

BURNOUT TO EMPOWERMENT: TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING PATHWAYS IN EFL TEACHERS

Usmanova Nilufar Khasan kizi,

Senior teacher, At Uzbekistan State World Languages University

nusmanova771@gmail.com

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Abstract. Teacher burnout has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, influencing teacher performance, learner outcomes, and institutional effectiveness. Recent scholarship demonstrates that transformative learning—through reflection, emotional awareness, and identity reconstruction—offers a pathway from burnout to empowerment. Drawing upon nine peer-reviewed studies published between 2022 and 2025, this article explores (a) the causes and early indicators of burnout, (b) the psychological and emotional mechanisms mediating resilience, (c) the role of transformative learning and identity work in empowerment, and (d) practice-embedded strategies that sustain teacher well-being. The findings underscore the significance of reflective practice, growth mindset, collegial collaboration, and continuous professional learning communities in cultivating empowered EFL teachers capable of thriving amid pedagogical and technological change.

Keywords: EFL teachers, burnout, transformative learning, resilience, empowerment, professional development, identity.

Annotatsiya. O'qituvchilarning ishdan chiqishi ingliz tilini chet tili (EFL) sifatida o'qitishning eng dolzarb muammolaridan biri sifatida namoyon bo'ldi, bu o'qituvchilarning faoliyati, o'quvchilarning natijalari va institutsional samaradorlikka ta'sir ko'rsatadi. So'nggi tadqiqotlar shuni ko'rsatadiki, o'zgaruvchan ta'lim - refleksiya, hissiy anglash va shaxsiyatni qayta tiklash orqali - charchoqdan imkoniyatlarni kengaytirishga yo'l ochadi. 2022-2025-yillar oralig'ida chop etilgan to'qqizta ko'rib chiqilgan tadqiqotga asoslanib, ushbu maqola (a) charchoqning sabablari va dastlabki ko'rsatkichlarini, (b) chidamlilikni ta'minlovchi psixologik va hissiy mexanizmlarni, (c) imkoniyatlarni kengaytirishda o'zgaruvchan ta'lim va o'ziga xos ishlarning rolini va (d) o'qituvchilarning farovonligini ta'minlaydigan amaliyotga asoslangan strategiyalarni o'rganadi. Natijalar pedagogik va texnologik o'zgarishlar sharoitida muvaffaqiyat qozonishga qodir kuchli EFL o'qituvchilarini tarbiyalashda refleksiv amaliyot, o'sish tafakkuri, kollegial hamkorlik va uzluksiz kasbiy ta'lim hamjamiyatlarining ahamiyatini ta'kidlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: EFL o'qituvchilari, toliqish, o'zgaruvchan ta'lim, barqarorlik, imkoniyatlarni kengaytirish, kasbiy rivojlanish, o'ziga xoslik.

Аннотация. Выгорание учителей стало одной из самых актуальных проблем в преподавании английского языка как иностранного языка (EFL), влияя на эффективность преподавания, результаты обучения и эффективность учреждения. Недавние исследования показывают, что преобразующее обучение - через рефлексию, эмоциональное осознание и реконструкцию идентичности - предлагает путь от истощения к расширению возможностей. Основываясь на девяти рецензируемых исследованиях, опубликованных в период с 2022 по 2025 год, эта статья исследует (a) причины и ранние показатели истощения, (b) психологические и эмоциональные механизмы, опосредующие устойчивость, (c) роль преобразующего обучения и работы с идентичностью в расширении прав и возможностей, и (d) стратегии, интегрированные в практику, которые поддерживают благополучие учителей. Результаты подчеркивают важность рефлексивной практики, менталитета роста, коллегиального сотрудничества и непрерывных профессиональных образовательных сообществ в воспитании

компетентных учителей ЭФЛ, способных процветать в условиях педагогических и технологических изменений.

Ключевые слова: Учителя ЭФЛ, выгорание, преобразующее обучение, устойчивость, расширение прав и возможностей, профессиональное развитие, идентичность.

Introduction. Burnout among teachers, especially within EFL contexts, has become an endemic issue that undermines instructional quality and teacher retention. Defined by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment, burnout erodes not only teachers' motivation but also their belief in the transformative power of education (Hossain et al., 2025). Within the high-stakes environment of language education—characterized by heavy workloads, cultural expectations, and shifting technologies—EFL teachers are particularly vulnerable. However, contemporary perspectives increasingly frame burnout not merely as a psychological failure but as a **transformative learning opportunity** (Chiu, 2025). The disorientation triggered by emotional fatigue can, when critically reflected upon, serve as the basis for renewed professional identity and empowerment (Mezirow, as cited in ResearchGate, 2018). This article synthesizes current empirical and theoretical insights to chart the journey from burnout to empowerment in EFL teachers, positioning transformative learning as the central mechanism of change.

Materials and methods. The first stage in addressing burnout involves recognizing its onset and underlying causes. **Usmanova (2025a)** identifies chronic workload, emotional strain from student behavior, and institutional indifference as major contributors in EFL classrooms. Teachers often experience what she terms “*pedagogical fatigue*”, a condition intensified by the demand for constant innovation and linguistic precision. Complementing this, **Usmanova (2025b)** examines the early manifestation of burnout among pre-service teachers during practicum. Her study reveals that even at the training stage, limited mentorship, performance anxiety, and unrealistic expectations can lead to early emotional exhaustion. These findings align with **Hossain et al. (2025)**, who emphasize that systemic issues—such as inadequate administrative support and cultural undervaluing of teaching—exacerbate the risk of burnout. From a broader psychological standpoint, **Chang et al. (2022)** underscore the mediating role of emotion regulation and self-efficacy. Teachers who lack effective coping mechanisms tend to internalize classroom stress, leading to a cycle of frustration and disengagement. The early signs, therefore, include reduced empathy, cynicism, and a mechanical approach to teaching.

Empowerment begins where burnout awareness transforms into personal agency. **Shen et al. (2025)** empirically demonstrate that resilience and growth mindset significantly predict lower burnout levels among Chinese EFL teachers. Using structural equation modeling, they found that teachers with a growth mindset reinterpret difficulties as learning opportunities, enabling them to sustain professional motivation. Resilience, in this context, operates not merely as endurance but as *adaptive transformation*. Teachers

who cultivate reflective resilience actively reconstruct meaning from adversity, engaging in self-directed professional growth (Chiu, 2025). These psychological mechanisms mirror Mezirow's (1991) conceptualization of *perspective transformation*, wherein disorienting dilemmas—such as classroom failure or emotional fatigue—catalyze a reevaluation of assumptions and values. Such findings reinforce that the path to empowerment is psychological before it is pedagogical. It begins with internalized beliefs about competence and evolves through self-reflection and reframing of professional identity.

Chiu (2025) situates transformative learning at the heart of teacher renewal. Her study with Taiwanese schoolteachers reveals that guided reflection on emotional experiences—particularly during disruptive events like the COVID-19 pandemic or the rise of artificial intelligence—can reignite a sense of purpose. Through structured reflection and dialogue, teachers reinterpret distressing experiences as catalysts for growth. Mezirow's theory provides a framework for understanding this transformation: individuals undergo a *disorienting dilemma*, engage in *critical reflection*, and reconstruct a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative worldview (Mezirow, as cited in ResearchGate, 2018). In EFL settings, such reflection often involves revisiting beliefs about language ownership, cultural expectations, and pedagogical roles. Moreover, transformative learning facilitates emotional literacy—helping teachers identify, analyze, and regulate the emotions underpinning burnout (Chang et al., 2022). When teachers perceive emotional challenges as learning opportunities, they transition from victimhood to agency, thus achieving empowerment.

Professional identity is central to how teachers interpret their experiences. **Zhou et al. (2025)**, in a longitudinal case study of novice EFL teachers, trace identity evolution across one semester of teaching. Their participants initially viewed themselves as peripheral and powerless within institutional hierarchies. However, through inquiry-based reflection and mentorship, they developed agency and professional voice—hallmarks of empowerment. Identity transformation mirrors Mezirow's (1991) model: reflection on disorienting experiences (e.g., classroom failure) prompts a reevaluation of who teachers are and what they value. As **Usmanova (2025b)** notes, practicum experiences often spark such identity negotiation early in career development. Transformative identity work, therefore, is both developmental and emancipatory—it allows teachers to align their professional selves with intrinsic values rather than external pressures. This process is not merely cognitive but emotional; empowerment grows as teachers integrate their professional and personal selves into a coherent identity narrative.

Transformation is rarely sustained in isolation. **Parker (2025)** introduces *Teacher Research Groups (TRGs)* as practice-embedded communities of practice that enable sustained empowerment. In these collaborative settings, teachers engage in peer observation, mentoring, and action research, fostering collective efficacy and reducing isolation. TRGs embody the *social dimension* of transformative learning: dialogue and

shared inquiry catalyze reflection and knowledge co-construction. Hossain et al. (2025) similarly emphasize institutional well-being policies that prioritize collegial collaboration, workload balance, and recognition. Such systemic supports convert individual resilience into collective sustainability. Together, these studies affirm that empowerment is not an endpoint but an ongoing, socially mediated process. It flourishes when teachers are embedded in supportive networks that value inquiry, reflection, and shared growth.

Results and discussion. Synthesizing the reviewed literature, the *burnout-to-empowerment pathway* can be conceptualized as a four-phase continuum:

1. **Disorientation and Recognition:** Teachers acknowledge emotional exhaustion and loss of purpose (Usmanova, 2025a; Chang et al., 2022).
2. **Reflection and Reframing:** Guided critical reflection transforms distress into insight (Chiu, 2025; Mezirow, 1991).
3. **Identity Reconstruction:** Teachers renegotiate professional selves through inquiry and growth mindset (Zhou et al., 2025; Shen et al., 2025).
4. **Collective Empowerment:** Sustained through collaborative professional communities (Parker, 2025; Hossain et al., 2025).

This model repositions burnout as the *entry point* for transformation rather than a terminal condition. When supported by reflective practice, institutional empathy, and peer collaboration, EFL teachers can emerge from burnout with enhanced agency and pedagogical innovation.

Implications for EFL Teacher Education

Teacher education programs must integrate **transformative reflection** as a core competency. Early interventions, such as reflective journals during practicum (Usmanova, 2025b) or resilience workshops (Shen et al., 2025), can pre-empt burnout trajectories. Additionally, embedding *communities of practice* within teacher training—where novices engage with mentors in inquiry cycles—fosters empowerment from the outset. Institutions should also embrace well-being policies that treat teacher reflection as professional capital rather than personal therapy. Transformative learning must thus be institutionalized through curriculum design, mentorship structures, and professional dialogue spaces.

Conclusion. Burnout remains a critical threat to the sustainability of EFL education, yet the reviewed literature reframes it as a potential catalyst for transformation. Through reflective and relational learning, teachers can reconstruct their professional identities and reclaim agency. The pathway from burnout to empowerment is neither linear nor automatic; it requires systemic support, emotional literacy, and collaborative structures that nurture transformative learning. As the field continues to evolve amid technological disruption and globalization, empowerment through transformation will define the resilience of the next generation of EFL teachers.

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