

Analysis of the Causes and Exploration of Countermeasures for Teacher Burnout

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Abstract: Teacher burnout has become a global educational concern, significantly impairing educational quality and teacher professional development. Grounded in Maslach's three-dimensional theory (encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) and an ecological systems theoretical framework, this study systematically analyzes the complex interplay of its causative factors. Intrinsically, it stems from the high emotional labor demands of teaching, societal expectations of "boundless responsibility", and multiple role conflicts (occupational characteristics). It is directly associated with adverse organizational environments, including work overload and time fragmentation, restricted professional autonomy coupled with insufficient support resources, and flawed performance evaluation and promotion systems (organizational environment). Simultaneously, it is exacerbated by weak social support, mismatched home-school expectations, and erosion of professional dignity (social environment). Its manifestation is further differentiated by individual variations in psychological resilience, coping strategies, and intrinsic motivation (individual traits). Contemporary challenges such as the rapid evolution of educational paradigms, digital transformation, and technology-induced anxiety (era-specific shifts) compound these issues. Accordingly, this study proposes multi-level synergistic intervention strategies: At the individual level, strategies focus on strengthening emotion management, time planning, psychological resilience building, and enhancing professional identity. At the organizational level, management innovation is advocated, encompassing workload reduction (substantive burden alleviation), empowerment, optimization of evaluation systems, and the cultivation of supportive organizational cultures. At the policy level, measures include safeguarding educational investment, improving remuneration and benefits, optimizing staffing allocations, and reforming professional ranking and promotion mechanisms. At the societal level, efforts should be directed towards restoring the ethos of teaching respect, clarifying the boundaries of home-school responsibilities, and integrating accessible support resources. Only through concerted, multi-dimensional efforts can a healthy educational ecosystem be established, effectively mitigating burnout and fortifying the foundation for high-quality educational development.

Keywords—teacher burnout; causes of burnout; countermeasure exploration; professional development; educational ecosystem

1. INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of ongoing modernization in education, teachers serve as the core agents of knowledge transmission and value guidance, with their professional status directly influencing educational quality and the nation's efficacy in cultivating talent. However, as societal transformation accelerates, educational reforms deepen, and the diversification of the student population becomes increasingly pronounced, the teaching profession faces increasingly complex occupational stressors. Job burnout has emerged as a global phenomenon undermining teachers' professional vitality and educational sustainability. First conceptualized by Freudenberger (1974), job burnout was subsequently systematized by Maslach et al. (1981) into a three-dimensional framework encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The teaching profession characterized by high-intensity emotional labor, elevated societal expectations,

and role multiplicity is recognized as a high-risk occupation for burnout (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998).

Recent empirical studies indicate a trend toward the normalization and younger-onset incidence of teacher burnout. The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018 report revealed that, on average, 35% of teachers across participating countries experienced chronic emotional exhaustion. The pervasive escalation of this phenomenon not only triggers mental health crises at the individual level—manifesting as anxiety, depression, and collapsed self-efficacy (Simbula & Guglielmi, 2013)—but also, through mechanisms such as alienating teaching behaviors (e.g., perfunctory instruction, controlling pedagogy), teacher-student relational detachment, and talent attrition, undermines student learning outcomes and destabilizes the foundation of the educational ecosystem (Hakanen et al., 2006).

Current academic research on the etiology of teacher burnout exhibits three primary limitations: First, a

predominant focus on singular dimensions (e.g., workload), neglecting the interactive effects of policy environments, organizational culture, social support, and individual traits (Bianchi et al., 2021). Second, proposed countermeasures prioritize macro-level recommendations while lacking school-based, differentiated intervention pathways. Third, insufficient attention is paid to emerging risk factors such as the transition to digital education and intergenerational value shifts. As “high-quality development” becomes the central imperative of education, systematically deconstructing the formative logic of teacher burnout and proposing actionable governance strategies possesses both theoretical urgency and practical necessity.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1 Classical Theories of Occupational Burnout

The analysis of teacher burnout necessitates anchoring its conceptual core and underlying mechanisms. The tri-dimensional model (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment) established by Maslach and Jackson (1981) provides a universal diagnostic framework: (1) Emotional Exhaustion arises from the chronic depletion of emotional resources, manifesting as a draining of psychological energy; (2) Depersonalization constitutes detachment behaviors triggered by psychological defense mechanisms, characterized by cynicism towards students and mechanical responses; and (3) Reduced Personal Accomplishment reflects a collapse in the individual’s sense of professional efficacy and value recognition (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

This model exhibits significant explanatory power within the educational domain. The inherent nature of teaching constitutes high emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983), requiring sustained investment in emotion regulation (e.g., empathic responding, conflict resolution), thereby rendering educators vulnerable to cycles of resource depletion. Concurrently, the delayed nature of achievement feedback and the unidirectionality of social comparisons exacerbate the risk of erosion in meaning.

Mechanistic understanding is further deepened by incorporating Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). This theory attributes burnout to a “loss spiral”: When the occupational environment persistently deprives teachers of material resources (e.g., remuneration, time), conditional resources (e.g., work autonomy, participation in decision-making), energy resources (e.g., social support, psychological safety), and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy), individuals enter a defensive state to preempt further loss. This ultimately entraps them in a vicious cycle of “reduced investment → diminished return → intensified burnout” (Hobfoll et al., 2018). For instance, frequent policy changes consume teachers’ adaptation resources; broadened accountability frameworks erode professional autonomy resources; and parent-teacher conflicts directly impact emotional recovery resources.

The COR theory reveals that burnout formation stems not merely from stress accumulation, but fundamentally from a structural imbalance between resource supply and demand.

2.2 Ecological Systems Theory

The Ecological Systems Theory (EST), proposed by American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979, emphasizes that individual development is influenced by multi-level interactions within nested environmental systems. This theory conceptualizes the environment into four primary, hierarchically organized levels: the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem, forming a dynamic framework for understanding human behaviour and psychological states. Within the context of research on teacher burnout, this theory offers a systemic perspective: a teacher’s professional state is not determined solely by personal traits or isolated work events but emerges as a result of interactions across these levels of their ecological system. The Microsystem encompasses the immediate environments in which teachers directly participate (e.g., classroom interactions, colleague collaboration, teacher-student relationships). The Mesosystem focuses on the connections between different microsystems (e.g., home-school communication, coordination between teaching and administration). The Exosystem refers to external environments that indirectly impact the teacher (e.g., school resource allocation, policy formulation processes). The Macrosystem constitutes the overarching cultural and institutional context (e.g., societal educational values, perceptions of teacher status, policy orientations).

Through this hierarchical model, teacher burnout is conceptualized as a systemic “maladjustment” arising from the multi-faceted interplay between the individual and their environment, necessitating attribution to interpersonal, organizational, and socio-cultural dimensions.

Applying Ecological Systems Theory to analyze the causes of teacher burnout enables researchers to transcend the limitations of “individual attribution” and reveal the complex network structure of stressors. At the Microsystem level, intense student management demands, ineffective teacher-student interactions, or unsupportive colleague relationships directly deplete teachers’ emotional resources, precipitating emotional exhaustion. Breaks or weaknesses within the Mesosystem exacerbate role ambiguity and work-family balance pressures. In the Exosystem, inequitable school resource distribution and centralized management decision-making often create structural constraints. Factors within the Macrosystem, such as societal expectations of educational utilitarianism, the occupational stigma associated with teaching, and the discrepancy between “high accountability” and “low support” in policy implementation, further erode occupational meaningfulness, leading to depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.

The core value of the Ecological Systems Theory lies in highlighting the synergistic and nested nature of intervention

strategies: alleviating burnout necessitates simultaneously optimizing micro-level support (e.g., psychological counseling, mentoring programs), strengthening meso-level linkages (e.g., collaborative home-school platforms), reforming exo-level institutions (e.g., decentralized management, targeted resource allocation), and guiding macro-level cultural transformation (e.g., fostering a renewed social consensus on respecting educators). This multifaceted approach aims to construct a nourishing ecosystem that sustains teacher professional vitality.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE ETIOLOGY OF TEACHER BURNOUT

Teacher burnout, as a complex multifaceted psychosomatic reaction, is not solely the outcome of a single factor. Rather, it arises from the intricate interplay and cumulative impact of individual intrinsic characteristics, organizational environmental factors, and broader sociocultural contexts. A profound analysis of its roots necessitates a multi-dimensional and tiered approach. The following provides a systematic academic exposition of its core causative factors.

3.1 The Inherent Multifaceted Challenges of the Teaching Profession

The unique nature of the teaching profession encompasses a constellation of inherent, high-intensity stressors. Foremost among these is the profession's requirement for continuous and deep emotional and cognitive investment. Serving simultaneously as knowledge transmitters and values-based guides for student development, teachers are required not only to engage profoundly in the pedagogical process itself, which entails meticulous knowledge restructuring and the dynamic art of classroom management, but also to bear indispensable, yet immensely demanding, emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983). They must constantly regulate their own emotional states to foster a positive learning environment, while maintaining a high degree of empathy and responsiveness towards student anxiety, frustration, and even conflictual behaviors. This persistent, intensive, and often inadequately reciprocated emotional expenditure constitutes the direct foundation for the core dimension of burnout: emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Secondly, the profession bears substantial pressures stemming from perceived vast role responsibility and societal expectations. Educating individuals constitutes an intricate systemic task encompassing moral and intellectual development. Student academic performance, moral character formation, and even physical and mental safety are inherently, and often disproportionately, ascribed by society to their subject teachers, particularly homeroom teachers. This cognition of virtually "boundless responsibility" imposes a heavy psychological burden on educators (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Concurrently, heightened expectations for premium education and heterogeneous evaluation demands from various societal segments, especially parents, frequently place teachers in complex positions governed by multiple, often conflicting, standards. Such role ambiguity and role

conflict significantly exacerbate occupational stress and burnout propensity (Leung & Lee, 2006). Within this context, teachers frequently experience identity anxiety and questioning, epitomized by the internal query: "What exactly am I expected to do?"

3.2 Deficiencies in the Organizational Environment and Management Mechanisms

Teachers' daily work is rooted in and constrained by the specific school organizational environment and management practices. Deficiencies at this level constitute the systemic incubator for occupational burnout. Excessive workload and loss of control over time allocation represent the most pervasive and potent stressors. The deepening of educational reforms and escalating societal demands have led to a persistent blurring and broadening of the boundaries of teachers' responsibilities, resulting in unrestrained workload growth (Mok & Marginson, 2021). Core teaching duties (lesson preparation, instruction, grading, tutoring) are often saturated, compounded by a multitude of administrative tasks, parent-teacher communication and coordination, responses to various evaluations, and continuing education requirements. Consequently, teachers' work time becomes splintered as well as lacking opportunities for deep reflection and adequate rest has become the norm (Longmuir & McKay, 2024), severely eroding their physical and psychological recovery resources.

Closely linked to this is the significant erosion of professional autonomy and a diminished sense of control over work content. Highly bureaucratic management systems enforce rigid regimentation of teaching practices through mechanisms such as mandatory collective lesson planning, uniform pacing, standardized teaching plans, and frequent assessments and inspections (Gupta & Zhao, 2024). Concurrently, frequent shifts in education policy and instructional mandates compress the space for teachers to engage in individualized and creative practices based on their professional judgment, contradicting the fundamental expectation of professional autonomy. This sense of helplessness and diminished efficacy, stemming from the lack of control, constitutes a key psychological pathway to burnout (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999).

Furthermore, the scarcity of core support resources and shortcomings in the fairness and rationality of evaluation and promotion systems exacerbate teachers' sense of alienation from the organizational environment. Effective pedagogy and student development depend critically on adequate resource support, such as sufficient instructional time, functional facilities and equipment, ample instructional aide support, timely and clear professional development guidance, and flexible collaborative mechanisms among staff. Shortfalls in resource provision readily induce potent hindrance stressors, making teachers feel their efforts are thwarted from yielding satisfactory results, thereby significantly increasing the risk of emotional exhaustion (Crawford et al., 2010).

Issues such as intense competition for professional rank promotion, ambiguous evaluation criteria, and unfair performance-based reward systems readily foster a profound sense of distributive injustice and an acute sense of the devaluation of effort. This dynamic is closely associated with the development of the depersonalization/cynicism dimension of burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996).

3.3 Insufficient Social Support and Norm Deficiencies

As integral members of the social system, teachers' professional state is profoundly impacted by the robustness of their external social support networks and the normative structure of societal expectations. The observable trend of distancing from the tradition of respecting teachers and prioritizing education, coupled with insufficient protections for their rights and interests, is a critical concern (Gao, 2008). Sensationalized and selective media reporting, often lacking substantiation and featuring excessive labeling or even stigmatization, combined with the amplification of sporadic, irrational parent-teacher conflicts through online dissemination, significantly erodes the collective social image and professional dignity of the teaching profession (Berkowitz et al., 2025). On another front, persistent issues such as a poorly defined legal status for teachers, ambiguous boundaries regarding professional safety, and inadequate implementation of guaranteed legal rest rights contribute to a pervasive sense of professional insecurity (Parcerisa et al., 2023).

Concurrently, deviations in parental collaboration mindset and communication methods generate substantial workplace stress for teachers. Some parents exhibit a lack of sufficient respect for pedagogical expertise or deficiency in contemporary educational philosophy, manifesting in two distinct yet problematic tendencies: First, an intense focus on academic outcomes to the neglect of holistic student development, placing persistent pressure on teachers and frequently intervening in instructional processes. Second, abdication of responsibility for their children's growth onto schools or dismissal of reasonable requests for cooperation (Liu et al., 2024). Both scenarios engender feelings of helplessness and misunderstanding among teachers. The consequent deficit in the mutual trust and support essential for healthy parent-teacher interaction becomes a crucial environmental stressor (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020).

3.4 Disparities in Teacher Disposition and Coping Resources

While environmental and occupational factors exert a powerful shaping influence, an individual teacher's psychological resilience, belief systems, and behavioral strategies also constitute significant factors in mitigating burnout susceptibility (Chen et al., 2023). Varied self-regulatory capacities and stress-coping styles exert a significant moderating effect on the experience of burnout.

When encountering comparable stressful circumstances, teachers demonstrating positive cognitive reappraisal, possessing effective emotion regulation strategies, actively

seeking social support, and proactively engaging in problem-solving exhibit greater resilience and lower burnout vulnerability (Doyle et al., 2024). Conversely, those routinely employing maladaptive coping styles, such as avoidance, emotional suppression, or excessive self-blame, are more susceptible to experiencing heightened levels of burnout (Parker & Martin, 2009).

Underlying work motivation and person-organization fit represent further critical considerations at the individual level. A teacher's professional drive may stem from a profound sense of calling and intrinsic satisfaction derived from facilitating student development (i.e., autonomous motivation or intrinsic motivation). Teachers possessing such motivation demonstrate an inherent "safeguard against burnout" (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In contrast, teachers motivated primarily by external pressures, or who experience a significant disconnect between their personality, capabilities, or interests and the complex demands of the educational profession, typically exhibit rapid declines in work engagement, self-efficacy, and perceived meaning. This group faces an elevated risk of succumbing to burnout (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Fernet et al., 2004).

A particularly potent factor exacerbating burnout susceptibility arises when teachers perceive a sharp dichotomy between their educational ideals and the perceived constraints imposed by their environment. Under these conditions, the conflict between internal motivation and external constraints becomes acutely intense.

3.5 Challenges Stemming from Socio-Temporal Shifts and Rapid Educational Reform

The teaching profession is currently navigating an unprecedented period of educational transformation. Driven by deep shifts in modern educational philosophy, the pace at which expectations are updated has accelerated significantly. Simultaneously, requirements for teacher professionalism have undergone a systemic leap, evolving from traditional knowledge transmitters to a complex composite of roles encompassing key competency facilitators, learning designers, developmental partners, and lifelong learners (Fullan, 2016). This shift necessitates not only skill iteration but also a challenging process of identity reconstruction. Teachers are tasked with internalizing and understanding a multitude of novel concepts and practices (e.g., cultivating core competencies, applying learning science insights, integrating across disciplines, reforming educational assessment), while simultaneously being required to efficiently reconstruct their operational models within constrained timeframes. This state of persistent skill overload, coupled with associated Identity Transition Anxiety, profoundly impacts burnout indices (Day & Gu, 2010). Concurrently, the rapid advancement of educational informatization imposes increasingly demanding requirements on teachers' abilities in areas such as integrating digital technologies into pedagogy, managing interaction on online platforms, and creating and utilizing digital resources. The resultant sustained technostress has also emerged as a

significant and growing contributing factor to burnout (Buabeng-Andoh, 2021; Ayyagari et al., 2011).

In summary, teacher burnout is not the consequence of isolated factors. Instead, it constitutes a complex outcome arising from the continuous accumulation and intricate interplay of stress emanating from five dimensions: (1) The inherently demanding nature of the profession (affective and cognitive); (2) Deficiencies in school organizational structures and management systems; (3) Weakened social support and an anomie expectation system (characterized by unregulated or contradictory societal demands); (4) Individual vulnerability variations and insufficient coping strategies, and (5) The heightened adaptive demands generated by the era of rapid change.

Furthermore, dynamic and mutually reinforcing interactions exist among these dimensions. For instance, scarce school resources can exacerbate pressures inherent to the profession, inadequate organizational environments further deplete individual psychological resources, and swift educational reforms impose new challenges on organizational management. Gaining a profound understanding of this systemic, dynamic, and interactive causal framework provides a crucial and precise epistemological prerequisite for subsequently exploring effective burnout mitigation strategies.

4. ANALYSIS OF COUNTERMEASURES TO TEACHER BURNOUT

As a complex systemic phenomenon, effectively alleviating teacher burnout requires the construction of a multi-tiered, collaboratively interventionist strategic framework.

The primary entry point is at the individual level, guiding teachers towards proactive adaptation and development. Teachers need to systematically enhance their emotion regulation and self-awareness capabilities, master scientifically validated stress coping strategies, and establish a clear sense of professional boundaries to avoid the assumption of unlimited responsibilities. Strengthening time management skills is particularly crucial; this entails optimizing workflows and setting priorities to counterbalance physiological and psychological loads amidst high-intensity work rhythms. Sustainable professional learning and growth motivation constitute a key pressure-release valve (Bendtsen et al., 2022; Rodriguez-Gomez et al., 2024). Teachers should formulate individualized career development plans aligned with their aptitudes, participate in communities of practice for teaching reflection and engage in practically oriented training workshops, consistently expanding their pedagogical toolkit and reconstructing a sense of value. More significantly, active cultivation of positive psychological capital, such as developing self-identity, efficacy beliefs, and perseverance, enhances psychological resilience, serving as the intrinsic bedrock for resisting chronic occupational stressors. This development of intrinsic career development alongside psychological resilience building forms the core internal defense against professional exhaustion.

Optimizing school organizational management systems provides the institutional safeguard for mitigating burnout (Zadok et al., 2024). Scientifically designing the work context necessitates strict control over excessive full teaching loads (class hours) and non-instructional administrative duties, implementing flexible work arrangements, and genuinely putting into practice the Ministry of Education's directive to alleviate the non-instructional workload on teachers. Actively promoting democratic, participative management, granting teachers professional autonomy, and enhancing their sense of job control are vital to combat role ambiguity. The fundamental step lies in reforming evaluation mechanisms: abandoning singular, outcome-oriented metrics and introducing value-added assessment, diversified evaluators, and formative developmental appraisal. This operationalizes Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory (specifically utilizing motivators) to strengthen intrinsic motivation (Herzberg, 1964). Organizationally, building a robust emotional support system is essential, emphasizing empathetic leadership behaviors and fostering a supportive, respectful school culture. Designing clear dual professional development pathways (e.g., teacher expert track / administrative leadership ladder) to mitigate promotion bottlenecks alleviates the profound anxiety associated with career plateauing.

Top-level policy design and macro resource support constitute the long-term intervention framework. Governments should ground decisions in sustainable educational development, ensuring rigorous safeguards for the rational growth of educational investment (Smith et al., 2024). Crucially, this requires prioritizing the enhancement of teacher salary competitiveness and benefit levels, moving along the path of structural salary adjustments. Efforts must focus on resolving managerial systemic bottlenecks, optimizing dynamic staffing allocation, eliminating barriers to teacher mobility, and alleviating feelings of professional inequity stemming from regional and inter-school resource disparities. Returning to the standard of teaching effectiveness and practical competence alleviates career development pressures. Improving the social security system, including comprehensive healthcare and retirement provisions, is paramount to resolve substantive concerns. Enhancing the stringency of policy implementation safeguards is the foundational measure for the systemic improvement of the professional ecological environment.

Constructing a collaborative social network that respects and supports teachers is of strategic significance. This involves reshaping healthy, rational home-school relationships, guiding parents to understand principles of pedagogy and the professionalism of teachers' work. Explicit definition of responsibility boundaries through mechanisms like parent academies and joint parenting guidelines is necessary to prevent parental conflicts with the school and the emotional burden imposed by excessive expectations (Ying, 2024). At the societal level, an all-encompassing reinforcement of "respect for teachers and valuing education" cultural promotion is required. Media should actively disseminate the

positive image and dedication of the teaching profession, fostering a positive societal reputation. Furthermore, there should be encouragement for professional societal organizations (e.g., psychological service centers), universities, and communities to participate in building teacher support service systems (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). This includes establishing volunteer teams for after-school programs and psychological hotlines, thereby forming a substantive support network. From a broader perspective, the comprehensive advancement of integrating teacher mental health screening and service systems into the public service domain is essential. This involves consolidating medical and social resources to provide specialized psychological counseling and crisis intervention mechanisms. Only through effective synergy in sociocultural recognition, professional external support, and service guarantees can the construction of a robust external buffer zone for teacher psychological resilience be achieved.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has systematically investigated the complex causes of teacher job burnout and corresponding intervention strategies. The findings of this study confirm that burnout arises not from isolated factors, but from the synergistic impact of five-dimensional stressors that continuously deplete teachers' physical and psychological resources: (1) intensive occupational characteristics (e.g., emotional labor, perceived boundless responsibility, role conflicts); (2) deficiency-oriented organizational management (e.g., work overload, lack of autonomy, resource scarcity, flawed evaluation systems); (3) weak social support systems (e.g., diminishing public respect for teachers, asymmetrical rights-obligations dynamics, barriers to home-school collaboration); (4) individual differences in coping resources (e.g., resilience, motivation, coping styles); and (5) rapid societal transformations (e.g., paradigm shifts in educational philosophies, sharply escalating demands for technological adaptability).

Consequently, mitigating burnout necessitates the implementation of a multi-level, coordinated, and comprehensive intervention framework. At the individual level, we should strengthen emotional regulation, time management, psychological resilience training, and cultivating professional identity. At the organizational level, we should optimize administrative processes, reduce non-essential burdens while enhancing effectiveness, empowering teachers, innovating evaluation mechanisms, and fostering supportive organizational cultures. At the policy level, we should enact mandatory safeguards for educational investment, improving salary and benefits, and optimizing the professional environment. At the societal level, we should revitalize a culture that respects teachers and values education, clarifying the boundaries of rights and responsibilities between families and schools, and integrating specialized social resources to provide robust support. Crucially, only through a concerted, multi-stakeholder effort to establish healthy, supportive ecosystems for sustainable teaching careers can job burnout be

effectively alleviated, thereby fortifying the foundations for high-quality educational development.

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