



## EFL Teacher Burn Out: The Indicators, Cognitive and Affective Impairments

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### Abstract

*Burn out is a psychological term that refers to long-term exhaustion and diminished interest in work. Teacher burn out could be the consequence of a whole spectrum of parameters including intrapersonal, social, ethnic, and cultural. The intrapersonal factors encompass teachers' individual emotional characteristics such as motivation, risk taking, resilience, self-efficacy, self-esteem, etc. These are features ingrained in their personalities, and may have been inborn and quite irrelevant to their environment and educational atmosphere. These intrapersonal traits are the manifestations of teachers' feelings, emotions and personal opinions which might not be vulnerable to social or other external influences. What's more, the external extrinsic concepts and forces like society, ethnicity and culture can tremendously affect the occurrence and intensity of teacher burn out. Happiness, sadness, satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the community in which a teacher lives can lead to different levels and severity of teacher burn out. Teachers as individuals can be susceptible to these negative or positive feelings as the main agents of teacher burn out. Furthermore, teachers' ethnic background cannot be ignored in the discussion on teacher burn out. Ethnic and racial characteristics have proved to be of paramount importance in teachers' feelings of fatigue, frustration, apathy, isolation and what not. Moreover, cultural issues and concepts such as values, norms, rites and ritual, etc. are inescapable phenomena when we are dealing with the concept of burn out. In this study the different factors leading to teacher burn out and especially the level of TB at some universities in Iran have been investigated.*

**Key terms:** burn out, emotional exhaustion, motivation, alienation, cynicism

### 1. Introduction

The term "burnout" was first used in 1974 by German psychologist Herbert J. Freudenberger in his book *Burnout: the High Cost of High Achievement*. It takes place within normally healthy people working in fields that requires a great sense of ideals together with intense interactions with others. Burnout is characterized by three psychological attributes: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to the draining of emotional resources caused by interactions. Depersonalization is the cynicism and callousness towards students, parents, and other staff members. Reduced personal accomplishment is also characterized by a sort of demotivational feeling that one's work no longer makes a difference. Alienation is the process whereby the teacher feels foreign to the career environment. Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (Maslach. et. al. 1996) 22-item scale has been developed specifically to measure the above mentioned characteristics. Today, the measure of coping capacity questionnaire, MECCA may also applied in some research. (Steinhardt et al., 2011).

Steventon's (2001) list of stressors includes amount of time spent on paperwork, lack of administrative support, parents who do not get involved, responsibility for legal requirements and confidentially, unrealistic parental expectations for their child's performance at school, unrealistic parental goals set for their child, lack of motivation by the students, students who are disrespectful towards the teacher, acts of cruelty by the students and school politics involved with the job.

Kyriacou (2001) stressed on ten main sources of teacher stress which are teaching pupils who lack motivation, maintaining discipline, time pressures and workload, coping with change, being evaluated by others, dealings with colleagues, self-esteem and status, administration and management, role conflict and ambiguity, poor working conditions.

Motivated teachers willing to regulate their duties, show lower levels of burnout, while demotivated teachers show higher levels of burnout (Fernet et al., 2008). Lower levels of efficacy in student engagement within teachers can be a significant predictor of burn out development and increases the risk to leave the profession (Martin et al., 2011). Loss of status and sense of defeat correlate positively with teacher burnout, especially on the secondary level, due to societal demands. Especially men seem to be more sensitive to low status and develop burnout (Buunk et al., 2007). However, both genders are affected when a sense of defeat generated by attempting to



motivate students who lack interest in the subject matter leaves teachers feeling ineffective (Schrier, 2008). In addition, student discipline is considered the critical aspect for teachers' exhaustion (Klusman et al., 2008) and the primary stress factor for teachers (Bauer, 2006). Teachers are more burned out when dealing with greater numbers of students with behavior problems and learning disabilities (Fejgin et al., 2005). Teachers who experienced more administrative support in their management decisions regarding student behavior were more likely to report higher job satisfaction (Tickle et al., 2011). Collaborative interactions with colleagues are actually negatively related to self-efficacy when new teachers are experiencing difficulties within their classrooms (Devos et al., 2012). Teachers with a higher emotional regulation abilities (ERA) will form stronger relationships with students and create a more positive classroom environment, and tend to develop more supportive relationships with their colleagues and principals, which lead to a greater sense of personal accomplishment (Brackett et al., 2010). Burnout has been shown to be more common among women, especially individuals who are divorced or employed part-time (Bauer et al., 2006). Teachers with lower job satisfaction have more somatic symptoms, more anxiety and worry, and more severe depression (Ho & Au, 2006).

There are generally numerous burnout factors in teaching domain. In this study, the focus is to review the causes and level of teacher burnout as many aspects as could be found among lecturers at several universities in Iran.

## 2. Review of Literature

Martin, Sass, and Schmidt (2011) conducted a descriptive study to examine the mediating effects of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment on chronic work stress and depressive symptoms. The highlighting result was that each of the burnout subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) was correlated with each other, and mostly between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The control variable related to demographics were not strongly related to chronic work stress, burnout, or depressive symptoms; but small correlations were found with more experiences and award-winning teachers reporting less burnout, and high school teachers reporting greater depressive symptoms and reduced personal accomplishment. Based upon their work, Martin, Sass, and Schmidt (2011) suggested that high levels of work stress can cause depression and increases the idea that emotional exhaustion is the main component of burnout. More importantly, the enhanced support could mediate the impact of chronic stress on emotional exhaustion, and accordingly mediating the development of burnout.

John Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence explored four groups of factors: teacher demographics, teacher experience, teacher perceptions of the school environment, and school-level contextual factors (Pas et al., 2012). The study results were interesting. Teachers with higher rates of teacher efficacy initially also reported lower levels of burnout, in other words, those who are more prepared feel more confident about their effectiveness. Surprisingly, years of experience, graduate degrees, and perceptions of parent and student involvement, were not significantly related to growth of teacher efficacy. On the other hand, parent and student involvement was significantly related to burnout. Moreover, the study concluded that although both teacher efficacy and burnout grow over time, burnout grows at a faster rate, and even those teachers who reported low levels initially, are susceptible to burnout (Pas et al., 2012).

## 3. Methodology

A set of Questionnaire by Richmond, V. P., Wrench, J. S., & Gorham, J. (2001) were selected to determine how participants felt about their job and its related aspects. There were no right or wrong answers. They were asked to work quickly and circle their first impression by indicating the degree to which each statement applies to them by marking whether they strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree accordingly in numbers 1 to 4. They were also free to write descriptively about their feeling after finishing the questionnaires. Participants were lecturers randomly selected from several universities in Iran. Questionnaires were sent to them through email. They were supposed to reply back in a week. Two hundred and thirteen out of five hundred lectures replied back in a week. Hundred and twenty were females and ninety three were males. More than half of the participants were master educated with more than five years of teaching experience at different faculties. The rest were Ph.D. educated with more than seven years of teaching experience. The researcher tried to be simply clear by doing the data analysis descriptively.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Followings were the questions sent to the lecturers via email.

1. I am bored with my job.
2. I am tired of my students.



3. I am weary with all of my job responsibilities.
4. My job doesn't excite me anymore.
5. I dislike going to my job.
6. I feel alienated at work.
7. I feel frustrated at work.
8. I avoid communication with students.
9. I avoid communication with my colleagues.
10. I communicate in a hostile manner at work.
11. I feel ill at work.
12. I think about calling my students ugly names.
13. I avoid looking at my students.
14. My students make me sick.
15. I feel sick to my stomach when I think about work.
16. I wish people would leave me alone at work.
17. I dread going to school.
18. I am apathetic about my job.
19. I feel stressed at work.
20. I have problems concentrating at work.

Participants were supposed to score from 1 to 4 accordingly if they strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree or strongly agree. Then, all the scores were added up. If the final score was between 20-35 meant the participant had few burnout feelings; 36-55 meant the participant had some strong feelings of burnout; 56-70 meant the participant had substantial burnout feelings; and 71-80 meant the participant experienced burnout.

Results showed that 33 teachers (25 master, 8 Ph.D.) had a few burnout feeling while the maximum number (100) had strong feeling of burnout including 62 master educated and 38 Ph.D. educated lecturer. Moreover, 50 of participants (39 Ph.D. and 11 master) had substantial burnout feeling. Only 30 of lecturers (17 Ph.D. and 13 master) experienced burnout. Mostly female lecturers had the experience of a few and strong burnout feeling and very few number of females were seen to experience substantial feeling or the very burnout while maximum number of men were seen at the third and fourth level.

When each of the questions were separately controlled, significant differences were found regarding the 4 level of burnout feeling. Majority of the participants, in other words, those who had substantial feeling or experiencing the very burnout, strongly agreed on question number 1,4,10,13,16,19 and 20 related to feeling bored and no excitement, hostile manner in communication, preferring to be alone, feeling stressed and finally having problem concentrating at work. In the spaces provided for lecturers to write about their personal ideas, majority of them complain about lack of students' discipline and interest in teaching materials leading to less effective interaction with students. This is exactly in accordance with what Klusman et al. (2008) and Fejgin et al. (2005) had already expressed. Teachers who experienced more administrative support in their management decisions regarding student behavior were more likely to report higher job satisfaction. Some of them also stressed the negative effect of old system of education in their department in which they were not interested anymore.

Results yield the need for more support of the teachers in classrooms. The important role of administrative support has been clearly identified as the most important predictor on teachers' job satisfaction (Tickle et al., 2011). Additionally, systematic support and wellness programs need to be developed within the schools to provide training for teachers and education on alternatives to cope with stress. Ironically, research has shown that culture and support are more important than money and resources (Shen et al., 2012). More attention needs to be paid towards providing additional support for novice teachers. Positive relationships need to be fostered with experienced staff members where new teachers feel safe asking for feedback and assistance. In my view, some of the suggestions proposed by Fore 111, Martin, and Bender in 2002 could be applied such as smaller class sizes as well as smaller caseloads, more support as well as interaction from colleagues, administrators, more observation of teachers, professional development workshops specifically designed for dealing with, developing a clearly defined job description. Furthermore, coping strategies (to eliminate sources of stress) of Kyriacou (2001) has provided beneficial guidelines in this regard such as to avoid confrontations, to try to relax after work, to take action to deal with problems, to keep feelings under control, to devote more time to particular tasks, to discuss problems and express feelings to others, to have a healthy home life and to recognize one's own limitations.

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