

The Periodic Process of the Teacher Burnout in ELT Classrooms¹

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Abstract

As a result of working in a stressful working environment, people commonly face “burnout”. Burnout refers to negative consequences associated with chronic job stress and it likely occurs in anyone who works with people in some capacity. Hence, it would be fair to say that burnout is not a phenomenon associated exclusively with any particular human service population. As they deal with teaching to students and organizing a relationship with the administration and many other issues all of which are related to human service and relation, teachers present one of the top 5 most stressful careers in the world. As a result of the stressful work they do, teachers commonly face “burnout”. Teacher burnout is an issue to be taken into consideration as it affects learners as well as teachers. In order to obtain a more stress-free environment and save both the learners and the teachers from psychological and physical effects of burnout, the issue of burnout is going to be studied in this paper. The article describes the phenomenon of professional burnout. The study revealed that this phenomenon can be cyclical in nature. Almost any employee in the social sphere can experience the phenomenon of professional burnout, as well as by workers in other professions. However, the phenomenon of “burnout” described in traditional literature, as a rule, is limited to a one-time characterization of the stages of burnout, ending in the destruction of the personality. The article shows that the degree of emotional stamina increases with the level of professionalism and age. The growth of professional skill over the years allows you to better cope with periods of decline. It is proved that the alternation of complete devastation with recovery is the natural and normal rhythm of professional life. The article is of a scientific and practical nature and is intended for a wide range of specialists in the field of psychology, sociology, economics, pedagogy, and healthcare.

Keywords: Burnout; Teacher Burnout; Professional Burnout; ELT Classrooms; Personality.

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1. Introduction

After the concept of burnout became a focus of interest in the mid-1970s, it rapidly expanded to cover a wide variety of social and personal problems facing workers (Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). The burnout phenomenon is “a chronic state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that arises in personnel from the cumulative demands of their work” (Goddard, O’Brien, & Goddard, 2006, p. 857). It is mainly distinguished as the inability to be adequately concerned about and engaged with clients due to growing frustration, tension, and anxiety (Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). Maslach (1984) clarified burnout as the lack of concern and enthusiasm toward the people one is working with. Further, he maintained that this negative response results from interpersonal contact with people on a large scale or as Kasinath and Kailaslingam (1995) put it, individuals who do ‘people work’. A commonly accepted portrayal of burnout is “a three-dimensional syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that occurs among individuals who work with people in some helping capacity” (Maslach, 1982, p.3). Specifically, emotional exhaustion centers round the feeling of being overextended and exhausted by one’s work. Depersonalization is a feeling of ill-will and indifference toward the receivers of one’s service. Personal accomplishment hinges on the positive feeling of competence, meaningfulness and achievement in one’s work with people (Maslach, 1982).

The teaching profession is not exempt from burnout. Though teaching is often referred to as a labor of love, it is stressful occupation. Although the reasons may vary, most teachers experience stress during their working life (Pishghadam & Sahebjam, 2012). Many teachers cope with the long-term stress; others fail and experience burnout (Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003). Teachers can be viewed as ‘people workers’ with learners as their ‘clients’ (Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). Teacher burnout not only affects learners and the classroom environment but also society and educational processes. A teacher who is highly frustrated and detached from pupils cannot be beneficial to society, the educational system or the workplace (Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). Hence, burnout as a major social dysfunction merits careful attention. Numerous studies (e.g., Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Pishghadam & Sahebjam, 2012) have been conducted in this area. Some have investigated the impact of burnout on productivity, health, and work efficacy (e.g., Huebner & Huberty, 1984). Others have analyzed its genesis (e.g., Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Many studies have been carried out to determine the sources of burnout in teaching domain, as the quality of education is directly tied to the phenomenon of teacher burnout. For instance, age, gender, and years of experience (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), personality traits (Schaufeli, 2003), emotional intelligence (Pishghadam & Sahebjam, 2012) and classroom environment (Dorman, 2003) have been identified as influential in teacher burnout.

Teachers experiencing burnout show chronic symptoms such as emotional exhaustion, fatigue, and loss of feeling of accomplishment which may affect their teaching performance either advertently or inadvertently. As a consequence, they find that their feelings toward their job, their students, and even themselves have turned more negative than in the past (Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). Furthermore, burnout teachers tend to communicate less frequently with their students and provide less information, praise, and assent to their ideas (Beer & Beer, 1992).

It is a commonly held view that burnout takes time to evolve; therefore, it is to some extent logical to expect that beginning teachers do not experience this widespread problem (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Yet, Fimian and Blanton's (1987) comparison of less experienced and more experienced teachers showed that the levels of burnout appear to be nearly identical in both groups. Previous studies have determined the role of factors such as work pressure, lack of support and role clarity highly influential on burnout rate (Kahill, 1988; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). In Hong Kong, MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) was adapted by Lau (2002), who found that "teaching language subjects does not seem to be a salient factor of teacher burnout while teaching students with lower academic ability is related to greater burnout in depersonalization" (p.316). In regard to the relationship between burnout and different sources of teacher occupational stress, Lau's study also revealed that "heavy workload and time pressure had great correlation with emotional exhaustion ($r=.48$) while pupil misbehavior had greater correlation with both depersonalization ($r=.356$) and personal accomplishment ($r= -.266$)" (p.319). Elsewhere, Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998) identified variables such as age, marital status, and personality type as factors in teacher burnout. The study showed that younger workers have a higher rate of burnout in comparison than those in their 30s or 40s. Additionally, unmarried participants were more apt to burnout than their married counterparts. In terms of personality traits, they concluded that there is a high level of burnout among people with low self-esteem and low level of resilience. This study's findings were reinforced by Pishghadam and Sahebjam (2012), who studied the effect of personality and emotional intelligence on teacher burnout. Their analysis revealed that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and personality types as well as the three burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

Relevance: What is surprising is the fact that Google returns 860 thousand results for a "burn-out" request, while there are practically no answers to a "burn-out cycle" request. This is due to the fact that in psychology, under the term "burnout", an extreme manifestation and the last stage of stress development are fixed. However, a person can experience several such cycles during his life.

Most of the works describing burnout syndrome (SEB) lead to the conclusion that the most important condition for professional work is the prevention of SEB. Many authors, according to the results of their research, offer various

rehabilitation or preventive programs for "burnout". However, there are practically no works in which the consistent rhythm of burnout and restoration of personality would be described as the norm.

Nevertheless, the author's observations over a number of years, psychodiagnostic tests, conversations, and polls of people of various professions testify to the SEB repeats phenomenon - from complete rehabilitation of the previous "burnout" ones and (usually after a few years), to a new complete exhaustion, followed by another recovery. The duration of the cycle can vary, reaching tens of years.

Increasing demands on the employee, on the one hand, and a decrease in the quality of life of a person who is faced with burnout, on the other hand, have made this topic relevant.

The Degree of Knowledge of the Problem: The topic of emotional burnout is a huge number of works, both domestic and foreign. The problem of professional burnout was dealt with by S. Maslach, V.V. Boyko, N.E. Vodopyanova, M.A. Vorobyeva, Kh.J. Freudenberger, N.V. Grishina, E.V. Orel, Rukavishnikov et al. However, most works present symptoms, causes, features, factors and methods for detecting burnout, as well as recommendations for its prevention. Burnout is very rarely seen as a "professional phenomenon on the border of "norm" and "pathology" and representing an extreme version of the norm" (Aisina, 2007), which is formed and developed by the employee under the existing personal prerequisites and continuous exposure to external professional factors. In fact, there are no works evidencing repetitions (cycles) of professional burnout.

Subject of Study: The phenomenon of professional burnout of a personality (burnout syndrome).

Purpose of the Study: on the basis of a synthesis of theoretical and practical experience in studies of the burnout syndrome, substantiate the concept of its cyclicity over the course of a person's life.

The Prospect of Research is associated with the development of specific methods, techniques and means of support and restoration of burnout.

On the whole, research findings have revealed that there exist numerous elements which may contribute to teacher burnout. Some of them are pertinent to teachers' daily communication with their students and their parents and some to schools and educational systems (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003). Taylor and Sobel (2001) reported that teachers may not have the required knowledge or experience to interact with or address issues concerning students with different backgrounds. Hence, the stress and adversity may end in occupational burnout. Similarly, students' discipline problems such as discourtesy and noisy attitude (Borg, Riding & Falzon, 1991) along with parental expectations (McCormick, 1997), have been considered as major sources of stress and teacher burnout. Moreover, lack of access to facilities,

dissatisfaction with physical environment or working time were found to be potent organizational factors (Friedman, 1991).

2. Methods

Research Methods and Methodology: theoretical analysis of studies on the problem of emotional burnout, analysis of statistical and Internet data, conversation, questionnaires, psycho-diagnostic testing (methods for diagnosing emotional burnout V.V. Boyko, MBI (K. Maslach and S. Jackson, in adaptation N.E. Vodopyanova)), observation, system analysis, method of comparison and generalization. The methodological basis of the study was the work of domestic and foreign scientists in the field of psychology, sociology, pedagogy. To process the results, standard mathematical analysis procedures were used.

Practical conclusions are confirmed by surveys of workers in social and other fields of activity. The total sample size was 48 people. Naberezhnye Chelny and Tatarstan, 19 men and 29 women. The age of the respondents is from 24 to 67 years; the average is 44.6 years. Professional composition: workers in social professions - 67% (42% - teachers), technical - 17%, creative - 8%, others - 8%.

Reliability of the results of research is provided by comparing the results of applying different diagnostic techniques for emotional burnout, using methods of mathematical statistics, and confirming theoretical positions with empirical data.

3. Results and Discussion

The results show that the four major teachers' conceptions of assessment are significantly correlated with teacher burnout level. As it was illustrated, high scores in Irrelevant and low scores in School Accountability and Improvement are in association with high scores in Depersonalization and Emotional Exhaustion. That is, the teachers who do not esteem assessment as a sign of school quality or an improvement tool for learning and deem assessment negative, bad, and unfair, may become exhausted, indifferent, and finally experience burnout to a higher degree. Moreover, it was found that high scores in Student Accountability, School Accountability and Improvement are significantly correlated with medium scores in Emotional Exhaustion and low scores in Personal Accomplishment. This finding seems to be very surprising, but if we consider the situation in Iran, the outcomes would be justifiable (Namaziandost, Rahimi Esfahani, & Hashemifardnia, 2018). One possible line of explanation is that private language institutes have a laissez-fair policy, based on which they make students pass the courses easily. Thus, examination is not very important and teachers are not supposed to design any exam. In this type of situation, when teachers do not have any control over the exam, though they have positive attitudes towards assessment, they experience burnout. Further, medium

scores in Improvement and School Accountability along with low to medium scores in Student Accountability and Irrelevant were in relation with low scores in Emotional Exhaustion, low to medium scores in Depersonalization, and medium to high scores in Personal Accomplishment. The overall picture of these complex associations is that teachers with negative attitudes to assessment are more susceptible to different dimensions of burnout (Namaziandost, Sabzevari, & Hashemifardnia, 2018).

Teachers' understanding of assessment can significantly predict teacher burnout. The best prediction of high scores in Emotional Exhaustion was provided by low scores in Student Accountability due to its negative Beta coefficients. It means that the teachers who do not consider individual student accountable for their own learning and improvement, feel overextended and exhausted (Maslach, 1982, Pishghadam & Sahebjam, 2012) more than their colleagues who assign scores to students' works, grant certificates based on their performances, and make different decisions (Guthrie, 2002). This finding can be justified in the context of language learning in Iran where teachers attribute students' success or failure to students' efforts (Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2012; Namaziandost, Neisi, Mahdavidrad, & Nasri, 2019). In consequence, incongruence with what Clouse (1983) stated, teachers may lose the necessary motivation for competition and experience burnout. The best prediction of high scores in Depersonalization was produced by high scores in Irrelevant. It is entirely logical to infer that the teachers who account assessment as inaccurate, neglected, or unfair may become indifferent and lose their concern toward their learners and their profession (Maslach, 1982). Eventually, the best prediction of low scores in Personal accomplishment was resulted from high scores in Irrelevant. It is quite justifiable that the teachers who esteem assessment as negative, bad, or unfair (do not hold the feeling of competence, achievement, or meaningfulness (Maslach, 1984); thus, experience burnout more than their co-workers (Shakibaei, Shahamat, & Namaziandost, 2019).

3.1. Professional Burnout: Concept and Extent of Distribution

Under professional (emotional) burnout, we agree to consider the state of complete physical, emotional and mental exhaustion associated with the experience of prolonged stress at work.

Summarizing the experience of many authors (Maslach & Leiter, 2017; Barnett et al, 2007; Malyshev, 2009, Aisina, 2007), it can be noted that among the factors influencing the development of the syndrome, internal (psychological) personality traits are in the first place.

In the second most important place are external conditions (work characteristics, level of responsibility, insufficient material reward, moral and psychological climate, lack of social support, etc.).

Thus, the prerequisites for the development of SEB is a complex of individual, organizational and social factors, of which the former are dominant. It is noticed that the person is strong, with a stable psyche and nervous system, better copes with problems at work and practically does not reach the last stage of burnout.

External pressure, working conditions, its dynamics, tension and level of responsibility are the second significant factor of burnout, and social problems complete the burn-out result.

It has been noted that representatives of social professions are more likely to suffer burnout syndrome (“85% of social workers have certain burnout symptoms” (Sukhovshin, 2012; Sepehri, Hajijalili, & Namaziandost, 2019), but experience has shown that any working person is faced with this phenomenon to one degree or another. So, according to the Hays Recruitment Agency (Romanova & Grishin, 2018), “79% of Russians in 2018 experienced professional burnout syndrome or experienced it among friends”.

The formed syndrome of “emotional burnout” is more characteristic of young specialists aged 18 to 35 years (84.6%), while 63.6% of respondents in the age group from 36 to 55 years old do not have. Thus, young professionals have a greater risk of burnout. The size of the spread of the disease also reflects alarming statistics: prevailing symptoms are observed in 19% of respondents, and in the formation phase, in 66% of (Sukhovshin, 2012).

Despite the fact that the decline in strength, violation of professional duties, hostility to addicted people (patients, students, clients) and other characteristics of burnout can hardly be called a “normal option”, nevertheless, the prevalence of this phenomenon in its middle stage (more than 80% of respondents) indicates that this is still more likely a pattern than a deviation.

3.2. Repetition of the Cycle of Emotional Burnout

The magnitude of the burnout syndrome (over 80% of the working population faced this phenomenon) indicate the relevance of finding ways to overcome it. What factors reduce the possibility and severity of a professional burnout?

Firstly, individual-psychological characteristics (love of life, openness, sociability, independence, a penchant for creativity, cognitive interest) and lifestyle (mode of work and rest, healthy eating and good sleep, physical activity, hobbies, etc.), - i.e. standard set of neutralizers of any stress, not only professional. The wider the range of interests of the individual, the more stable the psyche.

Secondly, external support is of great importance: the presence of like-minded people; mutual assistance and mutual assistance; support for family, friends.

The most important step towards overcoming burnout is the answer to the question: what is the true meaning of this activity, why is it needed.

Burnout syndrome can be defeated. However, observations of employees over a number of years, psycho-diagnostic tests, conversations, and surveys of people of various professions testify to the phenomenon of repeated SEB. People are faced with this phenomenon not only once in their life.

Repeated burnout can happen to a person in a few years. The similarity of symptoms of repeated burnout with his first experience (in many respondents) is interesting. Most often, the source and cause of repeated burnout for the same person is the same list of factors, for example, overload, lack of recoil, etc.

As in the case of primary burnout, personality traits are dominant in dealing with prolonged stressful situations. Passive resistance leads to a high degree of burnout; and vice versa, active resistance to stress reduces its level. Burning-out people often resort to self-isolation (in order to save energy residues), however, this is the wrong step. The support of family, friends, colleagues is very important at this stage. Changing the scope of activity, reducing the schedule, reducing the number and responsibility for decisions made, regular and full-fledged leave, daily routine, healthy lifestyle, self-development - these methods are tested to give a positive result, regardless of the stage of the burnout cycle.

The behavior of people faced with the second round of emotional burnout may be different. Workers who have overcome the first psychological blow are more likely to cope with a repetition of the situation. A frequent way to resolve a psychological impasse is what people call a job shift. This path is characteristic of people with weaker mental organization. While people with an active life position try to overcome the situation, make various efforts, do not hesitate to resort to the help of others. They transfer the second cycle of burnout easier and faster, more calmly relate to radical measures. This confirms the conclusion that the growth of professional skill and age have a beneficial effect on the course of burnout.

4. Conclusions

The results obtained as to the purpose of the study can be interpreted as having some implications for more effective education. First and foremost, in order to prevent this negative dysfunction, new programs and innovative ways should be proposed to shift teachers' understanding of assessment and to convince them that assessment is rather serious and beneficial than bad or unfair. Second, those who recruit teachers should pay close attention to the mindsets of the prospective teachers. Obviously, teachers with negative attitudes towards assessment are more prone to experiencing burnout. Third, the outcomes of this study present assessment as a potential source of teacher burnout, which requires to be taken more seriously. In fact, in-service and pre-service teachers are expected to be more conscious of the effects

of their assessment attitudes on their class performance and motivation. (Namaziandost, Nasri, & Ziafar, 2019).

All in all, the current paper addresses the dearth of empirical studies highlighting teachers' beliefs and also adds to the body of knowledge about teacher burnout. Nonetheless, due to our restricted sampling, caution must be exercised before the results of the present study be generalized to other contexts. The outcome of the study in question add weight to the argument that burnout researchers would be well advised to pay extra attention to uncovered sources of burnout such as teachers' creativity fostering behaviors. In addition, our findings could be compared with those of other cultures and settings to find cross-cultural similarities and difficulties in terms of teacher burnout.

Professional burnout is a frequent, and even regular, phenomenon; many people come across it every year. Working with people often involves emotional exhaustion, but this work also brings emotional lift. It is proved that the alternation of complete devastation with recovery is the natural and normal rhythm of professional life.

In addition, burnout can be cyclical in nature, that is, have a repeat of the cycle of burnout phases (from emptying to full recovery) several times during life. The article shows that the degree of emotional stamina increases with the level of professionalism and age. Overcoming the second round of burnout depends on the positive experience of overcoming the first. Knowledge of the mechanism of development and the course of burnout cyclical syndrome will help draw up corrective programs for the rehabilitation of individuals.

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