

Moderating Effects of Demographic Variables on the Relationship Between Stress, Burnout, and PsyCap in Chinese EFL Teachers

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Abstract:

This study examines current status of job stress, burnout, and Psychological Capital (PsyCap) among Chinese EFL teachers from various higher institutions, focusing on demographic variations and relationships between these variables. An online survey was conducted to collect data from 297 EFL teachers across various Chinese institutions between July and October 2023. The data analysis involved ANOVA, regression, mediation, and moderation techniques, utilizing SPSS 26 and SmartPLS for statistical processing. The findings show that Chinese EFL teachers experience moderately high levels of stress, burnout, and PsyCap, with PsyCap being lower than stress and burnout. Regarding the profile-based variance, teachers with less experience report the highest stress, while those with over 20 years' experience exhibit the most burnout. Teachers with 11-20 years of experience show the highest PsyCap levels. Those with doctorates experience the highest stress and burnout, while those with bachelor's degrees report the highest hope and self-efficacy. Private school teachers exhibit significantly higher stress and burnout than public school teachers, with lower hope and resilience. The mediation analysis reveals strong correlations: stress and burnout are positively linked, while PsyCap significantly mediates the correlation between stress and burnout. The moderation analysis revealed that higher education moderates the relationship between PsyCap and burnout, strengthening PsyCap's protective effect, and also moderates the relationship between stress and PsyCap, helping individuals maintain their psychological resources under stress. Additionally, work experience moderates the relationship between stress and both burnout and PsyCap, preserving resources in stressful situations.

Keywords:

Chinese EFL Teachers, Job Stress, Job Burnout, Psychological Capital (PsyCap)

1. Introduction

Due to the high demands and difficulty of tasks in higher education, stress among educators and researchers has been increasing [1], leading to a growing concern on teachers' well-being [2]. This concern has sparked public discussions about the stress associated with teaching [3]. Continuous work stress not only causes psychological issues like anxiety, tension, and depression but also depletes personal resources, contributing to job burnout [4]. Teacher burnout has escalated globally over the past three decades [5,6]. It has been argued that Chinese teachers facing increasing pressure due to high demands and workload [7,8].

In the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the risk of burnout and attrition is particularly high [9]. The turnover rate for EFL teachers is notably higher than for other subject areas [9,10], further emphasizing the need for empirical research on burnout in EFL contexts [7,11]. Given China's large population of English learners and its significant number of EFL teachers, researching burnout in this setting is crucial, as Chinese EFL teachers face unique challenges.

Earlier scholars proposed various theories and models to better investigate the connections between job characteristics, employee well-being, and workplace outcomes. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, developed by Bakker et al. [12] and Demerouti et al. [13], divides the work environment into two major categories: job demands and job resources, each of which is linked to specific workplace performance in distinct ways. Both the Conservation of Resources theory [14,15] and the JD-R model [13,16] highlight the critical role of adequate and appropriate resources in alleviating the negative effects of job stress on burnout [17,18]. Internal resources, such as PsyCap, are just as crucial as external factors like social support in mitigating teacher burnout. PsyCap, an essential concept rooted in positive organizational behavior, encompasses four essential elements: self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and hope, which collectively promote constructive behaviors within organizations [19]. PsyCap is a type of capital that goes beyond traditional forms such as human and social capital [20].

Luthans and Youssef [19] identified PsyCap as a vital factor in alleviating job burnout. Among Chinese educators, Cheung et al. [21] observed that PsyCap moderated the connections between emotional labor, job burnout, and job satisfaction. Similarly, Zhang et al. [22] demonstrated that PsyCap reduced burnout by leveraging coping styles as a mediator, a finding corroborated by studies such as Asheghi et al. [23], Liu et al. [24], and Zhu et al. [25]. The JD-R model strengthens PsyCap's protective role by claiming that job resources reduce the impact of job demands, improving both individual and organizational outcomes [26]. Consistent with this perspective, Pu et al. [27] emphasized PsyCap as an essential internal resource for combating job burnout effectively.

To date, little empirical study has been done to examine PsyCap's potential function in the connection between job stress and job burnout in among Chinese college EFL teachers, despite the fact that it has been found to buffer job burnout. Some research suggests that private sector employees may face more stress due to high customer-service orientation [28]. However, there is a gap in research regarding the differences in job stress and burnout between Chinese EFL teachers in private and public schools. Therefore, to go beyond the findings of earlier research, the present study investigated the status quo and relationships between job stress, job burnout, and PsyCap among Chinese EFL teachers in higher institutions. The study's findings will help to avoid

and lessen job burnout among Chinese EFL teachers. They may also offer valuable insights to managers and organizations looking to improve PsyCap among their staff members and lessen the detrimental impacts of burnout.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Job Stress

Job stress, first introduced by American psychologist Cannon [29], has been widely studied over time. In teaching, it refers to the experience of negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, frustration, tension, and depression, resulting from various job-related pressures. These stressors can include heavy workloads, challenging student behavior, administrative demands, and inadequate resources, which can significantly affect teachers' well-being and job performance [30]. Factors contributing to job stress include gender [31], organizational elements [32], and social dynamics [33]. For example, the quality of interpersonal relationships can significantly affect teachers' stress levels [34]. Among these, the heavy workload in universities is a significant concern, exacerbated by the shortage of teaching resources amidst rapid institutional growth [35]. This study focuses on organizational factors such as workload, role ambiguity, role conflict, job insecurity, and interpersonal conflict [36].

2.2. Job Burnout

Maslach and Jackson [37] defined burnout as a psychological syndrome marked by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, which results from extended exposure to work-related stress. The three main symptoms of burnout identified by Maslach are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal achievement. In addition, burnout in teachers can be caused by insufficient organizational support, which undermines their intrinsic motivation for professional growth [38]. Mahmoudi et al. [6] has shown that increasing social capital can effectively prevent burnout in physical education teachers. Furthermore, enhancing teachers' professional resilience [39] and promoting their overall well-being [40] are crucial approaches to mitigating burnout. Teachers' PsyCap is also known to influence their levels of burnout [41].

2.3. Psychological Capital

Psychological capital (PsyCap), a concept derived from positive psychology and Positive Organizational Behavior [42], is defined as an individual's positive psychological state characterized by four components: (1) self-efficacy, the confidence to take on challenging tasks and put in the necessary effort; (2) optimism, the belief in success now and in the future; (3) hope, the perseverance toward goals and the ability to adjust strategies when needed; and (4) resilience, the capacity to recover and grow stronger in the face of adversity [19]. Research shows that higher PsyCap is linked to positive outcomes such as improved job satisfaction, performance, organizational commitment, lower stress and burnout, and enhanced well-being. Organizations can enhance positive behavior by developing PsyCap through training, support, and fostering a positive work environment [21; 27; 43; 44].

2.4. Job Stress and Job Burnout

Notably, burnout is more likely to occur in people who often deal with stressors, exhaustion, annoyance, emotions of inefficacy, discomfort, and limitations [45].

Teacher burnout has been found to be significantly predicted by work-related stress [46-48]. Teachers who have fewer coping resources are also more susceptible to burnout [49]. The JD-R model suggests that high job demands, such as excessive workload, time pressure, and emotional demands, can significantly increase job stress [50]. This happens when individuals perceive that the demands placed on them exceed their available resources, including coping abilities and social support. Consequently, long-time exposure to high levels of job stress without sufficient resources can lead to burnout, which is marked by physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion as a result of ongoing work-related stress [51]. Building on this, we hypothesize that a positive relationship exists between job stress and job burnout among Chinese EFL teachers.

2.5. *PsyCap and Job Burnout*

Numerous studies have demonstrated that PsyCap, as a positive psychological resource, has a significant impact on individuals' attitudes and behaviors [52; 53]. The JD-R model predicts that PsyCap will have a negative correlation with job burnout and is regarded as a personal resource that works similarly to job resources. A recently study by Peng, Zhang, and their colleagues [54] found that PsyCap negatively predicted depersonalization, a key component of burnout. Furthermore, research conducted among Chinese workers has found a positive relationship between various PsyCap components, such as efficacy and resilience, and psychological well-being [55]. As a result, PsyCap is anticipated to have a positive impact on psychological health and work-related outcomes. Building on these findings, we propose that PsyCap is strongly and negatively associated with job burnout among EFL teachers.

2.6. *The Role of PsyCap in Connection Between Stress and Burnout*

According to the Cognitive Theory of Stress, Lazarus and Folkman [56] highlighted that while an individual's emotions are influenced by stressful events, the process of evaluating and coping with stress plays a crucial role in shaping the response. PsyCap, which is a positive mindset, helps individuals respond positively to workplace stress [57]. In a study by Zhu et al. [25], the mediating role of PsyCap was explored in the relationship between stress and job burnout among female nurses with two children. The results indicated that the relationship between stress and burnout was partially mediated by PsyCap. According to similar studies, PsyCap mediates in a number of situations [23; 25]. Thus, it's critical to investigate how PsyCap can lessen the negative impacts of occupational stress on Chinese EFL instructors' burnout. Additionally, knowing how PsyCap, job stress, and burnout are related might help school administrators create focused interventions to lessen burnout. Therefore, the study's hypothesis is that PsyCap mediates the link between EFL teachers' burnout and job stress. The ideas of stress, burnout, and PsyCap are related in a number of ways according to the examined literature; the specifics are displayed in figure 1.

Previous studies have investigated the antecedents, consequences or roles of job stress, job burnout and PsyCap from various perspectives, many of them provided insights into how demographic factors, such as age, gender, and education level can influence job these variables. However, research on EFL teachers' stress is relatively rare compared to research focusing on EFL learners' stress [58]. Additionally, profile-based variance in stress, burnout, and PsyCap has been explored with inconsistent results across demographic variables such as gender [59; 60], age [61; 62]. Furthermore, previous research has indicated that there is no significant overall

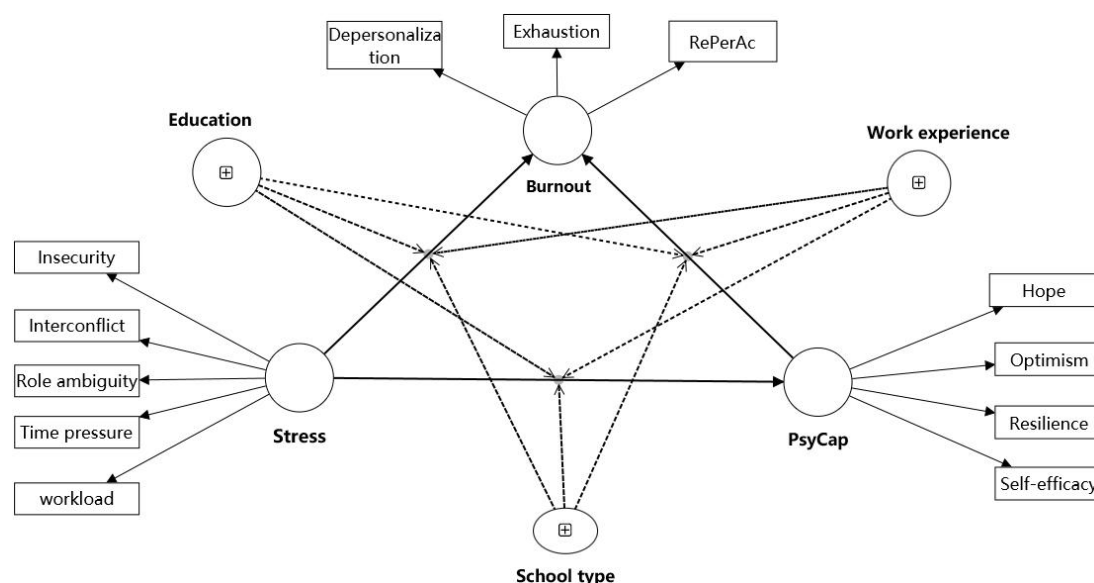
difference in total stress levels between public and private sector employees [63]. However, other research indicates that private sector employees may face higher levels of stress than their public sector counterparts, largely due to the intense customer-service expectations inherent in their roles [28]. This warrants further research on variables such as work experience, educational attainment and school types, with a specific focus on the moderating effects of these demographic variables on the relationships between stress, burnout, and PsyCap. This research will consider these gaps as opportunities to investigate how demographic factors may influence the outcomes of job stress, job burnout and PsyCap, and their connections. Figure 1 illustrates the research framework, outlining the three key variables of the study. Specifically, this study will answer the following questions:

What is the assessment of the stress, burnout and PsyCap levels among Chinese EFL teachers in higher institutions?

Is there a significant profile-based difference in the level of stress, burnout and PsyCap levels?

Will PsyCap significantly mediate the connection between job stress and burnout among Chinese EFL teachers in higher institutions?

Will demographic information significantly moderate the connection between job stress, burnout and PsyCap among Chinese EFL teachers in higher institutions?



Note: "RePerAc" refers to "Reduced personal accomplishment".

Figure 1. Research paradigm.

3. Method

This study utilized a survey methodology to investigate the current status and profile-based differences in stress, burnout, and PsyCap levels among EFL instructors in Chinese colleges. Additionally, it used regression and SEM analysis to explore the relationships between these variables, comparing different groups of instructors to identify potential variations.

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were randomly selected from various higher education institutions (colleges and universities) across different cities in China. A total of 297 valid responses were obtained through an online platform. The detailed information of the participants is shown in Table 1. The gender distribution among respondents in the EFL teacher survey revealed a mix of male (34.3%) and female (65.7%) participants. In terms of age group, respondents are categorized into age groups (25-40, 41-55, and 56 or older), with the majority falling in the 25-40 range (42.4%). The working experience aspect revealed diverse experience levels among EFL teachers, with 45.5% having 1-10 years, 39.4% with 11-20 years, and 15.2% boasting 21 or more years. Education attainment distribution reveals that respondents hold Bachelor's (14.8%), Master's (56.2%), or Doctor's (29.0%) degrees. The distribution between private (24.2%) and public (75.8%) school teachers, illustrates the diverse landscape of educational settings.

Table 1. Respondent Profiles.

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	102	34.3
	Female	195	65.7
Age	25-40	126	42.4
	41-55	84	28.3
	≥56	87	29.3
Work Experience	1-10 yrs	135	45.5
	11-20 yrs	117	39.4
	≥ 21 yrs	45	15.2
Education Attainment	Bachelor	114	38.4
	Master	150	50.5
	Doctor	33	11.1
School type	Private	72	24.2
	Public	225	75.8

3.2. Measurements

This research utilized a comprehensive questionnaire, which was structured into two sections. The first section gathered demographic details from participants, while the second section comprised three 4-point Likert scales (from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). These scales included the EFL Teacher Job Stress Scale, the EFL Teacher Job Burnout Scale, and the Psychological Capital Scale. The questionnaire was distributed to Chinese EFL teachers through an online survey platform (<https://www.wjx.cn/>), allowing for efficient data collection across a wide participant base.

EFL Teacher Job Stress Scale

The EFL Teacher Job Stress Scale, derived from the College Working Stress Scale (CWSS: [64]), offers a thorough evaluation of employee well-being across multiple dimensions. This 25-item, 5-factor tool assesses occupational stress among Chinese EFL teachers, focusing on aspects such as role ambiguity (5 items), role conflict (5 items), job insecurity (5 items), and interpersonal conflict (5 items). The scale exhibits excellent internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = 0.88$). Previous research in China has also demonstrated its strong internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = 0.83$ – 0.91) and supported its construct validity [65].

EFL Teacher Job Burnout Scale

EFL teacher burnout was assessed using a 15-item scale, which was adapted from a Likert scale initially developed by Aboagye et al. (2018) for use in China. This scale comprises three subscales: (1) emotional exhaustion, (2) depersonalization, and (3) reduced personal accomplishment. The scale has been widely used in previous research, and studies by Aboagye et al. [66] and Qiao & Schaufeli [67] have confirmed the reliability ($\alpha = 0.846$) and validity of this instrument.

Psychological Capital Scale

This study employed a questionnaire adapted from Luthans et al. [57] to assess Psychological Capital among Chinese EFL instructors. The questionnaire encompasses four dimensions: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism, with each dimension measured by 6 related statements. Respondents rated their agreement using a 4-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated and pilot-tested, achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.825, before being distributed to the target sample of Chinese EFL instructors.

3.3. Data Analysis

The study employed a comprehensive multi-dimensional statistical approach to explore the relationships between work stress, burnout, and PsyCap among Chinese EFL teachers. Descriptive statistics were computed using SPSS 25 to analyze the distribution of each variable. Group differences were examined through ANOVA, focusing on variations across subgroups based on work experience, educational attainment, and school type. To investigate the mediating role of PsyCap in the relationship between stress and burnout, regression analysis was performed, followed by verification through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using Smart PLS 4.0. This methodology allowed for a detailed exploration of how PsyCap interacts with stress and burnout, offering a robust analysis of the factors influencing teacher well-being.

4. Results

4.1. Assessment of the Respondents' Job Stress, Burnout and PsyCap

Table 2 provides a descriptive analysis of stress, burnout, and PsyCap among Chinese EFL teachers. Interpersonal conflict is the most significant stressor ($M=3.48$, $SD=0.33$), followed by workload ($M=3.37$, $SD=0.38$), with overall stress averaging moderately high ($M=3.36$, $SD=0.31$). For burnout, depersonalization ranks highest ($M=3.35$, $SD=0.36$), followed by reduced personal accomplishment ($M=3.31$, $SD=0.42$), and exhaustion ($M=3.29$, $SD=0.33$), with an overall average of $M=3.32$ ($SD=0.31$). Regarding PsyCap, resilience leads ($M=3.25$, $SD=0.37$), followed by self-efficacy ($M=3.19$, $SD=0.38$), hope ($M=3.07$, $SD=0.42$), and optimism ($M=3.06$, $SD=0.37$), with a moderate overall level ($M=3.14$, $SD=0.32$). While stress and burnout levels are moderately high, PsyCap appears slightly lower.

Table 2. Assessment of stress, Burnout and PsyCap of Chinese EFL teachers.

Dimension	Indicators	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Stress	Workload	297	2.35	4	3.37	0.38
	Role ambiguity	297	1.90	4	3.29	0.43
	Time pressure	297	2.20	3.91	3.30	0.44
	Interpersonal conflict	297	2.60	4	3.48	0.33
	Insecurity	297	2.00	4	3.35	0.38

	Average Stress	297	2.50	3.88	3.36	0.31
Burnout	Exhaustion	297	2.30	3.9	3.29	0.33
	Depersonalization	297	2.20	3.92	3.35	0.36
	Reduced Personal Accomplishment	297	2.10	4	3.31	0.42
	Average Burnout	297	2.50	3.87	3.32	0.31
PsyCap	Hope	297	2.30	4	3.07	0.42
	Self-efficacy	297	2.36	4	3.19	0.38
	Resilience	297	2.00	4	3.25	0.37
	Optimism	297	2.20	4	3.06	0.37
	Average PsyCap	297	2.43	3.88	3.14	0.32

Note. The scale categorizes involvement levels as follows: 3.51–4.00 as "Highly Involved," 2.51–3.50 as "Involved," 1.51–2.50 as "Somewhat Involved," and 1.00–1.50 as "Not Involved."

4.2. Demographic Variations of Stress, Burnout and PsyCap

To examine differences in stress, burnout, and PsyCap levels based on work experience, education attainment, and school type, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed using SPSS. The analysis was conducted separately for each variable to provide a detailed assessment of potential variations.

4.2.1. Work Experience-Based Difference in the Assessment of the Stress, Burnout and PsyCap Level

Table 3 summarizes the impact of work experience-based variations on stress, burnout, and PsyCa among EFL teachers, categorized into three groups: "1-10 years," "11-20 years," and "over 20 years." Participants with 1–10 years of work experience reported the highest levels of stress, insecurity, interpersonal conflict, workload, and time pressure. The lowest levels were reported by teachers with more than 21 years of experience, while those with 11–20 years of experience showed moderate levels in these areas. The highest degrees of exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment were observed among teachers with over 20 years of job experience. There were no discernible variations between the burnout groups of responders with 1–10 years and those with 11–20 years. Furthermore, respondents who had between 11 and 20 years of experience reported the greatest PsyCap levels, followed by those who had between 1 and 10 years, while those who had more than 21 years of experience reported the lowest PsyCap levels.

Table 3. Summary of Work Experience-Based Variations in Stress, Burnout, and PsyCap.

Measures	Work experience(M±SD)			F	p	post hoc
	1(n=135)	2(n=117)	3(n=45)			
Workload	3.47±0.34	3.33±0.37	3.14±0.38	15.261	0.000	1>2>3
Role ambiguity	3.34±0.35	3.29±0.48	3.13±0.47	4.179	0.016	1>3;2>3
Time pressure	3.47±0.33	3.24±0.49	2.92±0.27	35.16	0.000	1>2>3
Interpersonal conflict	3.58±0.26	3.42±0.37	3.34±0.32	13.856	0.000	1>2;1>3
Insecurity	3.45±0.35	3.29±0.44	3.20±0.22	10.189	0.000	1>2;1>3
Average Stress	3.46±0.25	3.31±0.34	3.15±0.26	22.342	0.000	1>2>3
Exhaustion	3.26±0.35	3.27±0.32	3.40±0.24	3.475	0.032	1<3;2<3
Depersonalization	3.31±0.37	3.31±0.37	3.61±0.19	14.079	0.000	1<3;2<3
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	3.31±0.35	3.23±0.47	3.52±0.39	8.343	0.000	1<3;2<3
Average Burnout	3.29±0.31	3.27±0.33	3.51±0.21	11.003	0.000	1<3;2<3
Hope	3.09±0.42	3.09±0.44	2.99±0.38	1.141	0.321	

Measures	Work experience(M±SD)			F	p	post hoc
	1(n=135)	2(n=117)	3(n=45)			
Self-efficacy	3.12±0.34	3.37±0.36	2.93±0.30	31.04	0.000	2>1>3
Resilience	3.23±0.34	3.34±0.37	3.07±0.37	10.127	0.000	2>1>3
Optimism	3.05±0.41	3.11±0.37	2.95±0.24	2.986	0.052	
Average PsyCap	3.12±0.32	3.23±0.31	2.98±0.23	10.796	0.000	2>1>3

Note: "1"="1-10 years", "2"="11-20 years", "3"="over 20 years", p<0.05.

4.2.2. Education Attainment-Based Difference in the Assessment of the Stress, Burnout and PsyCap level

Table 4 summarized the impact of education attainment-based variations on stress, burnout, and PsyCap among EFL teachers, categorized into three groups: "bachelor," "master," and "doctor." Among teachers, those with a doctorate degree demonstrated the highest stress levels, encompassing workload, role ambiguity, and time pressure, while those with a master's degree exhibited a medium level, and those with a bachelor's degree showed the lowest level. In terms of job burnout, teachers with a doctorate degree have the highest levels across all indicators, while those with a master's degree experience moderate levels, and those with a bachelor's degree have the lowest levels. Furthermore, the post hoc analysis indicates that teachers with bachelor's degrees exhibit the highest levels of hope and self-efficacy, while teachers with doctorate degrees show the lowest levels in hope, self-efficacy. Conversely, teachers with doctorate degrees display the highest levels of optimism. Teachers with master's degree exhibit the lowest level of PsyCap.

Table 4. Education Attainment-Based Variations in Stress, Burnout, and PsyCap.

Indicator	Education Attainment(M±SD)			F	p	post hoc
	Bachelor(n=44)	Master(n=167)	Doctor(n=86)			
Workload	3.28±0.37	3.38±0.39	3.60±0.20	9.936	0.000	1<2<3
Role ambiguity	3.15±0.42	3.33±0.38	3.60±0.45	17.105	0.000	1<2<3
Time pressure	3.26±0.41	3.28±0.47	3.51±0.33	4.389	0.013	1<3, 2<3
Interpersonal conflict	3.43±0.35	3.52±0.32	3.51±0.25	2.684	0.07	
Insecurity	3.28±0.38	3.40±0.40	3.32±0.27	2.946	0.054	
Average Stress	3.28±0.30	3.38±0.32	3.51±0.23	7.968	0.000	1<2<3
Exhaustion	3.23±0.35	3.30±0.32	3.45±0.19	6.285	0.002	1<3, 2<3
Depersonalization	3.20±0.40	3.40±0.31	3.68±0.12	29.754	0.000	1<2<3
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	3.25±0.49	3.27±0.34	3.72±0.16	19.804	0.000	1<3, 2<3
Average Burnout	3.23±0.35	3.32±0.27	3.62±0.12	22.885	0.000	1<2<3
Hope	3.21±0.40	3.02±0.43	2.84±0.31	13.505	0.000	1>2>3
Self-efficacy	3.22±0.39	3.10±0.37	3.46±0.15	14.384	0.000	1>2>3
Resilience	3.30±0.39	3.20±0.38	3.28±0.20	2.497	0.084	
Optimism	3.07±0.34	2.98±0.38	3.35±0.23	14.479	0.000	1<3, 2<3
Average PsyCap	3.20±0.34	3.08±0.31	3.23±0.17	6.681	0.001	1>2, 2<3

Note: "1"="bachelor", "2"="master", "3"="doctor", p<0.05.

4.2.3. School Related Difference in the Assessment of the Stress, Burnout and PsyCap Level

Table 5 presents differences in stress, burnout, and PsyCap across school types. Significant variations were found in workload ($F=17.103$, $p=0.000$), interpersonal conflict ($F=5.092$, $p=0.025$), and average stress ($F=6.828$, $p=0.009$), with private schools reporting higher stress. No significant differences were observed in role ambiguity, time pressure, and insecurity. Private schools also reported higher burnout levels in exhaustion ($F=7.419$, $p=0.007$), depersonalization ($F=16.996$, $p=0.000$), and reduced personal accomplishment ($F=9.125$, $p=0.003$). In contrast, public schools exhibited higher hope, resilience, and average PsyCap, though no significant differences were found in self-efficacy and optimism.

Table 5. School type-based variations in stress, burnout, and PsyCap.

Constructs	Indicators	School Type (M, SD)		F	p	compare
		Private(n=72)	Public(n=225)			
Stress	Workload	3.52 (0.30)	3.32 (0.38)	17.103	0.000**	1>2
	Role ambiguity	3.36 (0.43)	3.27 (0.43)	2.556	0.111	
	Time pressure	3.36 (0.38)	3.28 (0.45)	1.888	0.171	
	Interpersonal conflict	3.56 (0.26)	3.46 (0.34)	5.092	0.025*	1>2
	Insecurity	3.40 (0.33)	3.33 (0.40)	1.647	0.2	
	Average Stress	3.44 (0.28)	3.33 (0.31)	6.828	0.009**	1>2
Burnout	Exhaustion	3.38 (0.24)	3.26 (0.34)	7.419	0.007**	1>2
	Depersonalization	3.50 (0.32)	3.31 (0.37)	16.996	0.000**	1>2
	Reduced Personal Accomplishment	3.44 (0.44)	3.27 (0.40)	9.125	0.003**	1>2
	Average Burnout	3.44 (0.28)	3.28 (0.31)	15.356	0.000**	1>2
PsyCap	Hope	2.90 (0.35)	3.13 (0.43)	17.095	0.000**	1<2
	Self-efficacy	3.14 (0.43)	3.20 (0.36)	1.479	0.225	
	Resilience	3.13 (0.42)	3.29 (0.34)	10.526	0.001**	1<2
	Optimism	3.04 (0.38)	3.06 (0.37)	0.154	0.695	
	Average PsyCap	3.05 (0.33)	3.17 (0.31)	7.714	0.006**	1<2

Note. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$; “1” = “private school”, “2” = “public school”

4.3. Mediation and Moderation Analysis

The mediating role of PsyCap between stress and burnout and moderating role of demographic variables was analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0. Before running the structural model, the items for each indicator were item-parceled, and the factor loading, reliability of the three constructs was assessed.

4.3.1. Measurement Model

Table 6 presents reliability, validity, and factor loadings for the constructs Burnout, PsyCap, and Stress. Burnout includes three items with strong reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.859, AVE = 0.641) and low VIF values (1.518–1.926). PsyCap comprises four items, showing excellent reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.797, AVE = 0.710) and acceptable VIF values (1.719–2.417). Stress consists of five items, with high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.843, AVE = 0.671) and VIF values ranging from 1.667 to 2.697. All constructs demonstrate strong validity and no multicollinearity issues, supporting their suitability for further analysis.

Table 6. Factor Loadings, Reliability and VIF of constructs.

Construct	Parceled Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's alpha	rho_a	AVE	VIF
Burnout	Depersonalization	0.861	0.859	0.865	0.641	1.926
	Exhaustion	0.836				1.518
	Reduced Personal Accomplishment	0.831				1.822
Pyscap	Hope	0.844	0.797	0.803	0.71	1.719
	Optimism	0.851				1.982
	Resilience	0.854				2.417
	Self-efficacy	0.719				1.947
Stress	Insecurity	0.847	0.843	0.88.	0.671	2.697
	Interpersonal conflict	0.842				2.625
	Time pressure	0.746				1.667
	Workload	0.823				1.902
	role ambiguity	0.737				1.692

4.3.2. Structural Model

Table 8 presents the results of the hypothesis testing, including regression, mediation, and moderation analyses, showing the path coefficients, statistical significance, and effect sizes for the relationships between Stress, Burnout, and PsyCap, along with the moderating roles of demographic variables such as education, school type, and work experience.

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis reveals several significant relationships between the constructs. The path from PsychCap to Burnout shows a negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.306$, $t = 3.702$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher PsyCap is associated with lower burnout. The relationship between Stress and Burnout is positive ($\beta = 0.395$, $t = 5.030$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that increased stress leads to higher burnout. However, the path from Stress to PsyCap is negative ($\beta = -0.335$, $t = 2.428$, $p = 0.015$), demonstrating that higher stress is associated with lower PsyCap, though it is relatively modest in size.

Mediation Analysis

In the mediation analysis, the indirect effect of Stress on Burnout through PsyCap is positive ($\beta = -0.244$), with a t-value of 7.943 and a p-value of 0.000, which is marginally significant. This suggests that while PsyCap does have an indirect influence on the relationship between stress and burnout, its effect is weak and requires further exploration for clearer conclusions.

Moderation Analysis

Table 8 presents the moderation analysis results, examining how education, school type, and work experience influence the relationships between stress, burnout, and PsyCap. Four significant moderation paths were identified as follows:

(1) Education and PsyCap on Burnout

The moderation analysis revealed that education significantly moderated the relationship between PsyCap and burnout. Specifically, higher education levels

strengthened the protective effect of PsyCap against burnout, with a path coefficient of 0.146 ($T = 2.910$, $p = 0.004$) and an F square of 0.031.

(2) Education and Stress on PsyCap

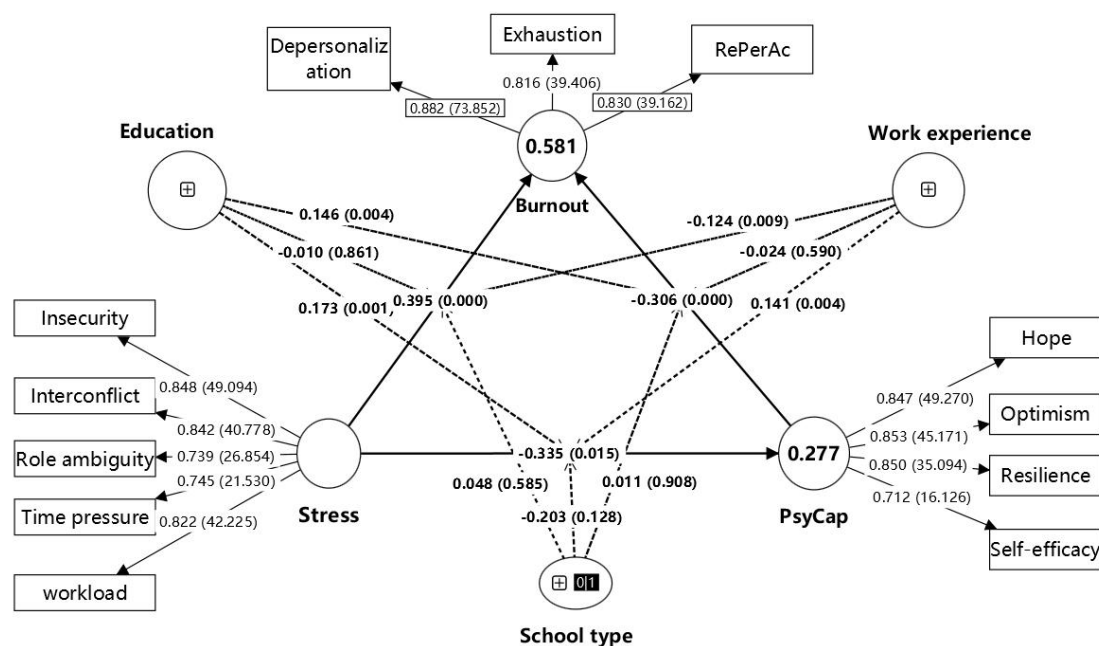
Education also played a key role in moderating the relationship between stress and PsyCap. The analysis showed a positive moderation effect ($\beta = 0.173$, $T = 3.288$, $p = 0.001$, F square = 0.034), indicating that individuals with higher education were more likely to maintain their PsyCap under stressful conditions.

(3) Work Experience and Stress on Burnout

In terms of work experience, the results indicated that it significantly moderated the relationship between stress and burnout. Teachers with more work experience were better able to mitigate the impact of stress on burnout, as evidenced by the path coefficient of -0.124 ($T = 2.624$, $p = 0.009$) and an F square of 0.024.

(4) Work Experience and Stress on PsyCap

Work experience also moderated the relationship between stress and PsyCap. The analysis showed a positive moderation effect ($\beta = 0.141$, $T = 2.894$, $p = 0.004$, F square = 0.022), indicating that more experienced teachers were better able to preserve their PsyCap in stressful situations.



Note: "RePerC" refers to "Reduced personal accomplishment".

Figure 2. The structural model with factor loadings, path coefficients and P values.

Table 8. Hypothesis results.

Analysis	Path	Path Co. (β)	SD	T	P	F square
Regression	Psychap -> Burnout	-0.306	0.083	3.702	0.000	0.047
	Stress -> Burnout	0.395	0.079	5.030	0.000	0.065
	Stress -> Psychap	-0.335	0.138	2.428	0.015	0.029
Mediation	Stress -> Burnout -> Psychap	-0.244	0.031	7.943	0.000	\
Moderation	Education x Psychap -> Burnout	0.146	0.050	2.910	0.004	0.031
	Education x Stress -> Burnout	-0.010	0.059	0.175	0.861	0.000

	Education x Stress -> Psychap	0.173	0.053	3.288	0.001	0.034
	School type x Stress -> Burnout	0.048	0.087	0.546	0.585	0.001
	School type x Stress -> Psychap	-0.203	0.133	1.522	0.128	0.009
	Work experience x Stress -> Burnout	-0.124	0.047	2.624	0.009	0.024
	Work experience x Stress -> Psychap	0.141	0.049	2.894	0.004	0.022
	School type x Psychap -> Burnout	0.011	0.098	0.116	0.908	0.000
	Work experience x Psychap -> Burnout	-0.024	0.045	0.539	0.590	0.001

5. Discussion

5.1. Respondents' Job Stress, Burnout and PsyCap Levels

The study reveals that Chinese EFL teachers experience moderately high levels of stress ($M=3.36$, $SD=0.31$) and burnout ($M=3.32$, $SD=0.31$), with stress being the most significant factor. The lower mean for PsyCap ($M=3.14$, $SD=0.32$) suggests that while teachers maintain a positive outlook, their PsyCap remains lower than stress and burnout levels. These results align with previous research, which indicates that Chinese teachers face considerable work-related pressure due to high expectations, workload, and job standards, leading to increasing burnout (Zang et al., 2022; Zhu, 2020). The findings on burnout, particularly emotional exhaustion (Chen & Lin, 2008; Xu & Jia, 2022) and reduced personal accomplishment (Wang, 2022; Zhao et al., 2020), confirm the pervasiveness of these issues. However, in contrast to Yong et al. (2016), who found very high PsyCap among EFL teachers in Zhejiang province, this study shows a moderately high PsyCap, indicating less optimism.

5.2. Profile-based Difference in the Level of Stress, Burnout and PsyCap

5.2.1. Experience-Based Variations in Stress, Burnout, and PsyCap

The exploration of profile-based variations in stress, burnout, and PsyCap uncovers a diverse landscape. Regarding the impact of working experience, participants with 1-10 years of experience reported the highest levels of stress indicators. Burnout was highest among teachers with over 20 years of experience. Respondents with 11-20 years reported the highest PsyCap. In keeping with previous studies, these results go counter to a study conducted in 2015 by Agai-Demjaha et al., which revealed no discernible difference in stress levels between novice and seasoned primary school teachers. In contrast, our research highlights distinct perceptions of stress among EFL teachers based on varying levels of work experience. Specifically, significant differences in stress perceptions were observed in the dimensions of workload, time pressure, insecurity, and overall stress levels. In previous studies, work experience has been found closely linked to teachers' ability to manage job-related stressors. Experienced teachers are likely to have developed effective coping mechanisms and teaching strategies to handle high workloads and time pressures [68]. Additionally, experienced teachers may have a better understanding of their roles, reducing ambiguity-related stress [68; 69]. However, they may also face challenges in adapting to new teaching methodologies or technologies.

What's more, work experience is also a significant factor in understanding burnout among EFL teachers. Experienced teachers may have developed effective coping mechanisms and teaching strategies to handle high workloads and time pressures [70]. However, they may also face challenges in adapting to new teaching methodologies or technologies. Numerous studies indicate that there is a substantial association between EFL teachers' job burnout in China and their length of teaching [71], yet the findings of different studies on this topic do not agree. Those who taught for two to five years and for twenty to six years had the highest levels of burnout, with the latter being higher than the former, according to Liang and Liu's [72] research. According to Zhang [73], Tang and Zhao [74], there is a positive correlation between job burnout and the length of time spent teaching and the quality of that experience. But according to Liu [75], teachers with more than 15 years of experience had the lowest level of job burnout and much lower scores in emotional tiredness, depersonalization, and reduced personal successes than teachers in other age groups.

Among previous studies, little was found between PsyCap and working experience among teachers. The research by Gong et al. [76] has similar findings with this, the results in Gong's study suggested that educational experience plays a role in influencing job burnout and job performance among individuals, but not necessarily in the same way for PsyCap and emotional intelligence. Older EFL teachers with more experience may have developed greater hope due to their exposure to diverse teaching situations and successful outcomes, which can enhance their goal-setting and persistence [77]. What's more, older, more experienced teachers may exhibit greater resilience as they have likely faced a variety of challenges and developed coping strategies over the years [78]. However, in this research, only teachers with 11-20 years of working experience show significant.

These insights offer a nuanced understanding of how different dimensions of stress are experienced by EFL teachers, shedding light on the impact of work experience. Tailoring interventions or support based on these findings can contribute to more effective strategies for addressing stress among EFL teachers.

5.2.2. Education-Based Variations in Stress, Burnout, and PsyCap

In terms of education attainment, teachers' stress and burnout levels were highest among those with a doctorate degree. Teachers with bachelor's degrees had the highest levels of hope and self-efficacy, while those with doctorate degrees displayed the highest levels of optimism. Teachers with master's degrees exhibit the lowest PsyCap levels.

Education attainment is also found closely related to teachers' stress in previous study [79]. The study conducted by Zhou et al. [80] using the TALIS 2018 teacher questionnaire sheds light on the heightened work stress levels among 2,386 teachers in primary and secondary schools across Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, and Chongqing. The overall elevated stress levels are noteworthy, and the research further identified significant variations based on ethnic background, education attainment, teaching stage, and years of teaching experience.

This finding contributes to some previous findings regarding education-based variance in burnout. Numerous studies demonstrate a strong negative link between educational background and occupational burnout, with bachelor's degree holders in EFL having the greatest levels of burnout [81]. However, Liu's [75] research revealed that master's-degree holders who teach EFL in colleges had the highest levels of both

emotional tiredness and total burnout. Additionally, research indicates that EFL teachers' levels of burnout are not significantly impacted by their educational background [82].

Regarding education-based difference in PsyCap, the finding is similar to the research by Liu et al. [83], Gong et al. [76] and Rosco et al. [84] who found no significant relationship between their highest educational status and their level of PsyCap. However, being different from them, some variance were found in self-efficacy and optimism. Educational background, particularly in language teaching or related fields, can significantly influence PsyCap components. Teachers with specialized training may possess a stronger theoretical foundation, leading to higher self-efficacy in applying effective teaching strategies [85]. Additionally, educators with advanced education in language teaching may exhibit greater hope and optimism in their ability to facilitate student learning and linguistic development. While not directly tied to demographics, resilience is a critical component of PsyCap that can be influenced by demographic factors. For instance, experienced teachers may have developed higher levels of resilience through years of navigating the complexities of the EFL classroom. Additionally, older teachers may draw upon their experiences to bounce back from setbacks and adapt to changes in the educational landscape.

5.2.3. School Types-Based Variations in Stress, Burnout, and PsyCap

Teachers in private schools experience higher levels of workload, interpersonal conflict, and overall stress, consistent with findings by Mercer [86] and Richards et al. [87]. In terms of burnout, private school teachers report significantly higher levels of exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment compared to their public school peers. This supports the notion that teacher well-being is shaped by various organizational factors, including school type and working conditions [88,89]. Regarding PsyCap, private school teachers display lower levels of hope and resilience, suggesting challenges in maintaining a positive outlook and coping with adversity in their work environment. However, self-efficacy and optimism remain consistent across both school types, differing from earlier studies that found higher optimism in private sector employees and higher self-efficacy in public sector employees [90,91].

5.3. Mediating Role of PsyCap Between Stress and Burnout

Based on prior research [92; 93], the positive association between job stress and burnout implies that extended exposure to high job stress without sufficient resources can result in burnout [94]. The negative correlation between burnout and PsyCap aligns with earlier findings that PsyCap negatively predicts depersonalization [49,95].

The mediation model integrates stress and PsyCap as predictors of burnout, offering insights into their direct and indirect effects. It reveals that hope and resilience play significant mediating roles in the relationship between stress and burnout. This connection can be explained using the Job-Demands Resources theory and the Conservation of Resources theory. The negative relationship between stress and PsyCap can be understood in these theoretical frameworks, as job stress is known to significantly impact teachers' PsyCap [49]. High stress levels may deplete psychological resources, making it more difficult for educators to sustain psychological resources [57]. The effect of PsyCap on teacher burnout is consistent with prior research [23]. According to PsyCap theory, individuals with high levels of PsyCap are better able to manage job demands, feel more in control of their work environment, and experience higher job satisfaction [16,96]. Educational institutions

can address job stress and burnout by implementing interventions such as stress management training, mentorship programs, and cultivating a supportive work environment [26,97].

5.4. Moderating Role of Profiles on Connection Between Stress, Burnout and PsyCap

The moderation analysis provides valuable insights into the complex relationships between stress, burnout, and psychological capital (PsyCap), highlighting the moderating roles of education, school type, and work experience. The results suggest that education plays a critical role in enhancing the protective effects of PsyCap against burnout. Specifically, higher education levels appear to bolster individuals' ability to utilize their psychological resources to counteract burnout, as evidenced by the positive moderation effect between education and PsyCap on burnout. This finding emphasizes the importance of educational attainment in promoting resilience and reducing burnout among individuals. Similarly, education was found to moderate the relationship between stress and PsyCap, with higher education levels enabling individuals to better preserve their PsyCap under stressful conditions. This further underscores the value of education in enhancing coping mechanisms, particularly in stressful work environments.

In terms of work experience, the analysis reveals that it significantly moderates the relationship between stress and burnout, with more experienced teachers being better equipped to handle stress and mitigate its impact on burnout. This suggests that work experience serves as a buffer, allowing teachers to better manage stress and avoid burnout. Additionally, work experience was found to moderate the relationship between stress and PsyCap, with more experienced teachers being more likely to maintain their PsyCap in the face of stress. This indicates that experience not only helps individuals cope with stress more effectively but also contributes to the preservation of psychological capital.

These findings highlight the importance of both education and work experience as key factors in moderating the negative effects of stress on burnout and PsyCap. In practical terms, these results suggest that interventions aimed at reducing burnout and promoting PsyCap should take into account the educational background and work experience of individuals, tailoring strategies to enhance their coping abilities and psychological resources. Moreover, further research into the role of school type and other contextual factors could provide additional insights into the specific conditions under which these moderation effects are most pronounced.

6. Conclusions

With an emphasis on demographic differences and the connections between these variables, this study investigates the current state of psychological capital (PsyCap), job stress, and burnout among Chinese EFL teachers from different higher education institutions. Chinese college EFL teachers reported moderate to high levels of stress and burnout, with a lower PsyCap. Profile-based variance reveals distinct patterns in stress, burnout, and PsyCap, highlighting varying landscapes across different groups. In terms of work experience, teachers with less years of experience report the most stress, whereas burnout is most common among those with more than 20 years of experience. Teachers with 11 to 20 years of experience demonstrate the highest levels of PsyCap. In terms of education, teachers with doctorates face the most stress and

burnout, whilst those with bachelor's degrees express the most hope and self-efficacy. Teachers in private schools are more stressed and burned out than their counterparts in public schools, and they have much lower levels of hope and resilience.

Complex relationships between job stress, burnout, and PsyCap were found among Chinese EFL teachers. The analysis shows strong correlations, highlighting a positive link between stress and burnout, as well as negative correlations with PsyCap. The moderation analysis highlights four key findings regarding the roles of education and work experience in managing stress, burnout, and PsyCap. The moderation analysis revealed significant roles of profiles. First, higher education strengthens the protective effect of PsyCap against burnout, indicating that individuals with higher education levels can better utilize their psychological resources. Second, education also helps individuals maintain their PsyCap under stress, supporting more effective stress coping mechanisms. Work experience, on the other hand, moderates the relationship between stress and burnout, with more experienced teachers better able to handle stress and reduce burnout. Additionally, work experience preserves PsyCap in stressful situations, further enhancing the ability to cope with job-related stress. These findings underscore the importance of education and experience in promoting psychological resilience and well-being.

These findings provide practical guidance for educational stakeholders aiming to enhance teacher well-being. Interventions that focus on improving PsyCap, particularly by strengthening hope and resilience, can effectively reduce the negative impacts of stress and burnout. The study also underscores the importance of personalized support strategies due to the complex influence of stress on various aspects of burnout. Overall, it sets the groundwork for evidence-based initiatives to prioritize teacher mental health and resilience. However, the study has some limitations. Due to space constraints, it did not explore the detailed connections within each key dimension, such as how time pressure contributes to burnout. While work experience, education attainment and school type were examined, their interactive effects were not analyzed. Future research should address these aspects for a deeper understanding.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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