



Analysis of the Burnout Syndrome in Primary English Teachers in the Principality of Asturias

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Abstract

This study focuses on an analysis of the burnout syndrome in English teachers who work in schools of Primary Education the Principality of Asturias (northern Spain). This article reports on an investigation responding to this situation in which teachers' attitude towards their work is affected. Maslach (1982) studied this concept and concluded that the burnout syndrome can be defined as tiredness and loss of motivation in teachers. Being these two feelings the ones that produced that perception of inadequacy and failure and, therefore, the lack of work satisfaction.

The burnout syndrome is caused by stress produced by the teaching profession. This study shows the reasons why English teachers who work in different schools in central Asturias are affected by the burnout syndrome. The results have been obtained from interviews of teachers of different group ages and number of years of experience, work situation, as well as schools in central Asturias will be interviewed. The interviews will be done individually between the months of June and September 2014. Those interviews will include Maslach Burnout Inventory. A descriptive analysis of the results will be presented along with recommendations for further research.

1. Introduction

In the last years, there has been a constant issue that some teachers are losing their enthusiasm in the profession since they see it less satisfying. The constant changes in the Spanish educational system, teachers' working conditions, the increment of demands from school, parents and students, and the underestimated teacher's role are just a few examples that may produce in teachers, attitudes of exhaustion and cynicism, cold attitudes towards their job. Also, teachers who work under these conditions feel frustrated and show a lack of efficacy at work. The concepts of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy at work form what it is known as the burnout syndrome, which is considered "a phenomenon of dramatic importance in education" [1].

Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter [2] define burnout as "as a psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. The three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment". This definition shows the three dimensions of the burnout syndrome: a) exhaustion; b) cynicism; and c) a feeling of inefficacy at work.

Teachers who suffer from burnout syndrome show unpredictable and contradictory behaviours. They are also irritable and blame others for the situations they are involved and need to escape from teaching [3]. We can affirm that the burnout syndrome produce a damage in the health of these professionals. Teachers do not perform well in their everyday life and do not feel the passion to teach that they had when they began their professional careers. Furthermore, their relationships with their students, colleagues at work, or any other person who relate to them are problematic and, therefore, their presence in schools deteriorates their teaching and the school life [4].

Whereas, the concept of the burnout syndrome has been studied for a number of years in different countries, there is very little research on the effective palliative or therapeutic measures to treat teachers' stress or burnout syndrome [5]. Therefore, it would be necessary that the educational system provide teachers of programs that help them prevent from stress. However, not only would programs of prevention be needed, but also they should be monitored and evaluated by qualified and experienced professionals.

Besides, the studies developed in this field have various flaws. Within the most relevant are the lack of theoretical basis that conduct the research and that the burnout syndrome is not related to other fields in Social Psychology [6].

Having stated the situation that teachers are suffering and realizing that the burnout syndrome is becoming an important phenomenon in professions that involve working with other people, we want to analyse what the situation is in nine Primary public schools located in the Principality of Asturias. Are those Primary English teachers who are currently working in these Primary public schools affected by

the burnout syndrome? Does sex, age, years of teaching, or their administrative situation affect them more?

2. Method

Participants

Nine Primary public schools have participated in this study. These schools belong to the public educational system and are located in Oviedo and its surrounding areas. The population is formed by English teachers who teach this subject in the school year 2013-14. There are six women and three men, who are qualified to teach English in Pre-school and Primary schools within the Spanish public educational system. Six of these teachers teach in Pre-school and Primary school, two teachers in Primary school and there is one teaching in Pre-school. Teachers' age ranges from 35 to 60. All of them have a number of years of experience teaching English either in bilingual or non-bilingual sections. In this study, five participants are working in a bilingual section.

Procedure

Instrument. This study has been designed according to a quantitative methodology. Although, we thought of using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, we considered that the MBI-General Survey designed by Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach and Jackson was more appropriate for our purposes since "the three components of the burnout construct are conceptualized in slightly broader terms, with respect to the job, and not just to the personal relationships that may be a part of that job" [2].

The WoNT team from the University Jaume I, in Castellón (Spain) has adapted it to any type of workers and has also translated it. Also, the survey has been validated for using it specifically with teachers. It is NTP 732: Burnout syndrome: a measurement instrument, carried out by Instituto Nacional de Seguridad e Higiene en el Trabajo, Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales de España. We asked the WoNT team for permission to use their survey in this particular research and the permission was given. There is access to the it in the following link: http://www.insht.es/InshtWeb/Contenidos/Documentacion/FichasTécnicas/NTP/Ficheros/701a750/ntp_732.pdf

Also, we add a section where participants give personal information such as sex, age, degree at university, years of experience, school (Pre-school or Primary), English certification, and type of school (bilingual or non- bilingual).

The participants answer the items using a Likert scale from "0" (never) to "6" (always). The results obtained will show the level of burnout of these English teachers at work.

The questionnaire has 15 items that measure three different dimensions that form the burnout syndrome: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy at work. From the 15 items, five correspond to exhaustion, four items to cynicism, and six items to inefficacy at work. Therefore, we also obtain results according to these components. If the results show high punctuations in exhaustion and cynicism, and lower in inefficacy this means that these teachers suffer from burnout syndrome.

The survey was sent via email to the headmaster of nine public schools located in Oviedo and its surrounding area, in the month of June. The headmaster distributed it to each English teacher.

Variables. In this study we want to analyse the degree of burnout of English teachers at school. This survey also allows us to obtain results related to other dimensions that form the burnout syndrome such as exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy at work.

3. Results

Sex and age	Man (39)		Man (46)		Man (46)	
Exhaustion	0,8%		0%		0,2%	
Cynicism	0,2%		0%		0%	
Inefficacy	5,1%		5,5%		5,3%	
Sex and age	Female (35)	Female (38)	Female (43)	Female (46)	Female (46)	Female (60)
Exhaustion	0,8%	4%	1%	2,2%	0,4%	1,8%
Cynicism	0%	1,5%	0,2%	1%	0%	2,75%
Inefficacy	5,5%	5,1%	4,8%	5,1%	5%	4,1%

Table 1. Results by the participants' sex and age

The results show very similar percentages and there not many differences according to their age or sex. However, it is interesting to mention that the woman who is 38 and the one who is 60 shows high percentages in exhaustion and cynicism, but percentages in inefficacy are similar to the other participants. It is also remarkable that both show high percentages in these three components.

Years of experience	3	5	7	10	13	15	17	19	36
Exhaustion	0,8%	0,4%	1%	0,8%	4%	0%	2,2%	0,2%	1,8%
Cynicism	0%	0%	0,2%	0,2%	1,5%	0%	1%	0%	2,75%
Inefficacy	5,5%	5%	4,8%	5,1%	5,1%	5,5%	5,1%	5,3%	4,1%

Table 2. Results by years of experience of the participants

These results are very unlike. We cannot establish a relation between their years of experience and the components of exhaustion, cynicism, or inefficacy. Each participant shows different results, no matter the number of years of work in teaching.

Administrative situation	Civil servant							Supply worker	
Exhaustion	0,2%	2,2%	1%	0,8%	4%	0%	1,8%	0,4%	0,8%
Cynicism	0%	1%	0,2%	0,2%	1,5%	0%	2,75%	0%	0%
Inefficacy	5,3%	5,1%	4,8%	5,1%	5,1%	5,5%	4,1%	5%	5,5%

Table 3. Results by the participants' administrative situation

We want to remark that both temporary workers show 0% of cynicism. And the results in the other two components are much alike too.

According to the results of this study, the participant teachers show low percentages in exhaustion and cynicism, thus these teachers don't suffer from burnout syndrome. However, they show high percentages of inefficacy. According to Gil – Monte and Peiró [6], feelings such as low professional fulfilment, failure, and incompetency at work are related to the component of efficacy. However, we cannot say that the participants don't feel fulfilled or incompetent since the results are higher than the other, so they are acceptable.

4. Conclusions

According to the results of the present survey, the English teachers of these nine schools located in Oviedo and its surrounding areas are not affected by the burnout syndrome. The results of this research are rather positive, better than expected. Literature reflects there is a phenomenon that affects some teachers. This phenomenon describes them as professionals who are tired of their work, who perform worse than they should, and whose presence at work is harmful for the school life. The results of this study show teachers who enjoy at work and have an enthusiastic attitude to it. They also consider their performance important for the community, as well as they admit they are good at developing their work. Therefore, they see themselves as good teachers. And, they do not think that they have a lack of enthusiasm towards the teaching profession.

In spite of the good outcomes obtained, further studies should be conducted in this field. The current results might be caused by the limited number of participating schools. Therefore, we consider essential to develop a more comprehensive study, in which a higher number of schools in the area were involved. Once this study had been done, its results might be compared to the outcomes obtained from this survey.

Nevertheless, this study does not show negative effects in the attitude and work of teachers in this particular area of the Principality of Asturias, we consider important to develop a program to familiarize teachers from the characteristics of the burnout syndrome. It would also be necessary to inform teachers how to prevent from it in the future. From the work done within the program, a further study could be developed related to the comments and experiences that arise that teachers do not consider affect their enthusiasm in the profession.



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