as Nezakatgoo and Behzadpour (2017) mentioned, these teachers probably face all the problems that an untrained language teacher might encounter in an EFL/ESL class.

In the same vein, Rahmati et al. (2019) conducted a study to explore the growth of LTI in in-service EFL teachers working in public high schools. Through the utilization of semi-structured interviews, the study identified several key factors that triggered the emergence of LTI within the participating educators. These triggers encompassed elements such as diminished self-confidence, students' lack of motivation, inadequate income, resource limitations, insufficient time for English instruction, parental expectations, and unfavorable attitudes toward the English language.

Conclusion and Implications

The current research revealed that the majority of content teachers who instruct ESP exhibit maladaptive LTI, while most EGP teachers teaching ESP display adaptively immunized LTI. These immunity patterns seem to stem from the frequent exposure to stressful situations in the teaching profession and the ability to effectively cope with them, as opposed to succumbing to exhaustion, cynicism, and burnout. EGP teachers, despite encountering challenges such as a limited grasp of the discipline's content compared to their well-informed students, appear to have developed adaptive immunity. This adaptation can be attributed to four key features of productive teacher immunity: specificity, memory, adaptability, and durability, which are evident in their professional characteristics. Specificity enables instructors to identify and address specific instances of stress, allowing them to select appropriate coping strategies from their repertoire. Consequently, EGP teachers may adeptly employ these coping strategies while teaching ESP. The memory feature of productive immunity highlights the role of past encounters with challenging situations (CIs) in shaping LTI. EGP teachers benefit from their prior experiences with disturbances, which contribute to the development of adaptive LTI in them. These experiences may not only originate from ESP classes but also from general English classes, as both contexts can present challenges like large and diverse student populations. The durability feature suggests that once productive immunity is established in EGP teachers, it remains effective while teaching ESP classes. This continuity of immunity can be advantageous. Additionally, language teacher training for EGP significantly shapes immunity, equipping teachers with strategies transferable to ESP classes. In contrast, content teachers teaching ESP in Iranian universities lack this essential language teacher training. To help content teachers develop productive immunity, providing them with this specific language teacher training could be a viable solution, addressing concerns such as their inability to convey content effectively in English, as revealed in interviews.

In this present study, an attempt was also made to gain insight into the factors that trigger disturbances in ESP teachers, potentially leading to the development of LTI. Some common sources of discomfort, which were mentioned by both groups of ESP teachers (such as inadequate compensation

for a demanding job and a lack of sufficient time to teach ESP during a course), are connected to issues that can only be addressed or alleviated through innovative decisions made by educational policymakers or high-level administrators and course developers. On the other hand, some triggering factors that are specific to each group of language teachers (such as the lack of content knowledge in EGP teachers or the inability to effectively convey content in English in content teachers) could be resolved through collaboration between an EGP teacher and a content teacher. Collaborative teaching, characterized by the cooperation of content teachers and EGP teachers before, during, and after an ESP course, is a potential solution to redeem the stress caused by deficiencies in both groups of teachers while practicing ESP.

Considering that teachers who possess productive immunity exhibit and maintain positive motivation, a strong commitment to teaching, a willingness to innovate, and emotional resilience even in the face of challenges, supporting teachers in acquiring productive immunity could yield substantial benefits for teachers, students, teaching practices, and the overall educational system. One potential approach to providing this support involves educating teachers about their maladaptive immunity and the counterproductive consequences it can yield. This awareness can prompt teachers to delve into their negative emotions, past experiences, and the underlying factors contributing to them. This process of self-inquiry represents the initial step toward change for maladaptive immunized teachers, leading them to contemplate how they might have responded differently to the various challenges they encountered. This study can serve as a small but meaningful contribution towards helping teachers, especially ESP instructors, develop this awareness. However, awareness alone may not be sufficient. Introducing effective strategies is a valuable aid in assisting language instructors in cultivating positive immunity.

While raising awareness about maladaptive immunity and its role in causing disturbances is crucial for helping teachers develop adaptive immunity, it is not a standalone solution. Teaching is a complex process embedded within a multifaceted system influenced by various factors. In addition to teachers, there are other stakeholders who can also benefit from this awareness, including macro-level policymakers, educational administrators, curriculum developers, and teacher trainers. This awareness may prompt them to create more conducive teaching environments that alleviate the pressure on teachers and offer more effective pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. Several limitations constrained this study. One of these limitations was the relatively small number of participants, which impacts the extent to which the findings can be generalized. It is advisable for future research to include a larger and more diverse sample of ESP teachers from various educational contexts. Additionally, this study solely utilized two data collection methods. Future research endeavors could benefit from employing a wider array of data-gathering instruments.

The expansion of technology in the current century has made a sudden shift in public tendency from face-to-face instruction to online-based learning, ESP classes are not any exception. Teaching ESP through the Internet and online platforms might impose some new requirements or/and pressure on ESP instructors. While LTI in online classes has been examined, the issue has not been addressed in the ESP context exclusively, so studying ESP LIT in an online-based context would be recommended for future studies. Since, burnout is likely influenced by the specific school and subject context. Given that burnout, along with coping strategies, plays a pivotal role in categorizing teachers into productively or maladaptively immunized groups, it is reasonable to infer that LTI could also be subject-dependent. This consideration becomes particularly relevant for ESP teachers, especially EGP teachers who instruct ESP, as they are required to teach ESP in connection with various subjects. Therefore, it would be valuable to explore the concept of LTI among ESP teachers in relation to different subject areas.

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