

Language Teacher Burnout and School Type

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Abstract

The present study was an attempt to explore the level of burnout among primary school teachers in Malaysia. In addition, the study tried to determine if the school type has any significant influence on teachers' burnout level. To this end, 714 primary school teachers participated in the study. They were teaching at Malay (SK), Tamil (SJKT), and Chinese (SJKC) medium schools. The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986) was used to collect the data on the teachers' burnout. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were used to analyze the data. The findings showed that the teachers' burnout ranged from moderate to low level. In addition, it was found that the teachers working at SJKC experienced lower level of Personal Accomplishments (PA) than those at SK and SJKT schools.

Keywords: Burnout, Malaysia, primary school, MBI-ES, school type

1. Introduction

Freudenberger (1974) was the one who first introduced the term 'burnout' in his *Staff Burnout*. He noticed that social workers tended to become depressed after a few years. Maslach, who is one of the most well-known figures exploring burnout, described it as emotional and physical fatigue through which the affected individual develops negative outlook towards his/her job, loses empathy for clients, and builds up reduced professional self-concept (Maslach & Pines, 1984). Burnout is classified into three different categories namely, Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA) (Maslach, 1993). Emotional Exhaustion occurs when the individual's psychic energy is considerably depleted or his/her emotional resources are drained. Depersonalization is a condition in which the person develops negative feelings and attitudes toward the clients. Depersonalized individuals also feel psychologically drained. Reduced Personal Accomplishment is evident if an individual feels inadequate and indifferent toward his/her clients and assesses his/her work with recipients negatively (Maslach, 1993; Gavrilovici, 2007).

Whereas many researchers have tried to explore and study burnout in the field of health care (Moreno, Morett, Rodríguez, & Morante, 2006; Miró, Solanes, Martínez, Sánchez, & Rodríguez, 2007), the empirical data in the literature have also identified teaching as a career that creates burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli & Buunk, 2002). Teachers experience a great deal of burnout, especially depersonalization, because they get isolated from their colleagues due to their career conditions (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990). As a matter of fact, teachers interact with others during work, but all the interactions are limited almost to learners. As a result, teachers do not get the chance to interact much with the people who can understand them. The risk of burnout elevates as the teachers become more isolated from their colleagues and/or other teachers.

The objectives of this study were to explore burnout among English Language teachers at primary schools in Malaysia. Moreover, the study made an attempt to find out whether the kind of school (SK, SJKC, SJKT) at which the teachers currently work, had any significant influence on their level of burnout. The research questions were:

- 1) What is the level of burnout among Malaysian primary school English language teachers?

- 2) Does the type of school have any significant influence on the teachers' level of burnout?

2. Review of Literature

The pioneering work on burnout is related to Freudenberger (1974) and Maslach (1976). Since then, a considerable number of studies have been conducted on burnout among various professions in human service sectors in different countries (Maslach & Jackson, 1982). Teacher burnout, in particular, has received a high amount of attention for being an extremely stressful profession (Friedman, 2000; Howard & Johnson, 2004; and Young & Yue, 2007). The stress levels of teachers are also found to exceed the average stress levels of individuals working in other client-related occupations (Travers & Cooper, 1993). Therefore, different negative effects of teacher burnout such as reduced motivation, increased possibility of teacher turnover and influence of the negative atmosphere of schools have been investigated and reported.

Many factors have been explored and introduced as sources of burnout. Schwab and Iwanicki (1982) stated that background variables (e.g., level of educational, type of graduation degree, etc.), personal factors (e.g., age, gender, number of children, etc.), and organizational variables (e.g., class size, work environment, workload, etc.) are significantly correlated with the level of burnout among teachers.

In their study, Bibou-Nakou, Stogiannidou, and Kiosseoglou (1999), and Croom (2003) found teachers experiencing high, low, and moderate burnout pertaining to reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA), Emotional Exhaustion (EE), and Depersonalization (DP) respectively. Similar findings were reported for the levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization by Kirilmaz, Celen, and Sarp (2003) in Turkey. They found that such factors as age, gender, tenure, and number of children did not have any effect on the burnout level of 43 primary school teachers, but their marital status did. Similarly, Byrne (1991, 1999) found that among the elementary, intermediate, secondary, and university educators, female elementary and university educators experienced a greater level of emotional exhaustion compared to male teachers.

Several studies have been conducted in Malaysia to explore teacher burnout (Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2009; Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010; Mukundan & Hour, 2011; Jamshidirad, Mukundan, & Nimehchisalem, 2012; Mousavy, Thomas & Mukundan, 2012; Thomas, Mousavy, & Mukundan, 2012). Using the MBI Educators Survey, Mukundan and Khandehroo (2009) looked into Malaysian primary and secondary English teachers' burnout with reference to their gender, teaching experience, and level of education. The data analysis showed that the teachers' burnout was, in general, significantly high. Particularly, it was found that the teachers with less than 25 years of teaching experience showed significantly high emotional exhaustion. Interestingly enough, the teachers with 26 years of experience or more did not show emotional exhaustion. In addition, the low experienced teachers (five years of teaching experience or less) were not experiencing depersonalization while the ones with more teaching experience were found to be suffering. The teachers with less than five years of teaching experience, and those with more than twenty six years of experience were found to be experiencing reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA). The instructors having between 6 and 25 years of teaching experience did not show any sign of reduced personal accomplishment. Furthermore, the respondents' level of education and its association with the three dimensions of burnout was explored. The results indicated that bachelor degree holders had a higher tendency of having emotional exhaustion as well as being influenced by depersonalization, whilst the teachers with PhD, Masters, and Diploma did not. The teachers holding Masters and Bachelor's degree were found to be suffering from reduced personal accomplishment while PhD and Diploma holders did not. The data pertaining to the respondents' gender were studied, elaborated, and analyzed as well pertaining to burnout dimensions. It was found that female teachers experienced more emotional exhaustion than their male counterparts. Unlike the female teachers, the males exhibited a high level of depersonalization. Finally, both male and female teachers showed significant reduced personal accomplishment.

In addition, Luk, Chan, Cheong and Ko (2010) investigated the relation between demographic variables and burnout among 138 teachers of two primary and secondary schools in Macau. They used the Chinese version of MBI. The results revealed that, in general, Macau school teachers had moderate levels of Emotional Exhaustion and low levels of Depersonalization. They found that age, marital status, and teaching experience significantly affected the burnout levels of teachers in their categories. Younger and single teachers had significantly higher Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization than older and married teachers. Similarly, teachers with less years of experience had significantly higher Emotional Exhaustion than teachers with more than 20 years of experience.

Mukundan and Khandehroo (2010) made an attempt to determine the relationship between burn out and the respondents' age and workload. The data were collected from 120 English teachers in primary and secondary schools. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) Educators Survey (1986) was used to collect the data and

measure the level of burnout among the research participants. Results showed that only the teachers between the ages of 25 to 45 years faced Emotional Exhaustion; yet those older than 46 did not experience the same amount of Emotional Exhaustion. In addition, Depersonalization was found significantly high only among the participants older than 25. The findings also revealed that the highest and the lowest age groups (those older than 45 and younger than 25) demonstrated high levels of reduced Personal Accomplishment. In contrast, the teachers between 26 and 45 years of age did not show any significant sign of reduced Personal Accomplishment. A significant relationship was also revealed between teaching hours and burnout dimensions. Specifically, the results showed a significant correlation between the working hours and Emotional Exhaustion. All the teachers showed a significantly high level of Emotional Exhaustion except the teachers working less than ten hours a week. The results also revealed that teachers working thirty hours a week or less underwent Depersonalization significantly. Teachers working more than thirty hours a week however did not show any significant symptom of Depersonalization. Finally, the group with less than twenty teaching hours a week demonstrated high level of reduced Personal Accomplishment whilst the teachers with twenty hours of teaching or more did not show any problem with Personal Accomplishment.

The results of the study (Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010) suggested that high levels of burnout are obvious in all three dimensions among English teachers in public schools. In other words, the teachers showed emotional exhaustion, a high level of depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Additionally, workload and age categories were found to have significant correlation with burnout in general and the three dimensions in particular.

3. Methodology

This quantitative survey study was carried out in the state of Melaka, Malaysia. All the primary school English language teachers in the state (N=714) who were present at school participated in the study. Out of the 714 participants, 445, 225, and 44 were teaching at SK, SJKC, and SJKT, respectively.

Two different questionnaires were administered to collect the required data. The first one was used to gather information about the demographic variables of the research participants. The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI- ES) (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986) was employed to collect the data on the teachers' burnout. MBI is a 22-item questionnaire with 7- point Likert scale ranging from 0-6 (0 = never and 6 = every day). The instrument covers three dimensions, namely Emotional Exhaustion (EE) with nine items, Depersonalization (DP) with five items, and reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA) with eight items. The questionnaire has been used around the world for decades to measure teacher burnout. Test-retest reliability (EE=.82; DP=.60; PA=.80) as well as high internal consistency (EE=.90; DP=.79; PA=.71) have been reported for the instrument (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996).

4. Results and Discussion

Data analysis was carried out by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The school type was the independent variable and the three burnout dimensions (EE, DP, PA) served as the dependent variables of the study. Low, high, and moderate are the three common levels of burnout. According to Maslach et al. (1996), burnout level is considered high if EE and DP scores are higher than 27 and 13, respectively. Moreover, the level of burnout is considered high if PA score is lower than 31. However, burnout level is moderate if the EE score falls between 17 and 26, DP is between 7 and 12, and PA is between 32 and 38. Finally, burnout is considered low if EE is 16 or lower, DP is 6 or lower, and PA is 39 or higher. Descriptive and inferential statistics including means, standard deviation, frequencies, and confidence interval for mean, and one-way ANOVA were used to analyze the data. Table one below shows the teachers' (N=714) level of burnout as a whole involving the three dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of Burnout

Burnout	N	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
				Lower	Upper
EE	714	20.5	10.6	19.8	21.3
DP	714	6.19	5	5.8	6.6
PA	714	34.14	7.4	33.6	34.7

As Table 1 shows, the level of burnout among the primary school teachers ranged from moderate to low. In other words, the participant experienced moderate Emotional Exhaustion ($m=20.50$) and reduced Personal Accomplishment (34.14). However, the primary school teachers experienced low levels of burnout in terms of Depersonalization ($m=6.19$).

In addition, Table 2 below demonstrates the level of the three dimensions of burnout (EE, DP, PA) among primary school teachers in the three different national schools which were investigated in this study (SK= Malay, SJKC= Chinese, SJKT=Tamil). The mean scores show the level of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and reduced Personal Accomplishment among the teachers in each type of primary school.

Table 2. Burnout levels in different primary schools

		N	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower	Upper
EE	SK	445	20.24	10.37	19.27	21.2
	SJKC	225	21.17	10.44	19.8	22.54
	SJKT	44	20.34	13.93	16.1	24.58
DP	SK	445	6.08	4.94	5.62	6.54
	SJKC	225	6.32	4.85	5.69	6.96
	SJKT	44	6.61	6.26	4.71	8.52
PA	SK	445	34.71	7.19	34.04	35.38
	SJKC	225	32.43	7.58	31.43	33.42
	SJKT	44	37.07	7.64	34.75	39.39

The present study also made an attempt to determine if there was any significant difference in the level of the three dimensions of burnout among the three national schools. In other words, it was intended to reveal if the teachers working at SJKT and SJKC experienced the same level of EE, DP, and/or PA?). Therefore, one-way ANOVA statistics was used to analyze the data to work out the question. The results of ANOVA test is presented below in table three.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA of the three dimensions of Burnout

		df	F	Sig.
EE	Between Groups	2	0.58	0.559
	Within Groups	711		
	Total	713		
DP	Between Groups	2	0.35	0.702
	Within Groups	711		
	Total	713		
PA	Between Groups	2	10.97	0
	Within Groups	711		
	Total	713		

As demonstrated in Table 3, there was a significant difference ($p<.05$) in the level of burnout pertaining only to the reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA). There was, however, no significant difference in the level of the teachers' burnout in the three different schools pertaining to Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and Depersonalization (DP). Teachers working in the three types of primary schools experienced the same level of Exhaustion (EE) and Depersonalization (DP). It should be pointed out that the data failed to show any significant difference between

the SK, SJKC, and/or SJKT teachers in reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA). Therefore, the Post Hoc Tests were conducted to confirm where the differences occurred between the group means. The results of Post Hoc Tests are presented below in Table 4.

Table 4. Post hoc tests

DV	(I) School type	(J) School type	MD(I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
PA	SK	SJKC	2.28*	0.001	0.81	3.76
		SJKT	-2.36	0.128	-5.2	0.49
	SJKC	SK	-2.28*	0.001	-3.76	-0.81
		SJKT	-4.64*	0.001	-7.61	-1.68
	SJKT	SK	2.36	0.128	-0.49	5.2
		SJKC	4.64*	0.001	1.67	7.61

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

DV (Dependent Variable), MD (Mean Difference).

As demonstrated above in the Table 4, there appeared a significant difference ($p < .05$) in the level of reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA) between the Malay (SK) and Chinese (SJKC) school teachers. In other words, teachers working at SJKC experienced higher level of burnout (PA) than teachers at SK. In addition, the results revealed that there was also a significant difference ($p < .05$) in the level of reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA) between Tamil (SJKT) and Chinese (SJKC) school teachers. In fact, teachers working at SJKC experienced higher level of burnout (PA) than teachers at SJKT. However, the findings failed to report any significant difference ($p > .05$) in the level of burnout (PA) between the teachers at SK and SJKT. Yet, the findings indicated that the teachers working at SJKC experienced higher level of reduced Personal Accomplishment than the teachers working at SK and SJKT.

5. Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to determine the level of burnout among primary school teachers in Malaysia. In addition, it tried to determine if the teachers in a particular type of school experienced any significant level of burnout. According to the results, the subjects experienced different levels of burnout in the three dimensions (EE, DP, and PA). The results revealed that the teachers experienced moderate levels of burnout pertaining to EE and PA in all the three schools. However, the teachers were shown to experience a low level of Depersonalization (DP).

The findings also demonstrated that there was no significant difference in the level of EE and DP among the teachers in all the three types of schools. However, there was a significant difference in the level of reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA) among them as far as the type of school was concerned. Teachers working at Chinese primary school experienced a significantly higher level of DP than those teachers working at Malay and Tamil schools. While there isn't any study in the literature which can shed light on this phenomenon, an assumption that we can make is that the culture of Chinese education which places emphasis on learner teacher dependence which puts a lot of pressure on teachers (which includes dealing with excessive amounts of learner written homework) could be a factor leading to this. Future research can thus help determine if this can be confirmed.

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