



Language Teaching Research Quarterly

2025, Vol. 47, 57–72



EFL Teachers' Classroom Management Practices: Predicting Role of Immunity

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Received 24 December 2024

Accepted 26 February 2025

Abstract

Language teacher immunity is conceptualized as a buffering mechanism protecting teachers amid the shifting sands of their teaching careers. Despite a noticeable interest drawn to this novel aspect of language teachers' professional identity, scant attention has been paid to examining its potential roles in classroom management. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a quantitative analysis of the relationship between the immunity of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and their classroom management practices. Using a correlational design, 213 Iranian EFL teachers, 134 females and 79 males with the age range of 20 to 53, completed two electronic surveys of the Teacher Immunity Scale (TIS) and the Behavior and Instructional Management Scale (BIMS). The results indicated a significant negative relationship between EFL teachers' immunity and their approach to classroom management. Moreover, multiple regression analyses revealed that openness to change and teaching self-efficacy dimensions of EFL teachers' immunity were significant negative predictors of their classroom management practices. The results are discussed in light of the teaching context of Iran, and implications are provided for language teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers.

Keywords: *Language Teacher Immunity, Classroom Management, EFL Teachers, Teachers' Professional Identity*

How to cite this article (APA 7th Edition):

Bapiri, A., Gholami, J., & Mohammadnia, Z. (2025). EFL teachers' classroom management practices: Predicting role of immunity. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 47, 57-72. <https://doi.org/10.32038/ltrq.2025.47.04>

Introduction

Teaching has been characterized as a demanding profession with a relatively high range of stressors and disturbances (Kyriacou, 2001; Mercer et al., 2016). Therefore, teachers develop a defensive mechanism, metaphorically known as teacher immunity, to cope with the tensions in their teaching careers (Hiver, 2015, 2017; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). In other words, according to Hiver and Dörnyei (2017, p. 669), teacher immunity is a “robust armoring system that

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<https://doi.org/10.32038/ltrq.2025.47.04>

emerges in response to high-intensity threats.” It is argued that this aspect of teachers’ professional identity lies at the heart of some of the key issues within the language teaching, enabling teachers to achieve professional equilibrium (Hiver, 2017; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). This equilibrium, however, can be easily disrupted by various stressors and challenges within the profession. Given the pervasiveness of teacher attrition in educational contexts (Borman & Dowling, 2008), it seems necessary to investigate how teachers protect themselves amid upheavals in their teaching careers. More specifically, a range of challenges, including those related to teacher competence and motivation, educational policies, large class sizes, limited resources, diverse student characteristics, and income disparities (Nam, 2023), can amplify teaching stressors, making the study of teacher immunity particularly critical.

This acquired immunity may manifest itself in both positive and negative directions, and in turn, teachers may possess either productive or counterproductive types of immunity. While both productive and counterproductive immunity serve a protective function, they differ significantly in their outcomes. The counterproductive one produces a skewed defensive mechanism, resulting in maladaptive rigidity that prohibits teachers from embracing innovations in their classroom behaviors and practices (Hiver, 2017; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). On the other hand, productively immunized teachers are open to change, enabling them to adapt their teaching practices according to the disturbances of their classroom contexts (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017).

The type of immunity that EFL teachers possess influences their teaching behaviors, classroom practices, and professional identities (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017; Maghsoudi, 2021; Songhori et al., 2018; 2020; Rahmati et al., 2019). Recently, this psychological construct has received increasing attention, with a growing body of research exploring this complex phenomenon (Gooran et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2024; Li, 2021; Namaziandost et al., 2022; Noughabi et al., 2020, 2024; Sheikhi & Alavinia, 2024; Wang et al., 2022). While numerous studies have explored the relationship between teacher immunity and other psychological characteristics of teachers, such as resilience, L2-tecaher grit, or buoyancy (e.g., Alam et al., 2024; Chen, 2024; Namaziandost & Heydarnejad, 2023), there is a lack of research examining how immunity manifests in classroom behaviors. More specifically, to the best of our knowledge, the quantitative analysis of the link between EFL teachers’ immunity and their classroom management practices has received little, if any, attention. The link between immunity and classroom management is particularly important because, as Hiver (2017) and Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) argue, maladaptive immunity can manifest as rigidity in teachers’ behaviors and practices.

This rigidity can directly impact classroom management, hindering teachers’ ability to adapt to the dynamic needs of their learners and to the challenges of the classroom in general. Given the significant role attributed to the influence of immunity type on teachers’ classroom behaviors and practices, and in turn, their overall effectiveness as language teachers, it seems promising to explore how teachers’ protective mechanism correlates with the way they manage their classrooms. Therefore, this study tries to investigate the interplay between EFL teachers’ immunity and their classroom management practices.

Literature Review

Language Teacher Immunity

Language teacher immunity is defined as a defensive mechanism that protects teachers from adversities in their careers (Hiver, 2017). Rooted in the Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST), self-organization is the central theoretical concept underlying the immunization process in teachers (Hiver, 2015; 2017; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). Self-organization is defined as “when dynamic systems change their internal structure or their overall function in response to some external circumstances through a process that we understand is not directed from outside the system” (Banzhaf, 2009, as cited in Hiver, 2015, p. 216). This self-organization process is characterized by four stages of triggering, coupling, realignment, and stabilization. To make these stages tangible, consider the repeated misbehaviors of a student as a trigger that sends the stable functioning of a teacher into disequilibrium. After being destabilized, in the coupling stage, this teacher may try to talk with the parents of this troublesome student or develop a better rapport with him/her as the available coping strategies. Therefore, in this stage, the disturbance (i.e., misbehavior) is linked to a response (i.e., talking with parents or developing rapport) by the teacher to send the system back to equilibrium again. Later, in the realignment stage, the teachers’ functioning returns to stability as the applied coping strategy reconfigures the teacher’s behavior in facing the disruptive students over and over again. Finally, in the stabilization stage, by forming narratives of resolution, this pattern of stability will be consolidated in the teacher’s professional identity. It will act as a protective system in future encounters with misbehaving students.

However, it should be noted that this protective mechanism is like a double-edged sword (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017) that manifests itself in both productive and counterproductive forms. The primary objective of productive immunity is to manage the disturbances effectively and help teachers to experience more commitment, engagement, and career satisfaction (Hiver, 2015). In accordance with its biological counterpart, however, autoimmunity may negatively affect teachers’ functioning. Consequently, counterproductively immunized teachers may show excessive conservatism, callousness, and resistance to change or innovation (Hiver, 2015; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). It is worth mentioning that some language teachers may not develop either productive or counterproductive immunity, being labeled as immunocompromised teachers.

In a pioneering study, Hiver (2015) tried to understand why some teachers achieve optimal teaching effectiveness while others struggle to survive or quit the profession. In answering this question, he identified an emerging developmental process (i.e., immunization) in teachers with productive and counterproductive characteristics. Later, Hiver (2017) tried to find a robust empirical foundation for language teacher immunity. *Teaching self-efficacy, attitudes to teaching, coping, classroom affectivity, burnout, resilience, and openness to change* were the identified factors of the language teacher immunity construct. Furthermore, Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) proposed a three-step guideline for rebooting counterproductive immunity.

Three main lines of inquiry can be identified within the territory of language teacher immunity research. The first one is dedicated to identifying the type of immunity language teachers possess (Dobakhti & Khalili, 2024; Gooran et al., 2022; Khalili et al., 2024; Maghsoudi, 2021; Songhori et al., 2018; Zohrabi & Paydar, 2025). For example, Gooran et al., (2022) found that online teaching had positive and negative influences on teachers’ immunity

during the COVID-19 era. Their findings revealed that teacher immunity is a dynamic state rather than a static one. The second line of inquiry investigates the psychological predicting factors or possible correlates of language teacher immunity (Alam et al., 2024; Li, 2021; Namaziandost et al., 2022, 2024; Noughabi et al., 2020, 2024; Wang et al., 2022). For example, Noughabi et al. (2020) attempted to examine the role of experienced EFL teachers' work engagement, emotions, and autonomy on their immunity. The findings showed that all of these factors were strong predictors of language teacher immunity. Enhancing or developing teacher immunity by exploring interventions and training programs is the third line of research in language teacher immunity territory (Ismail & Nikpoo, 2023; Noughabi et al., 2024; Sheikhi & Alavinia, 2024). For instance, Shekhi and Alavinia (2024) examined the effects of a Professional Development (PD) course and classroom observation on the protective mechanisms of teachers. The results depicted that the PD focused on classroom observation enhanced the productive immunity of language teachers.

As discussed above, teacher immunity is a protective mechanism with both productive and counterproductive manifestations. This duality is important for understanding how teachers address the dynamic needs and challenges of their classroom settings. Given the effect of teacher immunity on classroom behavior of teachers (Hiver, 2017), it can be argued that teachers' armoring mechanism can notably shape the way they react to classroom challenges and, importantly, their overall classroom behaviors and practices. In terms of the self-organization aspect of the CDST framework, it may be argued that productively immunized teachers' coupling and realignment stages are effective, leading to an adaptive stabilization of classroom reactions to the teaching challenges. On the other hand, in counterproductive immunity detrimental strategies may be used to face triggers, fostering ineffective coupling and realignment stages. This situation may lead to the maladaptive stabilization of the teachers with regard to the dynamic needs of the learning environment.

Classroom Management

Classroom management has been defined as a set of actions to construct an effective teaching and learning environment (Brophy, 1996; Thornbury, 2006). While acknowledging the influence of both external (e.g., broader educational imperatives) and internal (i.e., issues related to a classroom setting) factors, Wright (2005) proposed three central discourses of classroom management. They are establishing and maintaining order (i.e., addressing control and conformity), providing learning opportunities (i.e., addressing construction and uptake of learning opportunities), and creating a context of care (i.e., addressing the interpersonal aspects of the classroom setting).

Any classroom interaction between teacher and learners can provide a set of learning opportunities to be exploited (Wright, 2005; Hall, 2011). However, the way that these opportunities are created varies. In the order view of classroom management, it is argued that these learning opportunities are created based on teacher control. In contrast, the opportunity view of classroom management claims that teachers are trying to foster flexible learning situations that can be used for learning (Wright, 2005). Therefore, in classrooms with high structure, which are based on the order view of classroom management, a teacher makes decisions about lessons with little learner involvement. However, in low structure classrooms, which are based on the opportunity view of classroom management, learners are involved in

making decisions about lessons (Briggs & Moore, 1993, as cited in Wright, 2005). The amount of control exerted by the teacher is the main difference between high and low structures of classrooms (Hall, 2011). In the current study, it should be noted that classroom management is operationally defined on a continuum between constructing more to less controlling teaching environments or classrooms (Martin & Sass, 2010; Sass et al., 2016).

EFL teachers' classroom management has been extensively investigated. The main line of inquiry concerns the challenges being experienced by EFL teachers in managing their classrooms (e.g., Debrelí & Ishanova, 2019; Macias & Sanchez, 2015; Sakui, 2007; Shakerkhoshroudi et al., 2020). Then, the potential roles of teaching self-efficacy in EFL teachers' classroom management practices have also received noticeable attention (e.g., Choi & Lee, 2017; Khany & Ghoreyshi, 2013; Farkhani et al., 2022). Moreover, different individual factors have also been investigated (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2018; Yazdanmehr & Akbari, 2015). Finally, other studies have examined learner-related issues (e.g., Aliakbari & Bozorgmanesh, 2014; Marashi & Assgar, 2019), stated beliefs and actual practices (e.g., Aliakbari & Heidarzadi, 2015; Farrell & Bennis, 2013), personality type and teaching style (e.g., Jalili & Mall-Amiri, 2015; Kazemi & Soleimani, 2016), and coping styles of EFL teachers (e.g., Kalantarypour & Modirkhamene, 2021) in relation to their classroom management practices.

The Interplay between Immunity and Classroom Management

Teacher immunity provides a fresh lens for looking at teachers' professional identity construction as it intersects the link between individual and contextual factors (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). It is argued that this novel aspect of teachers' identity affects whatever teachers do in their careers (Hiver, 2015) and, more importantly, it can also illustrate why some teachers thrive in this demanding profession while others struggle to survive or quit (Hiver, 2015; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). Some of the main challenges of this demanding profession are directly related to the classroom setting. It has been shown that teachers' protective mechanism influences the way they deal with these challenges and, more generally, their overall classroom practices and behaviors (Hiver, 2017; Maghsoudi, 2021; Songhori et al., 2018, 2020; Rahmati et al., 2019).

Therefore, teacher immunity is a protective shield for dealing with the challenges of the teaching profession. As mentioned above, some of the main challenges of EFL teachers are related to their classroom environment. This leads to the expectation that considering the rigidity of teachers with counterproductive immunity (Hiver, 2017), they may exert a high degree of control in which ineffective classroom management strategies are used. As a result, a negative learning environment may be created in which learners are disengaged. On the other hand, productively immunized teachers' adaptability and openness to change may lead to managing the classroom in a way that a collaborative learning setting is created with more opportunities to learn. Consequently, it can be hypothesized that (in)flexibility of teachers while facing classroom challenges plays a pivotal role in effective classroom management.

Given the link between teachers' immunity type and their classroom behaviors and practices, it is surprising that examining immunity's potential role in teachers' classroom practices is relatively under-explored. The only exceptions that partially addressed this issue are Hiver (2017) and Songhori et al. (2020). Hiver (2017) is mainly concerned with providing a robust empirical foundation for language teacher immunity. He also peripherally addressed

the phenomenological manifestation of this concept in teachers' classroom practices. In so doing, however, that study examined teacher immunity's effect on teachers' professional identity construction rather than their concrete classroom practices. In another qualitative study, Songhori et al. (2020) examined a limited account of immunity type's effect on teachers' classroom practices while determining immunity sources and proposing intervention strategies for influencing its development.

Despite the important role of immunity in the classroom practices of teachers and, in turn, the overall effectiveness of the learning setting, these two qualitative studies have addressed this link in either peripheral or quite limited scope. Given the marginal focus of these studies, it would be promising to conduct a comprehensive investigation of how immunity influences teachers' practices in their classrooms. Without such an investigation, our understanding of how immunity shapes teachers' real classroom practices remains incomplete. Moreover, based on these qualitative studies, it is not possible to reach some generalizable conclusions about the above-mentioned link.

Therefore, while the literature suggests a link between teachers' immunity and their classroom behavior, there is a lack of research on the quantitative investigation of the possible role of immunity type in teachers' classroom management practices. For that reason, this study tries to bridge this gap by proposing quantitative evidence regarding this possible relationship. Understanding this association can provide valuable insight into the influence of teachers' defensive mechanisms on their ability to create effective language learning settings, which has implications for teacher professional development. To put it another way, shedding light on this relationship reveals how different ways that teachers face challenges directly translate into their ability to create (mal)functioning language classrooms.

To the best of our knowledge, the quantitative investigation of EFL teachers' immunity type and their classroom management practices has received little, if any, attention. Given the multidimensionality of this concept and its potential role in teachers' careers, it sounds promising to explore its manifestation in EFL teachers' classroom management practices from different methodological paradigms. Therefore, this study tries to investigate the interplay between EFL teachers' immunity type and their classroom management practices through a quantitative study.

RQ1: Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' immunity and their classroom management practices?

RQ2: Do Iranian EFL teachers' immunity factors significantly predict their classroom management dimensions?

Method

Participants

In this study, 213 Iranian EFL teachers with a response rate of 41.66% participated in filling out Teacher Immunity Scale (TIS) and Behavior and Instructional Management Scale (BIMS) from January to April of 2023. The data was obtained in the EFL context of Iran, where English learning is highly important for professional development and academic purposes. This educational context includes public and private sections, where English is a mandatory subject in schools. However, most of the students supplement their school education by attending private institutes to receive more focused practice on their conversational skills.

Response rates between 7 to 8% are considered an instance of self-selection bias. Therefore, according to Hiver (2017), the present study's 41.66 response rate can be considered an acceptable one. To collect a representative sample, EFL teachers with various age groups, teaching experiences, educational levels, gender, and teaching places completed the questionnaires. The teaching experience of 26.3% of participants was less than two years, 30.1% had between two and four years of experience, 24.4%'s experience was between five and 10 years, and 19.2% had more than 10 years of experience. The gender distribution of the participants was 134 females and 79 males. Furthermore, all of them were students or graduates of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), and their educational levels were Bachelor of Arts (27.4%), Master of Arts (49.7%), and Doctor of Philosophy (22.9%). Their age also ranged from 20 to 53. Finally, they have taught English in private language institutes, public schools, universities, and privately.

Instruments

In the current study, two instruments were used to collect the data. A description of them is provided below:

The teacher immunity scale (TIS)

The Teacher Immunity Scale (TIS) developed by Hiver (2017) was employed to measure language teacher immunity. This questionnaire contains 39 items on a 6-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Its seven factors are *teaching self-efficacy* with seven items ($\alpha = .82$), *burnout* with five items ($\alpha = .80$), *resilience* with five items ($\alpha = .82$), *attitudes towards teaching* with five items ($\alpha = .85$), *openness to change* with six items ($\alpha = .74$), *classroom affectivity* with six items ($\alpha = .81$), and *coping* with five items ($\alpha = .78$). The higher scores on this scale indicate a positive type of immunity (i.e., productive) while the lower scores mean a negative type of immunity (i.e., counterproductive). In the present study, the reliability of the TIS was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a value of 0.87.

The behavior and instructional management scale (BIMS)

The Behavior and Management Scale (BIMS) was used to measure EFL teachers' classroom management practices (Sass et al., 2016). This scale contains 14 items on a 6-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". *Behavior management* (7 items; $\alpha = .83$) and *instructional management* (7 items; $\alpha = .79$) are two factors of this questionnaire. The continuum of control underlies these two sub-scales (Glickman & Tamashiro, 1980). To put it another way, the higher scores on this scale mean a higher control exerted by teachers in the instructional and behavior dimensions of their classroom management. In the present study, the reliability of the BIMS was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a value of 0.71.

Procedure

First and foremost, participants' informed consent was obtained, and the confidentiality of their information was assured. The first step of the study, then, was to create the electronic version of both scales using Google Forms. Next, using a volunteer sampling technique (Best & Kahn,

2006), an invitation link was sent to the Iranian EFL teachers who were members of different academic and tutorial groups in the Telegram application. As mentioned earlier, 213 participants filled out the questionnaires with a response rate of 41.66% which eliminates the self-selection bias inherent in volunteer sampling. The high number of Iranian English groups and channels in Telegram was the main reason for selecting this application. With regard to its popularity among Iranian EFL teachers, we may conclude that a representative sample of Iranian EFL teachers utilizes this application. The second reason for using electronic surveys was the convenience inherent in it for both researchers and participants (Dörnyei, 2008). As for data analysis, first, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Then, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check if the data were normally distributed. Moreover, skewness and kurtosis values were also checked. Next, to determine the interplay between EFL teachers' immunity and their classroom management practices, a Spearman rank order correlation was utilized. Finally, to figure out the predictive power of different factors of teacher immunity on classroom management dimensions, multiple regression analyses were employed.

Results

This study examined the interplay between EFL teachers' immunity and their classroom management practices. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for EFL teachers' immunity dimensions. The skewness and kurtosis values between -1.5 to +1.5 are indicators of variance normality (Bachman & Kunnan, 2005). As shown in Table 1, the skewness and kurtosis values for all language teacher immunity sub-scales were within the prescribed value range for variance normality. Furthermore, according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality, all of the dimensions were normally distributed $D(213) = .064, p = .05$.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for EFL Teacher Immunity Sub-Scales

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
TS	2.86	6	4.58	.64	.13	-.15
B	1	6	3.8	1.14	-.13	-.63
R	2.4	5	3.9	.5	-.25	.18
AT	1.4	6	4.46	1.06	-.43	-.31
OC	1.67	5.33	3.52	.66	-.12	.21
CA	2.17	6	4.59	.77	-.3	-.17
C	2.8	6	4.38	.62	.06	-.31

*Note*¹. TS = Teaching Self-efficacy; B = Burnout; R = Resilience; AT = Attitudes toward Teaching; OC = Openness to Change; CA = Classroom Affectivity; C = Coping

*Note*². These abbreviations are used in the rest of the tables

Descriptive statistics for EFL teachers' classroom management dimensions are depicted in Table 2. As this table demonstrates, the kurtosis value for instructional management was above +1.5. It means there was a heavy tail for this dimension of classroom management, and it was not normally distributed. While the skewness and kurtosis values of *behavior management* denoted variance normality, according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, this scale was not normally distributed in general $D(213) = .04, p = .05$.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics for EFL Teachers' Classroom Management Dimension*

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
BM	1.67	5.67	4.1	.69	-.289	.462
IM	1	5.17	2.09	.67	1.08	2.86

*Note*¹. BM = Behavior Management; IM = Instructional Management

*Note*². These abbreviations are used in the rest of the tables

The first research question of this study addressed the possible link between Iranian EFL teachers' immunity and their classroom management practices. For detecting any possibly significant relationship between these variables, the Spearman rank order correlation was used. There was a significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' immunity and their classroom management practices ($r = -.35$, $p = .001$). Furthermore, the direction of the relationship between these two variables was negative. Table 3 shows the relationship between different dimensions of EFL teachers' immunity and their classroom management sub-scales.

Table 3*Correlation Coefficient between Sub-scales of EFL Teachers' Immunity and their Classroom Management Practices*

Variables	TS	B	R	AT	OC	CA	C
BM	-.009 (.893)	-.13* (.048)	.069 (.319)	-.1 (.127)	-.33** (.001)	-.12 (.077)	-.01 (.833)
IM	-.35** (.001)	-.19** (.004)	-.25** (.001)	.26** (.001)	-.051 (.459)	-.26** (.001)	-.31** (.001)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

With regard to the second research question of the current study, two multiple regression analyses were utilized to determine which dimensions of language teacher immunity can predict Iranian EFL teachers' classroom management practices. Table 4 depicts the model summary for the first dimension of classroom management (i.e., *behavior management*), and the regression coefficients are reported in Table 5.

Table 4*Model Summary^b for Behavior Management*

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.39a	.15	.12	.64

a. Predictors: (Constant) teaching self-efficacy; burnout; resilience; attitudes toward teaching; openness to change; classroom affectivity; and coping

b. Dependent variable: behavior management

Table 5
Regression Coefficients^a for the Predictors of Behavior Management

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	4.601	.469		9.801	.001
TS	.065	.091	.060	.716	.475
B	-.045	.054	-.074	-.831	.407
R	.028	.095	.02	.293	.77
AT	-.024	.058	-.037	-.41	.682
OC	-.406	.077	-.398	-5.291	.001
CA	.012	.090	.013	.133	.894
C	.172	.090	.155	1.9	.059

a. Dependent variable: behavior management

According to Table 4, EFL teachers' immunity dimensions explained 15% of the variation in *behavior management* ($R^2 = .15$). Furthermore, as Table 5 shows, only *openness to change* ($p = .001$) was statistically significant, making a unique negative contribution with a Beta value of $-.398$ to *behavior management*. The model summary for the second dimension of classroom management (i.e., *instructional management*) is demonstrated in Table 6. The results of regression coefficients are summarized in Table 7.

Table 6
Model Summary^b for Instructional Management

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
2	.41a	.17	.14	.62

a. Predictors: (Constant) teaching self-efficacy; burnout; resilience; attitudes toward teaching; openness to change; classroom affectivity; and coping

b. Dependent variable: instructional management

Table 7
Regression Coefficients^a for the Predictors of Instructional Management

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	4.559	.451		10.11	.001
TS	-.214	.087	-.204	-2.485	.015
B	.002	.051	.004	.042	.966
R	-.132	.092	-.099	-1.483	.152
AT	-.053	.056	-.083	-.94	.348
OP	.066	.074	.066	.9	.369
CA	-.067	.086	-.076	-.776	.438
C	-.152	.087	-.142	-1.754	.081

a. Dependent variable: instructional management

As Table 6 shows, 17% of the variation in *instructional management* can be explained by EFL teachers' immunity factors ($R^2 = .17$). Table 7 displays that only *teaching self-efficacy* was a statistically significant explainer of *instructional management* (Beta = $-.204$).

Discussion

The first research question of this study addressed whether there was a significant correlation between EFL teachers' immunity and their classroom management practices. The findings of Spearman rank order correlation revealed a significant negative interplay between EFL

teachers' immunity and their classroom management practices. This negative link corroborates the interplay proposed by the CDST framework of teacher immunity, showing that teachers' internal protective mechanism shapes their external classroom behaviors. With regard to the underlying control continuum of the classroom management scale (i.e., BIMS) (Wolfgang & Glickman, 1980, as cited in Martin & Sass, 2010), it can be argued that the more EFL teachers experienced the productive type of immunity, the less they tried to exert rigorous control in their classroom management practices. Therefore, in accordance with the coupling stage of self-organization, teachers with productive immunity tend to use less controlling strategies in response to classroom challenges, creating a more flexible classroom setting.

This finding can complement Hiver and Dörnyei's (2017) finding that counterproductively immunized teachers are mainly characterized by exercising mechanical control routines. Hence, the frequency of employing *external control* and *preventive classroom managing strategies*, as two of the main strategies used by EFL teachers (Yazdanmehr & Akbari, 2015), has a direct relationship with their immunity type. It reinforces the stabilization stage of self-organization process for counterproductive immunity in which teachers follow rigid controlled routines as their classroom practices. Concerning the highly controlled classrooms, according to Presson and Benassi (1996), using excessive control to deal with stressors is a toxic coping strategy being realized as a symptom of maladaptive immunity among teachers. In this case, teachers' defensive mechanisms become detrimental, leading to maladaptive management strategies in response to classroom challenges. Within the self-organization stages, this situation shows a maladaptive reaction in the coupling and, in turn, in the realignment stage for counterproductively immunized teachers in which rigid coping strategies create an autoimmune stabilization that strengthens maladaptive teaching practices.

Moreover, the results of the current quantitative study corroborate the findings of some qualitative studies that addressed the relationship between language teacher immunity and classroom practices in general (e.g., Songhori et al., 2020; Hiver, 2017). Similar to Hiver and Dörnyei (2017), counterproductively immunized teachers manifested a strict sense of control in their classroom behaviors as also noted by Songhori et al. (2020). In this vein, the results of the present study shed further light on this issue by illustrating the negative relationship between immunity type and control exercise in managing classrooms. It seems that EFL teachers who cultivate a positive type of immunity try to protect themselves by adopting strategies other than exerting strict classroom control over their students. Future research may try to figure out the classroom management strategies employed by productively immunized teachers to establish discipline in their classrooms. To delve into these alternative strategies, it will be promising to explore the coping strategies employed by the productively immunized teachers in their coupling stage.

The findings could also be discussed in terms of high and low structure of the classroom. The high and low structure classrooms are the outcome of the type and amount of exerted control by teachers in their management practices (Hall, 2011). The findings of the current study suggest that immunity type has a direct interplay with managing a classroom as a high or low structure one. More specifically, the negatively immunized teachers may be characterized as the high structure classroom managers. According to Kramsch (1987) and Wright (2005), this type of classroom is teacher-controlled in which learners follow fixed classroom rules. On the other hand, the characteristics of the positively immunized teachers

are in line with the low structure classroom managers, who involve their learners in decision-making, while avoiding exercising extreme control over them (Kramsch, 1987). This finding can be further explained using the CDST framework. By adopting an effective self-organization process, productively immunized teachers develop a more adaptive and flexible approach, leading to low structure classroom management. On the other hand, the detrimental self-protection mechanism of counterproductively immunized teachers stabilizes patterns that promote high structure classroom management.

It should be noted that according to the descriptive statistics, the lowest mean score of the language teacher immunity scale belonged to the EFL teachers' *openness to change* ($M = 3.53$, $SD = .66$). This finding is supported by several studies intended to measure Iranian EFL teachers' immunity (e.g., Khazaenezhad & Davoudinasab, 2022; Maghsoudi, 2021; Songhori et al., 2018). With regard to the finding that productively immunized teachers avoid conservative classroom behaviors (Hiver, 2017), it seems that Iranian EFL teachers, in the context of the present study, demonstrate a low tendency to be open to changes regardless of their positive or negative immunity types. This argument is further corroborated by Songhori et al. (2018), in which positively immunized Iranian EFL teachers ($M > 5.50$) experienced an unexpectedly low openness to change ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.04$). This finding is presumably surprising because one of the main characteristics of teachers that develop a positive type of immunity is their tendency to embrace risk and innovation (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). One plausible explanation for this phenomenon is a mandatory official curriculum that Iranian EFL teachers must adhere to, as it was also echoed by Songhori et al. (2018). In addition to curriculum expectations, some other possible reasons may be parental expectations, standardized testing, workload and time constraints, and cultural factors that enhance a sense of vulnerability among productively immunized teachers to not be more innovative. These teachers may try to keep a fixed and predictable learning setting to be in line with the established norms of the whole education system.

However, a fair number of Iranian EFL teachers keep working in private language institutes that advocate a more flexible curriculum. With regard to the mixed participants of this study (i.e., EFL teachers from different teaching contexts), further research is needed to explain the relationship between teaching context and openness to change. Moreover, future research can also investigate the other possible reasons for Iranian productively immunized teachers' reluctance to change.

Among all the immunity factors, *teaching self-efficacy* and *openness to change* were statistically significant predictors of EFL teachers' classroom management. *Openness to change* was a negative predictor of *behavior management*, meaning that resisting innovations might lead to exercising rigorous control in managing classrooms. It seems that while the external challenges require adaptation, the rigid internal structure of counterproductively immunized teachers lacks the needed openness to change. These kinds of teachers, in the coupling stage, use familiar and controlled-oriented techniques, leading to the stabilization of an inflexible classroom environment. Furthermore, *teaching self-efficacy* also negatively contributed to *instructional management*, suggesting that low teaching self-efficacy might increase the amount of control exerted by EFL teachers in their classroom management practices. In terms of the CDST framework, one of the reasons may be that lower teaching self-efficacy might weaken the internal structure of the teacher. Thus, teachers with low self-

efficacy might find it difficult to use adaptive coping strategies amid their management challenges. This situation leads to excessive control exertion, leading to a maladaptive form of classroom management. In the same vein, Choi and Lee (2018) found that self-efficacy beliefs significantly correlated with student-centered and interaction-oriented teaching practices in which the extent of teacher control is expected to diminish.

Conclusion

The findings of this study showed a significant negative correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' immunity and their approach to managing classrooms. It seems that the positive immunization of a teacher reduces the amount of control exercised in managing classrooms. Moreover, *openness to change* and *teaching self-efficacy* dimensions of immunity were the significant negative predictors of classroom management. With regard to the implications, instead of exerting excessive control as a defensive mechanism to manage classrooms, teacher educators can offer a repertoire of other management strategies to pave the way for EFL teachers to develop a more positive type of immunity. Furthermore, concerning the relationship between immunity and autonomy (Noughabi et al., 2020) on the one hand, and a mandated EFL curriculum in Iran on the other hand, policymakers may implement a more flexible curriculum to encourage EFL teachers to be more innovative in their teaching careers. As we observed, openness to change is one of the main predictors of EFL teachers' immunity. Finally, EFL teachers might work on increasing their teaching self-efficacy, and in turn, their productive immunity, to manage classrooms in a way that more opportunities are provided for EFL learners' participation and interaction (Hall, 2011).

The current study has a number of limitations. First, volunteer sampling was used. Therefore, despite eliminating the self-selection bias, the results of the present study should be used and interpreted with caution. Future studies may use probability sampling techniques to reach more generalizable results. Second, the sample of this study was Iranian EFL teachers. Further studies may use EFL teachers from other countries. In so doing, in addition to checking the generalizability of the results, the link between immunity and classroom management may also be investigated cross-culturally. Third, this study utilized self-reported data. Therefore, future investigations may use other techniques, such as classroom observation, to investigate EFL teachers' actual classroom management practices.

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Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

No, there are no conflicting interests.

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