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The Relationship between Emotional Invalidation and Intolerance of Uncertainty with Emotional Exhaustion in Teachers: The Mediating Role of Distress Tolerance

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional invalidation and intolerance of uncertainty with emotional exhaustion in teachers, considering the mediating role of distress tolerance.

Methods: The research method was descriptive-correlational, conducted within the framework of path analysis. The statistical population included all male and female elementary school teachers in Birjand during the 2024-2025 academic year. A sample of 200 teachers was selected through cluster sampling and responded to the research instruments. Data were collected using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), the Perceived Invalidation of Emotion Scale (Zelinsky, 2016), the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (Carleton et al., 2007), and the Distress Tolerance Scale (Simons & Gaher, 2005). Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to describe the study variables, and correlation analysis and path analysis were performed using SPSS 24 and Amos 24 software.

Results: Results show that emotional invalidation and intolerance of uncertainty increase teachers' emotional exhaustion, both directly and indirectly, through distress tolerance ($p<0.05$).

Conclusions: These findings emphasize that emotional exhaustion is a multilevel phenomenon influenced by environmental and interpersonal factors, as well as individual cognitive-regulatory characteristics. Consequently, interventions focused on emotion acceptance, mindfulness, and the enhancement of distress tolerance may be effective for both the prevention and reduction of exhaustion.

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Introduction

One of the significant challenges facing the field of education is the depletion of energy and human resources among teachers. This phenomenon causes many educators to lose their efficiency and effectiveness, often leading them to exit the educational system prematurely, a condition described as burnout (Hejrat et al., 2024). Burnout is a prevalent occupational phenomenon with the potential to negatively impact physical and mental health, job satisfaction, work quality, and turnover intentions among employees (Matthews et al., 2022; Sorengaard & Langvik, 2022). Maslach et al. (1986) conceptualize burnout as a psychological response to workplace stressors, characterized by a tripartite structure consisting of Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Its consequences include depression, cynicism, low job satisfaction, decreased performance, increased interpersonal and family problems, psychosomatic symptoms (such as fatigue, headaches, sleep, and digestive disorders), and ultimately, organizational inefficiency and absenteeism (Maslach et al., 1986; Bartl et al., 2022). Among these three components, Emotional exhaustion occurs when the cumulative pressures of job demand led to a depletion of resources over time. Key manifestations of emotional exhaustion include increased absenteeism, withdrawal, and a fear of returning to the workplace after periods of absence (Egoryshev, 2023). In fact, employees experiencing emotional exhaustion seek to escape their taxing work environment, which manifests as increased turnover intention and other withdrawal behaviors (Azarparvar & Karimi, 2020). emotional exhaustion constitutes the stress-related dimension of burnout, encompassing feelings of being drained of emotional and physical resources. This state fosters cynicism, which in turn shapes negative attitudes toward work and other individuals (Menon et al., 2024).

The professional environment of teachers—characterized by the expectations of administrators and educational authorities, diverse educational initiatives, and particularly the expansion of virtual learning—exposes teachers to a variety of demands and challenges. Coping with these demands drains cognitive and emotional resources, ultimately leading to burnout in the long term (Mollajafari & Rahimi, 2023). Therefore, increasing emotional exhaustion is a critical factor undermining teachers' efficiency, performance, and success, making the development of preventive strategies indispensable.

The nature of emotions, their roles, and their impacts on teacher growth, educational reform, and school development have become subjects of significant importance for understanding the quality and effectiveness of educators and school leaders. Compared to other professions, teachers experience high levels of intense emotions, stressful events, and negative feelings, such as anxiety or anger, during classroom instruction (Wang & Burić, 2023). Emotions are multifaceted constructs derived from affective and mental states that influence how an individual feels; they include complex sets of physiological, behavioral, and experiential responses and play a fundamental role in human life. Furthermore, they constitute a key aspect of teachers' lives during times of change and are closely linked to teacher engagement, as educators in learning environments frequently experience various positive emotions (e.g., joy, enthusiasm, affection) and negative emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, anxiety, and guilt) (Barari & Jamshidi, 2016). When experiencing intense negative emotions, individuals tend to express the circumstances of the event and share their resulting feelings and reactions with others (Brandao et al., 2021). However, others do not always provide support; they may respond negatively or create threats within a group through invalidation—such as ignoring or failing to understand the individual—which has detrimental consequences for physical and mental health (Hilman et al., 2023; Zielinski & Veilleux, 2018). In fact, a challenge to successful and adaptive emotion regulation is emotional invalidation, where the feelings and private experiences of another person are treated as incorrect or unacceptable (Linehan, 1993; Rezaei et al., 2024). Invalidation is associated with the intensification of negative emotions (Kuo et al., 2022). Individuals who experience emotional invalidation struggle to accept their own emotions and those of others; conversely, when emotional validation is provided, the individual is better able to identify and control emotional reactions, leading to improved emotion regulation, emotional self-efficacy, subjective well-being, lower stress levels, and, consequently, better performance (Rezaei et al., 2024).

Furthermore, studies have supported the role of intolerance of uncertainty in predicting emotional exhaustion (Hancock & Mattick, 2020; Malekpour Lapari & Bakhtiarirenani, 2021). As a form of intrusive thought, intolerance of uncertainty generates numerous maladaptive emotional, cognitive, and behavioral consequences for individuals suffering from anxiety disorders (Moloudi & Khademi, 2021). Intolerance of uncertainty has been identified as a personality trait characterized by a tendency to perceive problems in black-and-white terms to reach easy, quick

solutions to complex situations. Conversely, tolerance of uncertainty is defined as the capacity to perceive ambiguous situations as somewhat desirable, rather than interpreting them as a source of threat (Enoki et al., 2019). Today, Intolerance of uncertainty is viewed as a bias stemming from a set of negative beliefs about uncertainty and its implications; it is a significant predictor of worry and the tendency to interpret ambiguous situations negatively, as well as a cognitive state that increases the risk of anxiety (Merrotsy, 2020). Studies have shown that Intolerance of uncertainty is linked to burnout, particularly emotional exhaustion (Hancock & Mattick, 2020; Malekpour Lapari & Bakhtiarirenani, 2021); thus, understanding the complex nature of this variable and its link to burnout is essential.

Although the accumulation of empirical evidence regarding the relationship between emotional invalidation, intolerance of uncertainty, and emotional exhaustion is undeniable (Hancock & Mattick, 2020; Malekpour Lapari & Bakhtiarirenani, 2021; Kuo et al., 2022; Mollajafari & Rahimi, 2023), the lack of examination of the underlying mechanisms explaining these relationships has led researchers in the present study to expand the interpretive capacity of these variables by testing the mediating role of distress tolerance in explaining emotional exhaustion among teachers. Distress tolerance is a common construct in occupational conflict research, described as a meta-emotional construct and the individual's ability to experience and withstand negative emotional states. This construct, which may arise from cognitive or physical processes, is an emotional state often characterized by behavioral inclinations to reduce the negative effects of the emotional experience (Clarke et al., 2024). Based on the perspective of Simons and Gaher (2005), distress tolerance is defined as the ability to accept negative emotions. If an individual is unable to do so and focuses entirely on negative emotions, performance will decline during crises (Doorley et al., 2019). Distress tolerance is an emotional structure that involves evaluation and expectation of negative experiential situations in relation to tolerance, avoidance, and the ability to accept. Despite significant progress in therapeutic processes, experience shows that a large percentage of individuals drop out of treatment, for which distress tolerance appears to be a key factor (Forouzanfar, 2018).

Despite previous studies examining factors related to emotional exhaustion in teachers, the present study fills an important gap in the research literature by focusing on the tripartite relationship between emotional invalidation, intolerance of uncertainty, and emotional exhaustion. While the

impact of each of these variables has been studied separately, the mediating role of distress tolerance as a key construct in moderating these relationships has received less attention.

The primary innovation of this research lies in explaining the psychological mechanisms involved in teacher burnout through the simultaneous measurement of these variables and the investigation of the mediating role of distress tolerance. This comprehensive approach allows for a more precise identification of protective and risk factors against burnout. The necessity of this research is underscored by the fact that teacher emotional exhaustion not only has destructive effects on their mental health and quality of work life but also directly impacts the quality of education, student academic decline, and the overall health of the educational system. A deeper understanding of how this phenomenon forms through the proposed constructs, and identifying the mediating role of distress tolerance, can provide a scientific basis for designing effective and targeted intervention programs at the macro level of the national education system. These interventions can significantly help strengthen teacher resilience, enhance job satisfaction, and ultimately improve learning environments. Therefore, this study aims to bridge gaps in theoretical knowledge and provide operational solutions to address one of the fundamental challenges of contemporary education. Accordingly, the present study seeks to investigate the role of mediating factors in relation to the research variables. In fact, the main research question is: Is there a relationship between emotional invalidation and intolerance of uncertainty with emotional exhaustion, mediated by distress tolerance?

Material and Methods

The present study employed a correlation design using path analysis. Path analysis, first developed and formulated by Sewall Wright (1934), is essentially based on estimating the magnitude of associations between variables and applying these estimates to gain information about the relationships among a set of variables. In fact, it involves the application of multivariate regression in relation to the explicit formulation of causal models. The simplest method for calculating these is the use of standard regression techniques. Relationships between variables are considered to flow in one direction and are treated as distinct paths. The major concepts of path analysis are best explained through its primary feature, the path diagram, which reveals the potential links between

variables (Bashirgonbadi et al., 2021). In the present study, path analysis was used to examine the proposed model.

Participants and Sampling

The target population consisted of all male and female elementary school teachers in Birjand during the 2024–2025 academic year. Based on inquiries from the Department of Education, the population was estimated to be approximately 352 individuals. The sample size was calculated to be at least 184 people using Cochran's formula; however, to increase statistical power and compensate for potential data loss, 250 questionnaires were distributed using a cluster random sampling method. Of these, 230 were returned. Ultimately, due to incomplete or improperly answered questionnaires, 200 were selected for analysis. This number exceeds the recommended sample size and is statistically sufficient for the required analyses. Inclusion criteria for the study and participation in the survey included consent to participate and the absence of a history of mental disorders. Ethical considerations were strictly observed; participants were fully assured that their responses would remain confidential (as the questionnaires were anonymous). Furthermore, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Instruments

Emotional Exhaustion Questionnaire: To measure emotional exhaustion, the standard questionnaire by Maslach and Jackson (1981), as introduced by Mulki et al. (2006) and translated by Golparvar et al. (2008), was used. This 9-item questionnaire uses a seven-point Likert scale (1 = very little to 7 = very much). Higher scores indicate higher levels of emotional exhaustion. Evidence for its validity and reliability within and outside of Iran shows it is highly suitable for measuring this construct. Generally, Mulki et al. (2006) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, and Golparvar et al. (2008) reported 0.91. In a study by Golparvar and Hosseinzadeh (2011), exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation placed all nine items on a single factor with factor loadings ranging from 0.45 to 0.73 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86. Arshadi and Piriaei (2014) also used this tool and reported a reliability coefficient of 0.82. The range of scores for this questionnaire is between 9 and 63. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.78, indicating the reliability of the instrument.

Perceived Invalidation of Emotion Scale (PIES): This is a 10-item self-report scale designed by Zielinski (2016) to address limitations in previous retrospective scales by including invalidation

from friends, partners, colleagues, or acquaintances, rather than just parents (Khoshini et al., 2022). Participants rate each item on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never; 0–10%) to 5 (almost always; 91–100%). The original version of the PIES has shown high levels of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.93–0.94$), good test-retest reliability ($r = 0.67$), and concurrent validity (Rezaei et al., 2024). In the study by Rezaei et al. (2024), good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha between 0.89 and 0.91) was obtained. In the present study, the overall reliability of the scale was 0.83.

Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (IUS): Developed by Carleton et al. (2007), this 12-item scale evaluates two components: "Unacceptability and avoidance of uncertainty" and "Uncertainty regarding frustration" on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). Carleton et al. (2007) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91 for the total scale and 0.85 for both subcomponents, with convergent validity evidenced by correlations with the Beck Depression Inventory ($r = 0.56$) and Beck Anxiety Inventory ($r = 0.57$). This tool was standardized in Iran for children and adolescents by Zamani et al. (2022), who reported correlations with the Penn State Worry Questionnaire ranging from 0.28 to 0.48 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha was estimated at 0.85.

Distress Tolerance Scale (DTS): Designed by Simons and Gaher (2005) to measure distress tolerance, this 15-item questionnaire comprises four subscales: Tolerance, Absorption, Appraisal, and Regulation. Responses are based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree). All items are scored directly, except for item 6. Higher scores indicate higher distress tolerance. The initial Cronbach's alpha was 0.82. In Iran, Kord Zanganeh (2015) evaluated this scale among 48 students, finding a total reliability of 0.71. In a study by Sedighi et al. (2021) on 380 elderly residents of nursing homes, the total reliability was 0.75. In the present study, the total reliability was found to be 0.80 via Cronbach's alpha.

Procedure

To conduct this study, necessary permits were obtained from the Birjand Department of Education. Subsequently, 30 elementary schools were selected through cluster random sampling. After coordinating with the school principals, the researcher visited the schools in person to collect the data. Paper questionnaires were distributed to teachers meeting the inclusion criteria, and preliminary instructions regarding the completion of the survey and the importance of honesty were provided. All information was kept confidential and accessible only to the research team.

Ultimately, 20 questionnaires were not returned, and 230 were completed. During the screening phase, 30 questionnaires were discarded due to incompleteness, leaving 200 for final analysis. Efforts were made to select samples from various schools and districts to ensure relative diversity in gender, years of service, and school location. Thus, the sample is largely representative of elementary teachers in Birjand regarding demographic characteristics. However, the possibility of non-response bias exists and should be considered when interpreting the results. It should be noted that this research was self-funded by the researchers.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, descriptive indices including mean and standard deviation were used to describe the variables. Correlation and path analysis were performed using SPSS version 24 and Amos version 24.

Results

The study sample consisted of 200 elementary school teachers, comprising 111 females (55.5%) and 89 males (44.5%). The mean age of the sample was 31.47 years, with a standard deviation of 3.58, ranging from 23 to 43 years old. Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the study variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. Emotional Exhaustion	26.01	4.75	0.537	0.913
2. Emotional Invalidation	25.94	4.09	-0.650	0.099
3. Uncertainty Avoidance	15.04	3.95	-0.696	0.054
4. Uncertainty Regarding Frustration	14.56	3.28	-0.305	0.683
5. Distress Tolerance	36.58	8.16	0.346	-0.490

Prior to data analysis, the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and absence of multicollinearity were examined. Skewness and kurtosis indices were used to assess the normality of the distribution. Chou and Bentler (1995) suggest a cutoff point of ±3 for skewness. For kurtosis, values greater than ±10 are generally problematic in multivariate research (Kline, 2015). The values obtained for the variables indicate that the assumption of normality was met. Scatter plots were used to verify linearity and homoscedasticity, confirming that these assumptions held. The Durbin-Watson statistic (1.87) fell between 1.5 and 2.5,

confirming the independence of errors. Multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance indices; since no tolerance value was less than 0.10 and no VIF value exceeded 10, the assumption of no multicollinearity was satisfied. Table 2 presents the correlation matrix for the study variables: Emotional Exhaustion (1), Emotional Invalidation (2), Uncertainty Avoidance (3), Uncertainty Regarding Frustration (4), and Distress Tolerance (5).

Table 2. Descriptive Indices and Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Emotional Exhaustion	1				
2. Emotional Invalidation	0.38**	1			
3. Uncertainty Avoidance	0.35**	0.33**	1		
4. Uncertainty Regarding Frustration	0.36**	0.26**	0.34**	1	
5. Distress Tolerance	-0.48**	-0.25**	-0.15*	-0.16*	1

*P<0.05, **P<0.01

As shown in the table above, Emotional Exhaustion has a direct and significant positive relationship with Uncertainty Avoidance and Uncertainty Regarding Frustration (P<0.001). Similarly, Emotional Exhaustion is positively and significantly related to Emotional Invalidation (P<0.05) and has a significant negative relationship with Distress Tolerance (P<0.05).

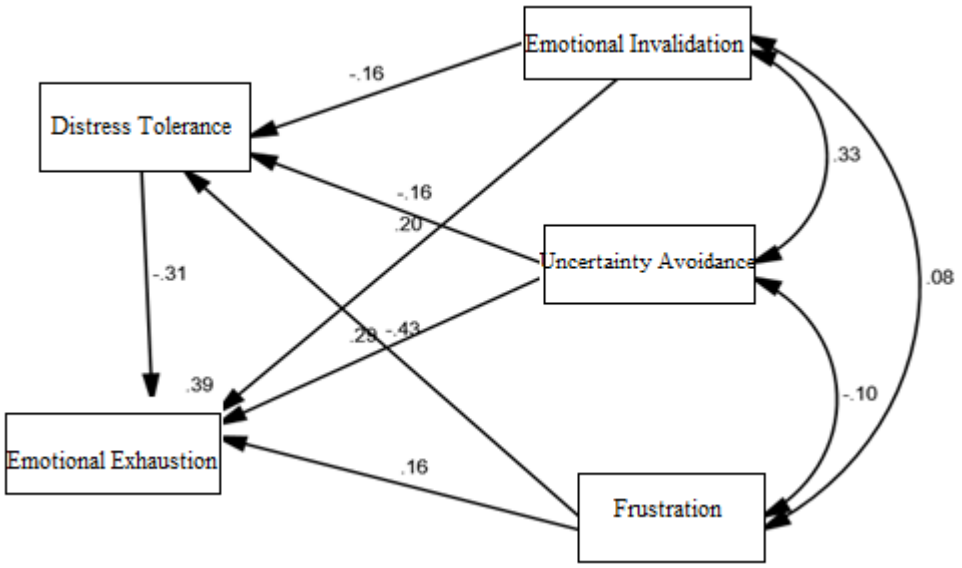

Figure 1. Standardized path coefficients of the research variables in the main model

In Figure 1, it can be observed that the paths from Emotional Invalidation, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Uncertainty Regarding Frustration to Emotional Exhaustion are positive and significant

(P<0.05). The path from Distress Tolerance to Emotional Exhaustion is negative and significant (P<0.05).

Table 3. Analysis of Direct Relationships in the Research Model

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Unstandardized B	Standardized β	Std. Error	T value	P
Uncertainty Avoidance	Emotional Exhaustion	0.211	0.290	0.044	4.822	0.001
Unc. Regarding Frustration	Emotional Exhaustion	0.363	0.161	0.141	2.569	0.010
Emotional Invalidation	Emotional Exhaustion	0.227	0.195	0.070	3.247	0.001
Distress Tolerance	Emotional Exhaustion	-0.184	-0.315	0.037	-4.901	0.001

Based on Table 3, the direct path from Emotional Exhaustion to Uncertainty Avoidance, Uncertainty Regarding Frustration, Emotional Invalidation, and Distress Tolerance are all significant (P<0.05).

Table 4. Indirect Relationship Coefficients in the Research Model

Independent	Mediator	Dependent	β	Lower Limit	Upper Limit	P
Unc. Avoidance	Distress Tolerance	Emotional Exhaustion	0.051	0.007	0.116	0.025
Unc. Regarding Frustration	Distress Tolerance	Emotional Exhaustion	0.136	0.075	0.210	0.001
Emotional Invalidation	Distress Tolerance	Emotional Exhaustion	0.051	0.009	0.106	0.009

To determine indirect effects, the bootstrapping method with 2,000 samples was used. Table 4 demonstrates that the indirect effects of Uncertainty Avoidance, Uncertainty Regarding Frustration, and Emotional Invalidation on Emotional Exhaustion, mediated by Distress Tolerance, are all significant (P≤0.05).

Table 5. Structural Model Fit Indices

Index Name	Acceptable Range	Assumed Model
Degrees of Freedom (DF)	—	17
Chi-Square (χ2\chi^2χ2)	—	75.367
χ2/df\chi^2/dfχ2/df ratio	< 5*	4.43
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> 0.90	0.91
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	> 0.90	0.92
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	> 0.9*	0.93
RMSEA	< 0.08*	0.06
SRMR	< 0.08*	0.05
*Acceptable cutoff values from Kline (2016).		

Table 5 presents the structural model fit indices. As indicated, the structural model demonstrates a good fit, with CFI and IFI values greater than 0.90, and RMSEA and SRMR values below the 0.08 threshold.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional invalidation and intolerance of uncertainty with emotional exhaustion, while considering the mediating role of distress tolerance among elementary school teachers in Birjand. The results indicated that emotional invalidation and intolerance of uncertainty are associated with and predict emotional exhaustion, both directly and indirectly, through distress tolerance.

Regarding the relationship between emotional invalidation and emotional exhaustion, these results are consistent with the studies of Rezaei et al. (2024), Hilman et al. (2023), Kuo et al. (2022), and Branda et al. (2021). From the perspective of Gross's (1998) emotion regulation theory, emotional validation serves as a confirmation and recognition of an individual's internal experience, which facilitates adaptive regulation and processing of emotions. Conversely, emotional invalidation causes an individual to suppress or distort emotions rather than processing and releasing them (Kuo et al., 2022). Consequently, the emotion regulation process becomes dysfunctional, leading to the long-term depletion of the individual's emotional resources—a state consistent with the emotional exhaustion component in the Maslach and Jackson (1981) model. From the perspective of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress-appraisal theory, invalidation can be viewed as a form of social stress. When an individual repeatedly feels that their emotional reactions are ignored or deemed insignificant in interpersonal relationships, their primary appraisal of the situation takes the form of a "threat of rejection or worthlessness." If an effective coping strategy is unavailable during secondary appraisal, a chronic stress response is activated (Rezaei et al., 2024). The persistence of such a state leads to emotional exhaustion, as the individual's physiological and psychological systems remain in a state of sustained arousal.

Furthermore, the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and emotional exhaustion aligns with the research of Hancock and Mattick (2020) and Malekpour Lapari and Bakhtiarirenani (2021). This finding can be explained through information processing theory, which posits that individuals with high intolerance of uncertainty tend to show overly controlling or catastrophic reactions to uncertain situations. These individuals fail to distinguish between "not knowing" and "danger," and consequently perceive ambiguity as a threat (Mohammadi, 2011). This cognitive appraisal pattern is consistent with the Lazarus and Folkman (1984) model, as the primary appraisal process in such individuals is usually characterized as a "threat" rather than a

"challenge." Threatening appraisals lead to the continuous activation of stress responses, increased psychological pressure, and eventually the gradual depletion of emotional resources. In other words, for these individuals, every ambiguous situation becomes a source of anxiety and emotional fatigue rather than an opportunity for growth or cognitive flexibility. Furthermore, neuropsychological evidence supports the link between intolerance of uncertainty and burnout. Studies have shown that individuals with low tolerance for uncertainty exhibit greater activity in brain regions associated with threat (such as the amygdala) and less activity in regulatory regions (such as the prefrontal cortex). This neural pattern indicates that such individuals are in a constant state of emotional alert, the persistence of which ultimately leads to the depletion of psychological energy and burnout (Hancock & Mattick, 2020).

However, the results also revealed an indirect relationship, suggesting that distress tolerance can act as a mediator between emotional invalidation, intolerance of uncertainty, and emotional exhaustion. Although no previous research in Iran has examined this specific configuration, studies such as Wang and Boric (2023), Kuo et al. (2022), Hancock and Mattick (2020), Mollajafari and Rahimi (2023), and Malekpour Lapari and Bakhtiarirenani (2021) align with these findings.

Regarding the indirect relationship between emotional invalidation and emotional exhaustion mediated by distress tolerance, it can be argued that individuals whose emotions are ignored or invalidated in interpersonal environments gradually lose their ability to tolerate and manage internal distress. Emotional invalidation—the negative, dismissive, or demeaning response of others to an individual's emotions—serves as a form of social feedback that gradually weakens internal emotion regulation mechanisms, leading the individual to learn to suppress or deny their negative emotions (Kuo et al., 2022). Within the framework of Linehan's (1993) theory, in an invalidating environment, an individual's emotional responses are not only misunderstood but often punished or minimized. Consequently, the individual feels inadequate and helpless regarding their internal distress, and their capacity to tolerate emotional turmoil diminishes. This inability to tolerate distress causes emotional situations to be experienced as overwhelming, even at low intensities (Rezaei et al., 2024). In summary, the experience of emotional invalidation, by gradually reducing the capacity for distress tolerance, makes the individual more vulnerable to repeated stress and emotional pressures. Reduced distress tolerance prevents the individual from

preventing extreme reactions through cognitive distancing or acceptance, and this cycle of high reactivity and constant fatigue ultimately leads to emotional exhaustion.

Regarding the indirect relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and emotional exhaustion mediated by distress tolerance, it can be argued that the inability to face ambiguous and unpredictable situations leads to a reduction in an individual's capacity to endure emotional tension. Individuals with high intolerance of uncertainty show intense emotional reactions such as anxiety, worry, and helplessness in the face of the unknown, and over time, their ability to tolerate distress decreases. Within the framework of Gross's (2015) emotion regulation model, this reduced tolerance leads the individual to use maladaptive strategies such as avoidance or emotional suppression, which not only fail to reduce discomfort but also lead to the constant depletion of psychological resources and increased emotional exhaustion. In fact, when an individual is unable to accept ambiguity, their psychological energy is consumed by attempts to control or eliminate it, resulting in the erosion of emotional resources (Hancock & Mattick, 2020). This gradual erosion leads to feelings of fatigue, lack of motivation, and emotional emptiness. Therefore, it appears that intolerance of uncertainty provides the ground for the emergence and intensification of emotional exhaustion by weakening the capacity for distress tolerance.

In conclusion, the findings of the present study suggest that emotional invalidation, intolerance of uncertainty, and low distress tolerance interact to facilitate emotional exhaustion. It appears that when an individual is in an environment where their emotions are ignored or deemed worthless, their ability to understand and regulate emotions is weakened. Upon encountering ambiguous or unpredictable situations, their stress levels rise. These pressures ultimately limit the individual's capacity for emotional recovery by reducing distress tolerance, thereby intensifying feelings of fatigue and emotional emptiness.

Although the present study successfully elucidated the relationships between emotional invalidation, intolerance of uncertainty, distress tolerance, and emotional exhaustion, it has limitations that should be considered in interpreting the results. First, there is the limitation regarding measurement tools; due to the use of self-report questionnaires, there is a possibility of response bias, social desirability bias, or perceptual errors. To mitigate this, the researcher utilized standard instruments with acceptable validity and reliability and provided precise instructions for participants. Second, the research design is cross-sectional, which does not allow for the inference

of causal relationships. To control for this, advanced statistical analyses and mediation modeling were employed to provide a more accurate picture of the relationships. Third, procedural limitations included the potential for respondent fatigue and differences in how questionnaires were completed. The researcher attempted to minimize this through appropriate scheduling, thorough explanations of the research process, and ensuring consistent conditions for all participants. Finally, the research was restricted in time and location to teachers in Birjand over a specific period; therefore, generalization of findings should be made with caution. Nevertheless, selecting samples from multiple schools and ensuring relative diversity provided the findings with a minimum level of generalizability. Future studies are suggested to utilize longitudinal or experimental designs to dynamically examine the relationships between these variables. The use of mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative), assessment from multiple sources, and cross-cultural studies could further enrich these findings. Additionally, designing interventions based on mindfulness, acceptance, and distress tolerance training could be effective in reducing emotional exhaustion and promoting emotional health, particularly among teachers.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of University of Birjand. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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