Predicting EFL Teacher's Perceived Self-Disclosure Practice: Demographic Factors in Focus

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Article info	Abstract
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Academics have generally accepted that teachers' interpersonal communication techniques and strategies—specifically, teachers' self-disclosure—are excellent instructional tools. The exploration of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perceptions regarding their self-disclosure practice and its relationship with demographic factors, which can also significantly contribute to the variation of the teachers' self-disclosure in EFL contexts, has been largely neglected in the Iranian EFL context despite the growing body of research in this area. To close this gap, the present research distributed a five-point Likert scale to the participants to gather their perceptions on self-disclosure as Iranian EFL instructors. The inferential statistical analyses revealed a great extent of self-disclosure is practiced by Iranian EFL teachers. Moreover, Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis indicated that among the degree, experience, age, and gender of participants, all, except gender, are associated with EFL teachers' self-disclosure, and could predict teachers' self-disclosure significantly. The study provides several implications for stakeholders in the EFL community as far as self-disclosure practice and teachers' professional development are concerned.

Keywords: *demographic factors, EFL teachers, self-disclosure*

1. Introduction

According to Khodamoradi et al. (2020), the classroom functions as a system where the outcomes it produces are influenced by multiple factors, including time, subject matter, resources, instructional methods, and materials, both in terms of their quality and quantity. The quality of the classroom atmosphere is influenced by various underlying factors, including the personalities of both teachers and students, as well as their interpersonal connections. As Maslowski (2003) maintains the classroom climate refers to the overall perceptions held by learners regarding the interpersonal dynamics and relationships within the classroom setting. The teacher-student relationship is so important that according to Van Petegem et al. (2005), a distinction is made between the interpersonal aspect of teaching, which centers on the interaction between instructors and students, and the pedagogical aspect, encompassing the sequencing of contents, instructional techniques, and evaluations. The student-teacher relationship is probably one of the most significant ones a person will ever have; in this reciprocal interaction (Khodamoradi et al., 2019), teachers are afforded the opportunity to disclose personal information with learners. When teachers provide personal information, students become more receptive to sharing their own personal experiences as well (Woolfolk & Woolfolk, 1975). For a variety of reasons, including grabbing students' attention, encouraging class debate, and providing firsthand examples of the material being covered, teachers decide to self-disclose to their students (McBride & Wahl, 2005).

Since teaching is fundamentally a communicative activity, several facets of education are influenced by the way the teacher interacts with and maintains relationships with his or her students (Aghaei et al., 2020; Qin, 2022). Teaching effectiveness and academic achievement are enhanced by positive interpersonal relationships between instructors and students (Sheybani, 2019). As several investigations (e.g., Cui, 2022; Pishghadam et al., 2021; Ranjbari et al., 2021) maintained in the EFL context, where learners are dependent on their instructors, these instructors are considered as the key to communication and effective learning and instruction. To create and maintain interest, improve students' interaction and engagement, and create a welcoming atmosphere for learning, teachers have to employ a variety of communication techniques (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). Self-disclosure, then, could be one of the significant communication strategies at the teachers' disposal to be employed for pedagogical purposes. Self-disclosure is one's deliberate choice of unveiling individual details about one to people (Jourard & Jaffe, 1970). Self-disclosure is a useful educational and communication strategy that allows one to orally share with another person his or her own emotions, attitudes, experiences, opinions, and beliefs (Gkonou et al., 2018; Safaei & Shahrokhi, 2019).

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2. Literature Review

The Social Penetration Theory (SPT) (Altman & Taylor, 1973) asserts that reciprocal self-disclosure is the primary way in which interpersonal relationships grow. SPT was used to elucidate the way people employ self-disclosure to unveil various aspects of others' viewpoints, values, as well as beliefs across multiple levels. According to SPT, personal disclosures change during an interpersonal connection from peripheral layers that could be few and superficial to core layers that could be numerous and intimate. Altman and Taylor (1973) maintained that interpersonal interactions often follow this pattern, and in case a great deal of personal information is shared before building trust, a sense of untrustworthy may develop.

Studies on teacher classroom practices in educational environments found that teachers often utilized personal disclosures in class. Earlier studies discovered teacher self-disclosure promoted a pleasant and supportive pedagogical environment (Aspy, 1969). Further, students were more motivated to engage and more likely to reciprocate self-disclosure when professors self-disclosed and employed verbal immediacy behaviors (Woolfolk & Woolfolk, 1975; Woolfolk et al, 1977).

The quality of student-teacher interactions may be influenced by several variables at multiple levels, including school variables (Birch & Ladd, 1997; 1998), student and teacher traits (Howes et al., 2000), and past relationship experiences (Saft & Pianta, 2001). Teachers' self-disclosure, which impacts the interaction between students and the instructor, and consequently students' outcomes, could be linked to several individual demographic factors. For instance, a direct linear relationship between teachers' years an instructor has taught, as a demographic factor, and the teaching quality is a general consensus reported in the literature (Brandenburg et al., 2016).

Knowing a teacher's demographic factors is essential for determining which characteristics, such as teaching experience, academic degree, age, and gender, are linked to the instructor's self-disclosure, which consequently influences the relationship between the learners and the teacher and facilitates the development of positive connections. In this regard, the authors of the current research, as Iranian EFL teachers, wonder what perception Iranian EFL teachers have regarding their self-disclosure practice in educational settings; they are also interested in examining the correlation between the self-disclosure practiced by EFL instructors and their demographic factors. Another concern of the research is to identify the demographic factors that may significantly predict self-disclosure among Iranian EFL instructors.

2.1. Objectives

Students may not always benefit from instructors who merely divulge personal details while teaching. Depending on how the self-disclosure was made, it could have an impact on better student results. Several studies (e.g., Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Zhang, 2007) reported that teachers' self-disclosure is a multi-faceted variable that fluctuates in various dimensions including amount, breadth, appropriateness, intent, topic, depth, relevance, timing, honesty, and valence due to the variation of both individual demographic factors and collective factors.

Teachers' self-disclosure has been the subject of research (Cayanus et al., 2003; Cayanus & Martin, 2004; Cayanus et al., 2008; Cayanus et al., 2009) in instructional communication as a means of promoting many dimensions of student engagement. This includes the moment in which instructors reveal private details to clarify the subject matter being taught in the classroom.

Despite the past literature indicates the valuable contributions of various aspects of the instructors' self-disclosure on outcomes of the classroom, what teachers' demographic factors contribute to the development of self-disclosure as a pedagogical aid still calls for more investigation due to its scarcity. Therefore, this study could be significant since it is one of the few studies in the Iranian EFL context that will hopefully enrich the understanding of the extent to which teachers' self-disclosure is practiced in relation to demographic factors. It can provide insightful information as to what extent Iranian EFL teachers' age, teaching experience, academic degree, and gender interact with self-disclosure and predict it as a pedagogical tool in an instructional setting like Iranian EFL classrooms.

As a result, the main goal of the present research is to find out the perception of Iranian EFL instructors regarding the extent to which they practice self-disclosure. Moreover, it explores the association between Iranian EFL teachers' demographic factors, namely teaching experience, academic degree, age, and gender, with their self-disclosure. Furthermore, the authors of the current research intend to cast more light on the demographic factors that significantly predict Iranian EFL teachers' self-disclose practice.

2.2. Research Questions

The research questions listed below served as a guide for the current study.

RQ_1: To what extent do Iranian EFL teachers practice self-disclosure in their interaction with their students?

RQ_2: Is there any significant correlation between Iranian EFL teachers'

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perceived self-disclosure and their demographic factors (academic degree, teaching experience, age, and gender)?

RQ$_3$: Which demographic factor can significantly predict Iranian EFL teachers perceived self-disclosure?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This research adopted a quantitative design conducted as a survey. For the exploratory phase of the study, a correlational method was used to explore the nature of the association between teachers' perceived self-disclosure as a main variable with such demographic factors as teaching experience, academic degree, age, and gender. This phase was supplemented with a deeper regression analysis of the correlation between the variables to cast further light on the significant power of the teaching experience, academic degree, age, and gender as predictor variables of the study.

3.2. Participants

In the current study, a nonprobability sampling technique (convenience/ opportunity sampling) was utilized to select the teacher participants of the study based on their availability. For the current study, a sample of 130 Iranian EFL teachers in Isfahan and Chahar-Mahal provinces were selected non-randomly. The target sample included EFL teachers with a teaching experience of a minimum of 2 years, and at various ages. Male and female EFL teachers of various academic backgrounds, including those with BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees, were included in the sample. They were chosen based on their availability and consent to take part in the study.

3.3. Instrument

To measure the EFL Teachers Perceived Self-Disclosure, a scale developed and validated by Demir and Demir (2021) was used. The scale has four factors including 21 items for teachers to rate their perceptions of their self-disclosure practiced in interactions with students in an educational context. In the study, the EFL teacher participants were instructed to indicate their level of self-disclosure on a 5-point Likert scale, which encompassed responses from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

3.4. Procedure

For the first phase of the study, a sample of 130 Iranian EFL teachers whose consent was obtained was selected non-randomly in Isfahan and Chahar-Mahal provinces. Some 31 participants were excluded after collecting the data because some of them did not return the questionnaires distributed among them, and because some questionnaires were not filled in completely and the questionnaire yielded missing data. The target EFL teachers had teaching experience ranging between 2 and 23 years. The sample included 37 male and 63 female EFL teacher participants. The male participants had a mean score of 42 years old for their age, and the age of the female participants indicated a 35-year-old mean score. The selected teacher participants were contacted in person, through telephone calls, or the social network application WhatsApp, based on the researchers' access. The respondents were required to assess their perceived self-disclosure in their EFL classes by filling in the EFL Teachers Perceived Self-Disclosure Scale after they agreed to take part in the research. The instrument was checked by two professors of Applied Linguistics in terms of its validity and was confirmed to be valid for measuring Self-disclosure. It was also piloted in a sample of 10 teachers who were from the target population of the study to reassure its consistency. Using Cronbach's alpha formula, the instrument demonstrated a strong level of reliability with a reliability index of .84. Both the hard copy and soft copies of the scale were distributed among the participants based on the nature of contact with the respected participants. There was a two-week time span for filling in the scale and returning the scale. The participants returned the questionnaire in person, via social media, or through email.

3.4. Data Analysis

After collecting the numerical data, descriptive statistics were run through the 26th version of the software Statistical Package for Social Science to check the required assumptions for running appropriate inferential statistics. Based on prior assumption checking, the appropriate regression analysis was employed to adequately respond to the first two inquiries.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The first study question was intended to determine the extent to which self-disclosure was practiced by Iranian EFL instructors while interacting with their pupils. Accordingly, an ex-post-facto design was employed to assess the respondents' perceptions of their self-disclosure practice. Given that the information was gathered via a questionnaire utilizing a five-point Likert scale,

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the mean score for all participants could be compared against the cut-off score of the EFL teacher's perceived self-disclosure scale. The cut-off score was set at 3, as it is the norm in five-point Likert scale instruments. A mean score of less than 3 indicated that the participants did not demonstrate the expected self-disclosure practice. And, a mean score of more than 3 could reveal the extent to which the EFL teacher in this research would practice self-disclosure more than expected.

Before conducting the necessary statistical analyses, the data underwent assessments for normality and the presence of outliers. According to Figure 1, the EFL teacher's self-disclosure practice data look approximately normal, observationally speaking.

Figure 1
Normal Q-Q Plot of EFL Teacher's Self-Disclosure

Observationally, the teacher's self-disclosure data look normal approximately according to Figure 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were run, as displayed in the following table, to make sure the data are normally distributed.

Table 1.
Normality Test for Teacher's Self-Disclosure

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Self-Disclosure	.105	99	.009	.986	99	.397

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

According to Table 1, the significance of the value for Kolmogorov-Smirnov (S (99) = .105, p = .009) was less than the P-value which confirmed the normality of the data; however, the value for Shapiro-Wilk (W (99) = .986, p = .3997) test of normality was more than the *p*-value (0.05), which rejects that the data were distributed normally. Therefore, since the Shapiro-Wilk test is a more robust normality test the data were treated as a normal distribution. Moreover, there were no cases of outliers, according to Figure 2

Figure 2

Teacher's Self-Disclosure Box Plot
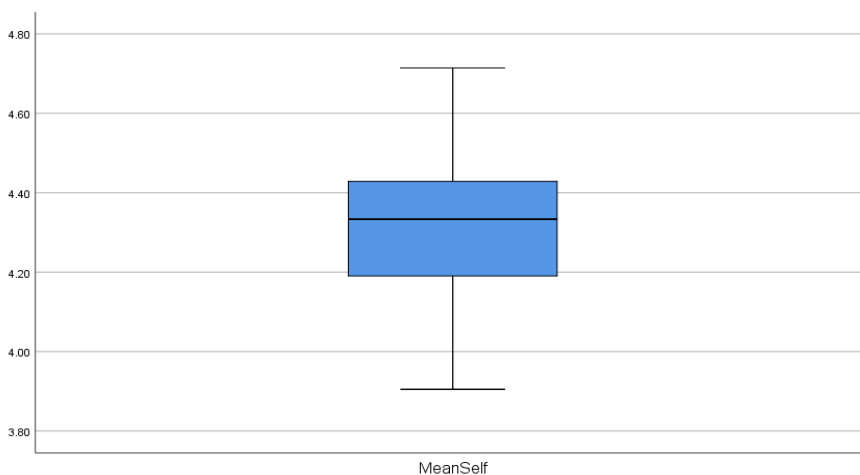
Running the descriptive statistics for the teacher's self-disclosure, the data revealed that the mean score for the EFL teacher's self-disclosure practice was more than the cut-off score (3), as displayed in the following table.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Teacher's Self-Disclosure

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Self-Disclosure	99	4.3093	.16118	.01620

However, to make sure whether the difference between the EFL teacher's self-disclosure score (M = 4.3093) and the cut-off is significant or not, inferential statistics were required. Therefore, to compare the mean of the sample of the study (M = 4.3093) with the cut-off score (M = 3), a one-sample t-test was run.

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Table 3

One-Sample Test for Teacher's Self-Disclosure

	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Self-Disclosure	80.824	98	.000	1.30928	1.2771	1.3414

The one-sample t-test test indicated the difference between the mean of the sample ($M = 4.3093$, $SD = .16118$; $t(98) = 80.824$, $p = .000$), and the cut-off score was statistically significant. Therefore, it could be deduced that the Iranian EFL teachers of the study practice self-disclosure in their interaction with their students to a great extent.

Another aim of the research was to investigate the nature of the association between instructors' self-disclosure and their demographic factors (academic degree, teaching experience, age, and gender), and also to check which demographic factor can significantly predict Iranian EFL teachers' self-disclosure, Regression Analysis was used. There are several models of regression analysis; however, because of the multiple independent variables in the current study and no prior knowledge about the predictive power of each independent variable, Hierarchical Multiple Regression could serve best the objectives of the statistical procedure of the current study (Ross & Willson, 2017).

This would let one see the power of prediction that every predictor (independent variable) incorporates into the model after entering or removing it. Hierarchical Multiple Regression is useful to identify (statistically) what factors are the most powerful predictors. The test reports the significance level for each model as well as the R^2 and *F*-statistic changes between the two models (Ross & Willson, 2017).

For Hierarchical Multiple Regression analysis to yield reliable and valid results, the data need to meet several assumptions. Hahs-Vaughn and Lomax (2020) list several assumptions that were checked in the present research for running a Multiple Regression analysis.

Checking and ensuring all the assumptions were fulfilled, the relationships among the variables of the study were analyzed. In this regard, Table 1 revealed that the correlation between perceived self-disclosure practiced by Iranian EFL instructors and their demographic factors was significant.

Table 4

Correlations

		Self-disclosure	Gender	Experience	Age	Degree
Pearson Correlation	Self-disclosure	1.000	-.107	.320	.470	.521
	Gender	-.107	1.000	.264	.549	-.669
	Experience	.320	.264	1.000	.646	-.392
	Age	.470	.549	.646	1.000	-.114
	Degree	.521	-.669	-.392	-.114	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Self-disclosure	.	.047	.022	.040	.000
	Gender	.047	.	.264	.016	.249
	Experience	.022	.264	.	.000	.083
	Age	.040	.016	.000	.	.030
	Degree	.000	.249	.083	.030	.

According to Table 4, a positive significant correlation was found between the dependent variable, namely EFL teacher's Perceived Self-disclosure and Experience ($r = .320$, $p = .022$) as one of the demographic factors. Moreover, there was a significant and positive correlation between Self-Disclosure and Age ($r = .470$, $p = .045$), as well as between Self-Disclosure and Degree ($r = .521$, $p = .000$). However, Gender indicated a weak negative correlation with EFL teachers' Perceived Self-disclosure as the other demographic factor analyzed in the current study.

Table 5

Variables Entered/Removed

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Degree, Gender, Experience, Age[b]	.	Enter
2	.[b]	Gender	Remove

a. Dependent Variable: Self-disclosure

b. All requested variables entered.

c. All requested variables removed.

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A Hierarchical Multiple Regression analysis was run, with two blocks of variables, to test the predictions. As Table 5 displays, the first block included age, experience, degree (0 = undergraduate, 1 = graduate), and gender (0 = male, 1 = female) as the predictors, with EFL teachers' perceived self-disclosure as the dependent variable. In block two, gender was removed as the predictor variable, with EFL teachers' perceived self-disclosure as the dependent variable. The rationale behind removing gender as the only demographic factor and predictor was the fact that it had the weakest relationship with the dependent variable of the study. Another justification was to check whether the prediction power of the models tested would increase.

Table 6

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. The error in the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.554a	.308	.289	.13589	
2	.563b	.317	.295	.13529	2.185

a. Predictors: (Constant), Degree, Gender, Experience, Age

b. Predictors: (Constant), Degree, Experience, Age

c. Dependent Variable: Self-disclosure

According to Table 6, the value in the *R* column represents the magnitude of the association between the outcome variable and the collective set of predictor variables. In the first model of the current study $R = 0.554$, which is a strong relationship (Cohen, 1988). The proportion of variation in teacher's self-disclosure, accounted for by the set of predictors, namely Degree, Gender, Experience, and Age can be explained by the R-square column ($R^2 = .308$). As displayed in Table 6, the set of predictors accounted for approximately 30% of the variation in EFL teachers' self-disclosure.

The second model in which gender, as a predictor was removed, yielded a stronger index of relationship, $R = .563$. Moreover, the variation of the dependent variable, that is EFL teachers' self-disclosure, could be accounted for 31% by the set of predictors Degree, Experience, and Age, in the second model of the regression analysis ($R^2 = .308$). Both models indicated a large effect size, with the second model having a larger effect size. Cohen (1988, p. 86) suggested the following "standards for judging the size of the effect of the set of predictors and the DV using R-square: $R^2 \leq .02$ (small effect); $R^2 = .13$ (medium effect); $R^2 \geq .26$ (large effect)".

Table 7

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.810	4	.202	10.965	.000[b]
	Residual	1.736	94	.018		
	Total	2.546	98			
2	Regression	.807	3	.269	14.700	.000[c]
	Residual	1.739	95	.018		
	Total	2.546	98			

a. Dependent Variable: Self-disclosure

b. Predictors: (Constant), Degree, Gender, Experience, Age

c. Predictors: (Constant), Degree, Experience, Age

The analysis of the data also revealed that the overall regression models in block one and block two were good fits for the data. The independent variables, namely Degree, Gender, Experience, and Age could overall statistically significantly predict the dependent variable, that is EFL teacher's self-disclosure, $F_{(4, 98)}$ = 10.965, $p < .000$ (indicating that the regression model fits the data well) in the first model. The second model also fitted the data very well $F_{(3, 98)}$ = 14.7, $p < .000$, confirming that Degree, Experience, and Age could overall statistically significantly predict EFL teachers' self-disclosure.

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Table 8
Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.807	.161		23.603	.000		
	Gender	.011	.029	.033	.391	.697	.290	1.010
	Experience	.118	.009	.532	2.017	.047	.204	8.604
	Age	.189	.008	.635	2.401	.018	.594	6.633
	Degree	.277	.028	.547	6.353	.000	.980	1.020
2	(Constant)	3.816	.159		24.015	.000		
	Experience	.194	.009	.526	2.006	.048	.104	9.570
	Age	.218	.008	.630	2.397	.018	.104	9.615
	Degree	.307	.028	.544	6.369	.000	.984	1.016

a. Dependent Variable: Self-disclosure

The significant contribution that every predictor variable makes to the two models is displayed in Table 8. As for the first model, looking at the Sig. column in Table 8, it is indicated that Experience ($p = 0.047$), Age ($p = 0.018$), and Degree ($p = 0.000$) as predictors of the model, could all significantly predict EFL teachers' self-disclosure, as the dependent variable of the study. However, Gender ($p = 0.697$) could not significantly predict the dependent variable of the study. Accordingly, since one of the predictors of the first model failed to have a significant contribution to the model, the study opted for the second model.

As for the second model, because gender was removed from the model, all the other predictors, namely Experience, Age, and Degree, could have a significant prediction of EFL teachers' self-disclosure. Therefore, the second model was selected in the present research to explain the variation of EFL teachers' self-disclosure by each predictor. Within Table 5, the Beta column presents the B values, which provide insight into the impact of each predictor on the outcome, as the impact of other variables is controlled. Accordingly, with each incremental increase of one unit in Degree, it is anticipated that EFL teachers' self-disclosure will increase by .307 units while keeping the other predictors constant (Degree $B_1 = .307$). Assuming the other predictors remain unchanged, an increase of one

unit in Age is projected to result in a .218 unit increase in EFL teachers' self-disclosure (Age B_2 = .218). Moreover, with each incremental increase of one unit in Experience, it is anticipated that EFL teachers' self-disclosure will increase by .194 units, keeping the other predictors constant (Experience B_3 = .194). Therefore, the model revealed that the strongest predictors of EFL teacher's self-disclosure were Degree, Age, and Experience (B_1 = .307, t = 6.369, p = .000; B_2 = .218, t = 2.397; p = .018; B_3 = .194, t = 2.006, p = .048) respectively.

4.2. Discussion

This research focused on examining the extent to which Iranian EFL instructors practice self-disclosure with their students. It also explored the association between EFL teachers' self-disclosure, as perceived by EFL teachers, and their demographic factors including degree, experience, age, and gender using Hierarchical Multiple Regression analysis. The major finding of the research proved that among degree, experience, age, and gender as demographic factors included in the current study, all, except gender, were associated with EFL teachers' self-disclosure, however, at different levels and in somewhat different ways.

The perception of Iranian EFL teachers regarding their self-disclosure confirmed that a great extent of self-disclosure is demonstrated by EFL teachers. The findings are supported by Rahimi and Askari-Bigdeli (2016) who found that Iranian EFL teachers deploy self-disclosure in educational settings with their students to talk about a range of topics including personal experiences/stories, personal interests, hobbies, and opinions, as well as for exchanging details about their acquaintances, relatives, and family. The great extent of self-disclosure practice could be explained by the advantages that self-disclosure has revealed to have both as an interpersonal relationship skill and as an instructional tool. According to Hill et al. (2008), perceptions of learning and the self-disclosure practiced by the instructor are correlated positively. Students' attitudes toward the instructor, and towards the course as a whole have a positive correlation with the self-disclosure practiced by the instructor (Cayanus & Heisler, 2013; Goodboy et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Sorenson (1989) came to the conclusion that teachers' self-disclosure aids students in understanding course material. Additionally, by using self-disclosure, teachers may strengthen their relationships with their students (Fusani, 1994; Galvin, 1999; Mendes, 2003), since doing so will help students to have a clearer understanding of their teacher's character, and lessen their perceived power gap from them (Moreland, 2011). Personal self-disclosures support students' feelings of care, closeness, and liking, which furthers teachers' relationship objectives (Kaufmann & Frisby, 2017). Furthermore, the past

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literature indicates that teachers' self-disclosure is an effective technique that facilitates both teaching and learning since it may result in fruitful student results (Cayanus & Martin, 2016; Wilson, 1995). Therefore, it could be argued that EFL teachers, consciously or unconsciously, have realized the advantages of their self-disclosure practices in their educational workplace. That is why EFL teachers report that they practice a great extent of self-disclosure in EFL contexts, as the current study revealed.

The non-differentiative role of gender perceived by EFL teachers of the current study, both males and females, about their self-disclosure practice is not supported by previous research on teachers' interpersonal relationships in instructional settings. The result is "contrary to traditional stereotypical roles in which self-disclosure is more consistent with the feminine role" (Duke & Murdock, 1992, p. 87). Furthermore, according to Drugli's (2013) research, female instructors exhibited higher levels of closeness in their relationships with students compared to male instructors. This disparity is most apparent as far as the intimacy of these interactions is concerned. Since subtle group variations may help understand how cultural and social elements may impact interpersonal interactions, Zusho and Kumar (2018) contend that the function of culture in connection to theory is crucial for researchers to take into account. Finding no significant prediction of EFL teachers' self-disclosure by their gender could be explained, therefore, from a cultural perspective. Accordingly, it could be argued that the Persian cultural settings in which EFL teachers of the current study work do not motivate any gender stereotypes in terms of self-disclosure behavior. That is why no significant correlation existed between EFL teachers' self-disclosure and their gender. This explanation, however, calls for further investigation and support.

Another explanation could be the institutional mandates advocated and disseminated in educational contexts in Iran, which are, in turn, generalized to the EFL context as well. In the Iranian educational system teachers' communication behaviors, including self-disclosure, and their role identities are influenced and limited by the preferences and priorities of the system itself, rather than being determined by the individual preferences of the teachers (Rahimi & Askari-Bigdeli, 2016); this trend is also applied to teaching methodologies as well. This means that Iranian EFL teachers operate within a framework that is backed by institutional mandates. In these circumstances, where the instructors' work is monitored and regulated, it is not surprising to find no relationship between teacher's gender and their perceived self-disclosure, since they are trained to follow the same principles and rules that have been prescribed by the educational system mandates irrespective to teacher's inherent gender differences.

Another finding of the study was the significant association between the self-disclosure of EFL instructors and their teaching experience, as well as the significant prediction of self-disclosure by the experience of teachers. As far as the researchers know, no previous research, locally and internationally, has previously looked at the association between Iranian EFL instructors' teaching experience and their self-disclosure, as explored in this research. The findings of the current study on this relationship, however, are consistent with earlier research on the linear relationship between a teacher's instruction quality and their experience (Brandenburg et al., 2016), which found that the influence of an instructor's self-disclosure on learners' outcomes is an indicator of good teaching. For instance, Song et al. (2016) discovered a connection between instructors' self-disclosure and students' reported knowledge gain and class satisfaction, in both online and face-to-face settings. A significant association between students' cognitive learning and their instructor's self-disclosure was reported by Goodboy et al. (2014) in different research. A possible reason for the substantial correlation between EFL instructors' self-disclosure and their teaching experience is the conception of teaching quality as implemented by teacher self-disclosure. According to Pianta and Hamre (2009), teaching quality is conceptualized as a multifaceted concept that originates from empirical research and encompasses various teaching practices that have a positive impact on students' emotional, behavioral, and academic achievements. Hence, one could contend that teachers' self-disclosure is correlated with teaching experience as they together contribute to the quality of teaching.

In the same vein, the interplay between teachers' ages and their self-disclosure could be justified. One possible reason might be the point that as teachers' teaching experiences increase, naturally their ages, as a covariate, increase as well. It could be argued that the older the EFL teachers become, the more experience they have. Therefore, it is logical that self-disclosure is correlated with an increase in both age and teaching experience as two covariates, as the current study indicated.

Furthermore, the present study revealed a significant association between EFL instructors' academic degree and their self-disclosure, as the academic degree could act as the most powerful predictor of EFL teachers' self-disclosure among other demographic factors examined in the current study. As far as the authors of the study know, this finding could be compared with no previous study as no study has examined it before in the Iranian EFL context. However, the interplay between EFL instructors' academic degrees and their self-disclosure can root in the knowledge they have acquired in their academic studies. Higher-educated instructors naturally take and attend more courses on various facets of learning and instructing languages, which results in their becoming more competent

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regarding the significance of interpersonal relationships with students, including self-disclosure. As a result, they are anticipated to practice more self-disclosure. Another explanation is that EFL instructors with postgraduate degrees in the study had more opportunities to get feedback and experience from their self-disclosure practices in classrooms compared with EFL teachers who were less-experiences and who had lower degrees; they had a stronger justification for enhancing their self-disclosure in EFL settings since, ultimately, interpersonal connections are intricately tied to the notion of experiential learning (Thompson & Pascal, 2012).

5. Conclusion and Implications

Understanding teachers' demographics is crucial for identifying which traits, like teaching experience, academic degree, age, and gender, are connected to the teacher's self-disclosure, which in turn influences relationships between students and teachers, and consequently develops positive relationships. Being Iranian EFL instructors themselves, the authors of the present research were intrigued by the perceptions of self-disclosure practices among Iranian EFL teachers. They aimed to assess the potential correlation between self-disclosure and various demographic factors, serving as predictive variables, within the context of the Iranian EFL community.

This study could lead the researchers to come to the conclusion that the advantages of self-disclosure have been unveiled to EFL teachers either consciously or unconsciously in their interpersonal relationship with their students; EFL teachers seem to have witnessed the impact of self-disclosure as an instructional tool on their students' learning outcomes too. Accordingly, their perception is that self-disclosure is practiced to a great extent in their relationships with their students. This is further supported by the correlations found between EFL teachers' self-disclosure and their demographic factors such as academic degree, teaching experience, and age. The current study demonstrated that the more experienced and older, the EFL teachers become, the more they practice self-disclosure. The significant association between EFL instructors' self-disclosure and their teaching experiences as well as age might suggest that as teachers get older and more experienced, their consciousness is raised regarding their interpersonal relationships with students in teaching, and in turn, this would enable them to enhance their self-disclosure practice to develop professionally. In addition, EFL teachers holding higher academic degrees would probably practice more self-disclosure due to the more academic knowledge they acquire in their courses, and also due to more opportunities they have to get feedback and experience from their self-disclosure practices with students. Therefore, the present research could propose that while instructors gain more teaching experience and grow older, and

while they attain higher academic qualifications, their tendency to engage in self-disclosure also increases.

Due to the limited number of studies exploring the association between demographic factors and self-disclosure, particularly within the Iranian context of this research, the present study makes a valuable contribution by shedding light on the extent demographic factors may indirectly impact the practice of self-disclosure among the community of EFL teachers. It consequently can provide some important implications for teacher educators in Teacher Training Courses (TTC), administrators in charge of holding teacher professional development programs, and the practice of novice and experienced EFL teachers among other stakeholders in EFL settings. It is obvious that teachers are important to education and that both internal and external variables affect their performance (Derakhshan et al., 2021). Hence, students' motivation, learning, achievements, and the educational system efficacy in general, all depend on several teacher's attributes, including but not limited to the teacher's self-disclosure. Considering the results obtained in the current investigation, it is recommended that the teacher educators attending TTCs improve and develop a deep understanding of various dimensions of self-disclosure among EFL instructors who have a superficial understanding of teacher self-disclosure. Teacher educators can provide trainees with materials and hold courses that highlight and clarify the fundamental characteristics of the concept of self-disclosure based on strong theoretical frameworks supported by empirical studies that stress the effect of instructor's self-disclosure on strengthening the association between the learners and teacher, and also on the improvement of student learning outcomes. Moreover, professional consequences and behavioral manifestations of teachers' self-disclosure can be highlighted by teacher educators to inform prospective EFL teachers of the concept as well.

The authorities in charge of teacher professional development programs are also recommended to take the age, teaching experience, and academic degrees of the EFL teachers who participate in professional development programs into account. They should tailor professional development programs to the EFL teachers' demographic factors to have more professional development among teachers, including teachers' self-disclosure development, in the EFL community. EFL teachers are encouraged to attend more pre-service and in-service training courses where the more experienced, older, and higher-degree-holder teachers share their academic and intuitive perceptions of teacher self-disclosure with novice, less experienced, and younger teachers who have lower academic degrees. They can learn the concept of teacher self-disclosure in these courses if they are not familiar with it; they can negotiate different aspects of the concept of self-disclosure that can be used as a teaching aid and as an interpersonal relationship

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skill, and develop their basic knowledge for their future carrier in teacher education programs. The presentation of such concepts and how important they could be, make the instructors ready to enact their professional knowledge in their instructional settings, paving the way to have more professional teachers in EFL contexts.

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