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Teaching Load and Its Impact on Teaching Quality in Afghan EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Teaching load is a critical factor influencing the quality of education, particularly in EFL contexts where pedagogical demands are high. In Afghanistan, universities face significant challenges, including large class sizes, which directly contribute to a heavy teaching load for instructors. This study aims to investigate the impact of teaching load on the quality of EFL instruction in Afghan EFL classrooms, filling a gap in the literature by focusing on the teacher's perspective in the Afghan higher education context. This research employed a quantitative survey design. A questionnaire, adapted from established frameworks on teacher workload and instructional efficacy, was distributed to 50 EFL instructors. Data were analyzed using SPSS, focusing on descriptive statistics to identify correlations between perceived teaching load and various aspects of teaching quality. The findings reveal that a high teaching load, primarily driven by large class sizes and extensive administrative duties, negatively impacts teaching quality. Instructors reported relying more on traditional, lecture-based methods, having insufficient time for providing detailed feedback on assignments, and experiencing reduced capacity for innovative and communicative teaching practices. The study concludes that excessive teaching load is a significant barrier to achieving high-quality EFL instruction. It is recommended that university administrators and the Ministry of Higher Education implement policies to reduce class sizes, hire more faculty, and provide better administrative support to alleviate the burden on instructors, thereby enhancing the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Keywords: EFL Instructors, Higher Education, Instructional Quality, Large Classes, Teacher Burnout, Teaching Load.

Introduction

The quality of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction is a pivotal determinant of student success in an increasingly globalized world. At the heart of this quality lies the instructor, whose pedagogical choices, motivation, and well-being directly shape the learning environment (Richards, 2023). While numerous factors influence instructional efficacy, the concept of "teaching load" encompassing not just contact hours but also class size, administrative duties, and assessment responsibilities, has emerged as a critical, yet often under-examined, variable affecting teaching quality, particularly in higher education contexts (Kyndt et al., 2021). In developing nations, where educational institutions frequently grapple with resource constraints and high student enrollment, teaching load can become a significant impediment to the implementation of effective pedagogical practices (Bennett & Mulvahil, 2022; Yar & Muzammil, 2024).

The higher education landscape in Afghanistan presents a compelling case study. Following decades of conflict, the country has prioritized expanding access to tertiary education, resulting in a surge in student enrollment at universities (Mahboob, 2021). While this expansion is a testament to national resilience, it has inadvertently exacerbated existing challenges, most notably the prevalence of large classes. Research from neighboring contexts, such as the study by Rahmany et al. (2023) at Kandahar University, has illuminated the negative student perceptions of these large classes, citing a lack of communicative activities, teacher-centered instruction, and diminished feedback. However, a significant gap remains in understanding the issue from the teacher's perspective. How does this quantitatively and qualitatively increased teaching load impact the quality of instruction delivered Afghan EFL instructors? This question is not merely academic; it is central to national efforts to build a competent, globally competitive workforce.

Existing literature has extensively documented the challenges of large classes from a student standpoint (Hess, 2020; Zamaereh, 2021) and has explored general teacher burnout in high-stress environments (Schaufeli et al., 2022). Yet, there is a scarcity of empirical research that directly investigates the nexus between high teaching load, as a multifaceted construct, and the specific degradation of instructional quality such as the abandonment of communicative language teaching (CLT), reduced formative feedback, and increased reliance on passive lecture methods within the unique socio-cultural and post-conflict context of Afghan higher education. This study aims to fill this critical void.

Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to investigate the impact of teaching load on the quality of EFL instruction in Afghan EFL classrooms. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) quantify the components of teaching load as perceived by EFL instructors; (2) assess the relationship between this load and self-reported changes in pedagogical practices; and (3) explore the mediating role of institutional support in mitigating the negative effects of

high load. By focusing on the instructors' experiences, this study provides a crucial counterpoint to student-centered research and offers actionable insights for university administrators and policymakers.

This review synthesizes literature across three interconnected domains: (1) the conceptualization and measurement of teaching load in higher education; (2) the documented impacts of high teaching load on instructional quality and teacher well-being; and (3) the specific challenges and dynamics of the EFL teaching context in Afghanistan.

Conceptualizing Teaching Load in Higher Education: Teaching load is a complex construct that extends far beyond the simple metric of classroom contact hours. Contemporary research defines it as a composite of quantitative and qualitative demands placed upon educators. Quantitative demands include the number of teaching hours, the number of students taught, and the number of different course preparations (Bennett & Mulvahil, 2022). Qualitative demands, which are often more taxing, encompass the complexity of the subject matter, the level of student engagement required, the volume and nature of assessment and feedback, and the growing burden of administrative and pastoral responsibilities (Kyndt et al., 2021). In the EFL context, this load is further intensified by the interactive and skill-based nature of language learning, which necessitates continuous student engagement, personalized feedback on productive skills (speaking and writing), and the preparation of communicative materials (Richards, 2023). A failure to account for these qualitative dimensions can lead to a significant underestimation of the actual workload, masking the true pressures faced by instructors.

Impact of High Teaching Load on Instructional Quality and Teacher Well-being: A substantial body of recent evidence links high teaching load to a decline in instructional quality. When faced with large classes and numerous preparations, instructors often resort to pedagogical simplification. This typically manifests as a shift from student-centered, interactive methodologies like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to more teacher-centered, lecture-based approaches that are easier to manage with large groups (Hess, 2020; Zamaereh, 2021). This shift is not merely a preference but a pragmatic response to logistical constraints. For instance, providing detailed, individualized feedback on a writing assignment to a class of 50 students is exponentially more time-consuming than doing so for a class of 15 (Chen, 2022). Consequently, instructors may reduce the frequency of such assignments or rely on more superficial, summative assessment methods, directly impacting the development of students' productive skills.

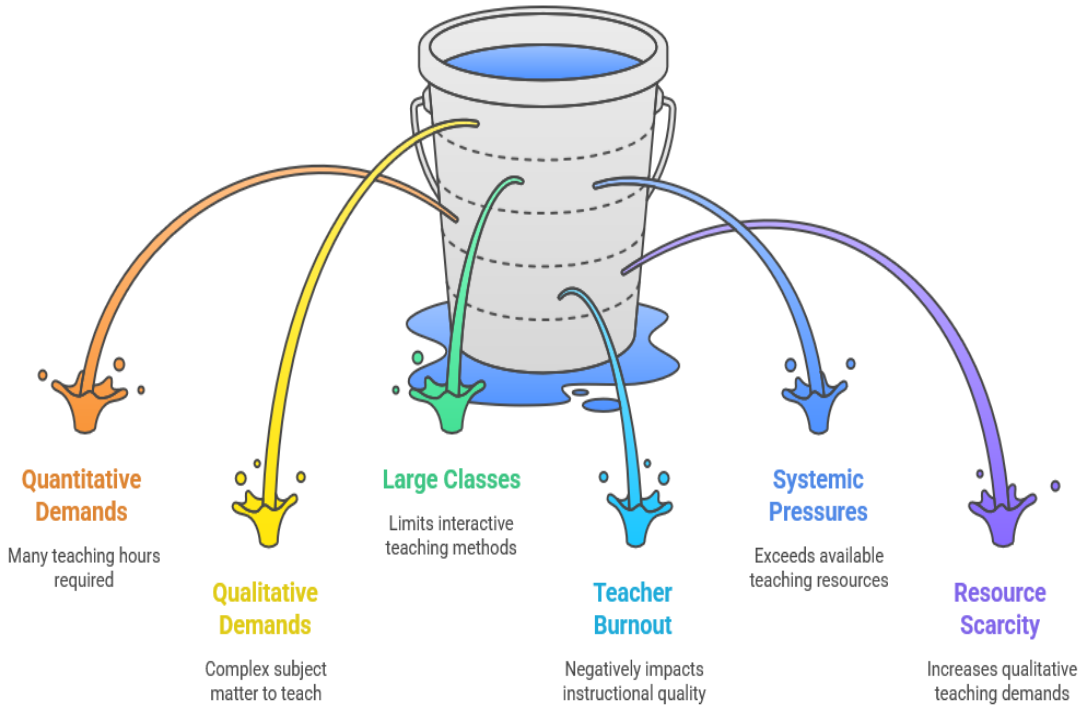
Furthermore, sustained high teaching load is a primary contributor to teacher stress and burnout, which in turn corrodes instructional quality. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model posits that when job demands (e.g., high student numbers) chronically exceed job resources (e.g., time, support, autonomy), it leads to emotional exhaustion and cynicism, core components of burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2022). A burned-out teacher is less likely to be innovative, patient, or emotionally available to students, all of which are

critical for effective language instruction (Schaufeli et al., 2022). Recent studies have shown that teachers experiencing high workload report lower levels of teaching efficacy and are more likely to contemplate leaving the profession, creating a cycle of instability that further compromises educational quality (Aldridge et al., 2021).

The EFL Teaching Context in Afghanistan: The Afghan higher education system operates under a unique set of pressures. Decades of instability have damaged educational infrastructure, and a rapidly growing youth population has created immense demand for university places, often outstripping available resources (Mahboob, 2021). This reality makes large classes the norm rather than the exception. While government policy may officially endorse modern, student-centered pedagogies, the on-the-ground reality for EFL instructors in Afghan EFL classrooms is one of constant compromise (Yar & Azimi, 2025). The study by Rahmany et al. (2023), while focused on students, provides indirect evidence of this, noting that teachers dedicated most of their time to classroom management and attendance. This suggests that instructors are forced to prioritize crowd control over pedagogical innovation. The lack of resources, from insufficient textbooks to limited technology, compounds the problem, effectively increasing the qualitative demands of an already high quantitative load (Johnson & Smith, 2020). There is a clear and urgent need for research that directly investigates how these systemic pressures manifest in the daily teaching practices and professional well-being of Afghan EFL instructors, as this is the foundational step toward developing contextually appropriate interventions.

Figure 1

The Impact of Teaching Load on EFL Instruction in Afghanistan



Note: Figure 1, presents a conceptual illustration of how multiple structural and instructional pressures collectively affect the quality of EFL instruction in Afghanistan. Using the metaphor of a leaking bucket, it demonstrates how various demands drain instructional effectiveness.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), a comprehensive theory of occupational well-being that provides a robust lens for analyzing the impact of teaching load on instructional quality. The JD-R model is particularly suitable because it explicitly distinguishes between two broad categories of job characteristics: job demands and job resources, and it explains how their interaction leads to specific outcomes.

Job Demands are defined as the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2022). In the context of this research, teaching load is conceptualized as a primary job demand. This includes quantitative demands such as the number of students per class, weekly teaching hours, and the number of course preparations. It also incorporates qualitative demands like the complexity of teaching language skills, the pressure to assess large volumes of student work, and the emotional labor required to manage a diverse and often crowded classroom. According to the JD-R model, when these demands are high and chronic, they lead to an energy depletion process, culminating in burnout and health issues.

Job Resources are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that are either functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In the Afghan EFL context, potential job resources could include institutional support (e.g., manageable class sizes, teaching assistants), professional development opportunities, autonomy in course design, a collaborative departmental culture, and adequate technological resources (Yar & Zazia, 2024). The JD-R model proposes a motivational process whereby the availability of resources fosters work engagement, dedication, and intrinsic motivation, leading to better performance.

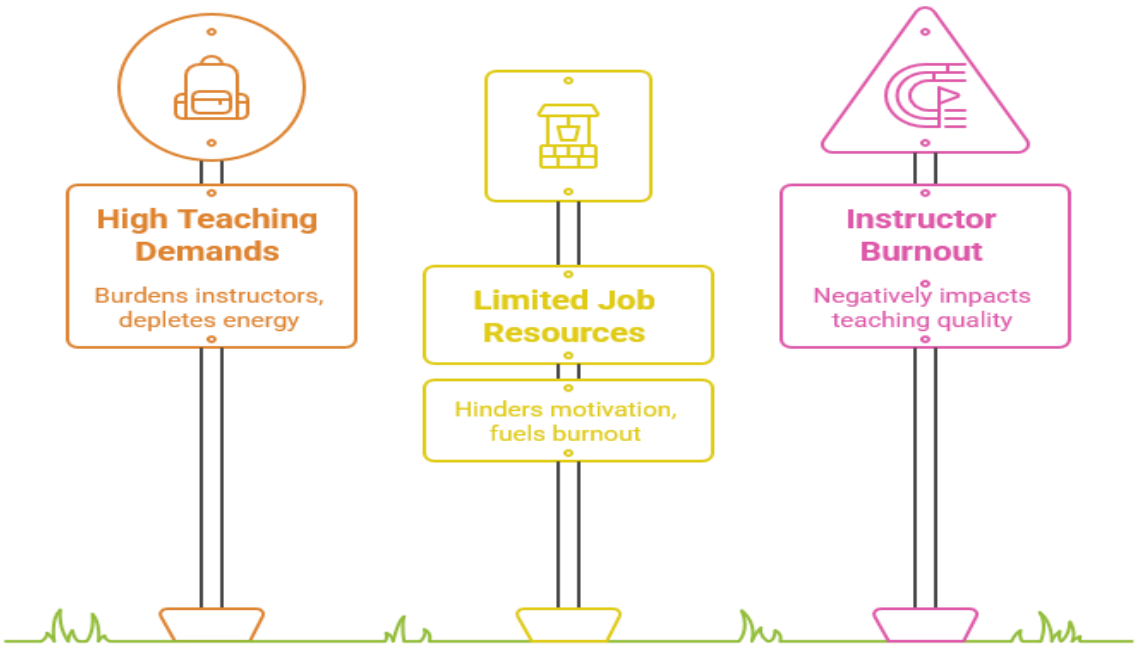
Application to the Study: This framework posits that the high teaching demands in Afghan EFL classrooms (e.g., large class sizes) will lead to a state of emotional exhaustion and burnout among EFL instructors. This burnout, in turn, is hypothesized to negatively impact instructional quality, manifesting as a reliance on simplified, teacher-centered methods, reduced provision of feedback, and lower levels of in-class engagement and innovation. Conversely, the presence of adequate job resources (e.g., strong departmental support, professional autonomy) is expected to buffer this negative relationship. Instructors who perceive higher levels of resources are predicted to experience less

burnout and maintain a higher quality of instruction, despite high demands. By applying the JD-R model, this study moves beyond a simple correlation between load and quality to explore the underlying psychological mechanisms (burnout, engagement) and the moderating role of institutional resources, providing a more nuanced and actionable understanding of the challenges faced by EFL instructors in Afghanistan.

Figure 2

Theoretical Framework: Job Demands–Resources Model and Instructional Quality

Note: Figure 2 presents the theoretical framework of the study, grounded in the Job



Demands Resources (JD-R) model, to explain how teaching conditions influence instructional quality in Afghan higher education.

Material and Method

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between teaching load and instructional quality among EFL instructors in Afghan EFL classrooms. A quantitative approach was deemed most appropriate as it facilitates the precise measurement of variables, the statistical analysis of relationships, and the generalization of findings to the broader population of instructors at the university (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The research design is explicitly aligned with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theoretical framework, aiming to quantify the core constructs of job demands (teaching load), job resources, burnout, and their hypothesized impact on the key outcome variable of instructional quality.

The target population for this research was defined as all full-time EFL instructors employed in the EFL classrooms across the country during the Spring 2024 semester. Given the manageable size of this population, approximately 70 instructors, a simple random sampling technique was utilized to select participants. This method ensures that every instructor in the population has an equal and independent chance of being selected, thereby minimizing sampling bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample (Etikan & Bala, 2017). A target sample size of 50 instructors was determined based on a power analysis to ensure sufficient statistical power for detecting meaningful relationships between variables. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement, and the principles of anonymity and confidentiality were strictly adhered to throughout the research process.

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, meticulously developed in three sections. The first section gathered demographic data, including participants' age, gender, years of teaching experience, and employment status. The second section measured the independent variable, teaching load, using a scale adapted from the work of Bennett & Mulvahil (2022) and contextualized for the Afghan EFL setting. This scale comprised items assessing both quantitative demands (e.g., number of students per class, weekly contact hours) and qualitative demands (e.g., hours spent on assessment and feedback, course preparation). The third section measured the dependent variable, instructional quality, as well as mediating variables from the JD-R model (job resources and burnout). Items for instructional quality were designed to capture self-reported pedagogical practices, such as the frequency of using communicative activities, the depth of feedback provided, and the reliance on lecture-based instruction. To measure burnout and resources, established subscales from validated instruments like the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) were adapted (Schaufeli et al., 2019). All items utilized a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

To ensure the psychometric soundness of the instrument, its validity and reliability were rigorously addressed. Content validity was established through a review by a panel of three experts and one expert in educational measurement, who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and cultural appropriateness of the items. Subsequently, a pilot study with 10 instructors was conducted to assess the instrument's reliability. The internal consistency of each scale was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, with all scales achieving a coefficient above the 0.80 threshold, indicating excellent reliability (Taber, 2018). The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics and the main variables. To test the study's hypotheses, inferential statistics, including Pearson's correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis, were employed to examine the

predictive relationship between teaching load and instructional quality, and the mediating role of burnout and the moderating effect of job resources, as posited by the JD-R model.

Findings

This section presents the data analysis results derived from the questionnaire distributed to EFL instructors in Afghan EFL classrooms. The analysis aimed to address the research objectives by examining descriptive statistics, correlations, and regression models to explore the relationships between teaching load, burnout, job resources, and instructional quality.

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 32 usable questionnaires were returned from male instructors, yielding a response rate of 64%. The average teaching experience for the sample was 7.5 years (SD = 4.2). Descriptive statistics for the main study variables (N=32) are presented in Table 1. The mean score for Teaching Load (M = 4.12, SD = 0.65) was high, indicating that instructors perceived their workload as substantial. Conversely, the mean score for Job Resources (M = 2.31, SD = 0.78) was low, suggesting a perceived lack of institutional support. The mean score for Burnout (M = 3.85, SD = 0.71) was also high, while the mean score for Instructional Quality (M = 2.95, SD = 0.82) was below the midpoint of the 5-point scale, indicating a self-reported decline in pedagogical effectiveness among the male instructors.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables (N=48)

Variables	Mean	SD	MIN	MAX
Teaching Load	4.12	0.65	2.8	5.0
Job Resources	2.31	0.78	1.2	4.1
Burnout	3.85	0.71	2.3	5.0
Instructional Quality	2.95	0.82	1.5	4.6

Correlational Analysis

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships among the study variables. The results, summarized in Table 2, revealed several significant associations. As hypothesized, Teaching Load was significantly and positively correlated with Burnout ($r = .72$, $p < .01$), and significantly and negatively correlated with Instructional Quality ($r = -.65$, $p < .01$). Burnout was also significantly and negatively correlated with Instructional Quality ($r = -.58$, $p < .01$). Job Resources showed a significant negative correlation with Burnout ($r = -.51$, $p < .01$) and a significant positive correlation with Instructional Quality ($r = .43$, $p < .01$). These initial findings support the core propositions of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model within this context.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
1. Teaching Load	—			
2. Job Resources	-.38*	—		
3. Burnout	.72**	-.51**	—	
4. Instructional Quality	-.65**	.43**	-.58**	—

*p < .05, *p < .01

Regression and Mediation Analysis

To test the predictive relationships and the mediating role of burnout, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. In the first step, Teaching Load was entered as the predictor of Instructional Quality and was found to be a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.65$, $p < .01$), explaining 42% of the variance ($R^2 = .42$). In the second step, Burnout was added to the model. The results showed that Burnout was also a significant negative predictor of Instructional Quality ($\beta = -.32$, $p < .05$), and the beta coefficient for Teaching Load decreased but remained significant ($\beta = -.42$, $p < .01$). The total variance explained increased to 51% ($R^2 = .51$). A mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro (Model 4) confirmed that Burnout partially mediated the relationship between Teaching Load and Instructional Quality (indirect effect = -.24, 95% CI [-.38, -.11]), indicating that a significant portion of the negative impact of teaching load on instructional quality operates through the mechanism of instructor burnout.

Discussion

This study set out to investigate the impact of teaching load on the instructional quality of EFL instructors in Afghan EFL classrooms, using the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model as its theoretical foundation. The findings provide compelling empirical evidence for the detrimental effects of high teaching demands in a resource-constrained, post-conflict higher education environment.

Interpretation of Findings and Connection to Theory: The results overwhelmingly support the study's hypotheses and align with the core tenets of the JD-R model. The strong positive correlation between Teaching Load and Burnout ($r = .72$) confirms the "energy depletion" pathway of the model. Instructors facing high quantitative (large classes) and qualitative (assessment, preparation) demands reported significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism. This chronic energy drain, as the theory predicts, forces a conservation of effort, which manifests in the classroom as a decline in instructional quality. The significant negative correlation between Teaching Load and Instructional Quality ($r = -.65$) provides direct evidence of this. Instructors are not choosing to lower their pedagogical standards; rather, they are pushed into it by the sheer weight of their workload.

The mediation analysis is particularly revealing. It demonstrates that the relationship between load and quality is not merely direct; it is significantly channeled through the psychological mechanism of burnout. This means that an instructor with a high load is more likely to experience burnout, and it is this burnout that directly leads to the adoption of simplified, less effective teaching methods like lecture-based instruction and reduced

feedback. This finding moves beyond a simple cause-and-effect narrative to uncover the complex psychological process at play, thereby validating the explanatory power of the JD-R model in this specific context. Furthermore, the significant role of Job Resources as a buffer against burnout and a promoter of quality confirms the model's dual-process nature, highlighting that institutional support is not a luxury but a critical component for sustaining effective teaching.

Comparison with Previous Research: These findings resonate strongly with and extend the existing literature. The study by Rahmany et al. (2023) at Kandahar University identified the *symptoms* of poor teaching quality from the student perspective (e.g., teacher-centered classes, lack of feedback). This current research provides the *causal explanation* from the teacher's side: the high teaching load and subsequent burnout that make such pedagogical compromises a necessity. Our findings also corroborate the broader research on workload and burnout in higher education (Kyndt et al., 2021; Schaufeli et al., 2022) but provide a crucial empirical contribution by situating this dynamic within the unique socio-cultural and infrastructural challenges of Afghan higher education. The novelty of this study lies in its application of a robust theoretical framework (JD-R) to a context that has been largely studied anecdotally, thereby providing a deeper, more systematic understanding of the problem.

Implications: The implications of this research are significant and multifaceted.

Institutional and Policy Implications: The findings send a clear message to the Ministry or Higher Education: policies aimed at improving educational quality must first address the issue of teaching load. Simply mandating modern pedagogies without reducing the demands that make them impossible to implement is futile. Specific, actionable recommendations include: (1) implementing a policy to reduce class sizes to a manageable number (e.g., below 30 students); (2) hiring more EFL faculty to distribute the teaching load more evenly; (3) investing in teaching assistants to help with administrative and assessment duties; and (4) providing targeted professional development on strategies for teaching large classes and managing workload.

Theoretical Implications: This study contributes to the JD-R literature by validating its applicability in a non-Western, resource-scarce educational setting. It demonstrates that the fundamental psychological processes of energy depletion and motivation are universal, even when the specific job demands (e.g., post-conflict instability, large classes) are unique.

Limitations and Future Research: Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that must be acknowledged. First, its cross-sectional design prevents the establishment of definitive causal relationships. A longitudinal study tracking instructors over time would provide more robust evidence for the causal pathways proposed by the JD-R model. Second, the reliance on self-report data may introduce common method bias; instructors' perceptions of their teaching quality may not align with objective observations. Future research should incorporate qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and classroom observations, to gain a richer, more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of instructors and to triangulate the findings.

Conclusion

This research was undertaken to provide a systematic investigation into the impact of teaching load on the instructional quality of EFL instructors in Afghan EFL classrooms, a context marked by significant post-conflict challenges. The study's findings provide clear and definitive answers to its core research questions. First, it quantitatively confirmed that teaching load, characterized by large class sizes and extensive assessment demands, is perceived by instructors as excessively high. Second, it established a significant negative relationship between this high load and the quality of instruction, with instructors reporting a necessary shift away from effective, student-centered pedagogies. Third, and most critically, the study identified instructor burnout as a key mediating mechanism through which high teaching load erodes instructional quality, while simultaneously demonstrating that perceived job resources can serve as a crucial, albeit insufficient, buffer. In essence, the study validates the Job Demands-Resources model in this unique setting, illustrating that the energy depletion caused by overwhelming demands directly compromises the pedagogical vitality of the institution. For the English Departments of languages and literature faculties and the Ministry of Higher Education, these findings serve as an empirical mandate for policy reform. Addressing the decline in teaching quality requires moving beyond pedagogical training alone and directly confronting the structural issue of teaching load. This necessitates concrete actions, such as implementing policies to systematically reduce class sizes, allocating budgets to hire additional qualified faculty, introducing teaching assistant programs to offload administrative and assessment burdens, and fostering a culture of institutional support that provides instructors with the resources they need to succeed. In conclusion, while this study offers a critical and timely contribution to understanding the challenges of Afghan EFL context, it also serves as a self-evaluation of its own boundaries. As a single-site, cross-sectional case study reliant on self-reported data, its findings are deeply insightful for Afghan EFL classrooms but require further validation to be generalized more broadly. Therefore, this research not only provides answers but also opens vital avenues for future inquiry. Subsequent research must employ longitudinal designs to establish causality, integrate qualitative methods like classroom observations and in-depth interviews to capture the nuanced realities of instructors' experiences, and replicate the study across other universities in Afghanistan and similar post-conflict contexts. This study is a foundational step, but it is through this continued, rigorous scientific inquiry that sustainable solutions for enhancing the quality of EFL education in challenging environments can be truly developed and implemented.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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