

Teacher Burnout and Its Effects

Identifying Factors and Postulating Ideas to Address Teacher Burnout

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Abstract

The United States is facing an existential crisis within education: a teacher shortage. Educational institutions ranging from Pre-K through Higher Education, both public and private, struggle to fill vacancies caused by retirement and resignations.

Academic institutions do not stand idle on this matter. Higher education recognizes a substantial downturn in enrollment among student populations aspiring to become teachers. Additionally, K – 12 institutions are addressing the teacher shortage by way of “grow your own” programs, and state governments are investing monies into teacher pipeline initiatives to stem the shortage.

However, initiatives such as these are falling short, because the number of teachers leaving the profession continues to outpace those individuals willing to enter it. A key contributor to the teacher shortage is premature resignation and retirement attributable to the occupational disease burnout.

It seems that an immediate remedy to stem the tide against the teacher shortage is to address resignations and retirements caused by burnout. Therefore, this paper examines teacher burnout, what are the common drivers of it, and possible policy recommendations to mitigate it.

Keywords: Teacher Burnout, Teacher Shortage, Turnover, Retirement, Resignation

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Introduction

Job burnout exists among wide variety of professions – especially within the service industry (Hanju and Shiquan, 2024). Moreover, as a subset, burnout among teachers is greater than any other job classification. Indeed, Madigan refers to teaching as the most sucking and tiring job (2023). Teacher burnout is not limited to grade level, culture, nationality or any other group: it is cross cultural and political.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) labels burnout as an occupation disease among the international classification of diseases. The experience of burnout is nothing more than the feeling of dissatisfaction or stress in the workplace; however, it should not be considered the same as job dissatisfaction and stress (Mahmood and Shaheen, 2024).

Further, burnout is a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and inadequate personal achievement. Emotional exhaustion is a wearisome condition due to adverse working conditions. Depersonalization is caused by pervasive exhaustion leading to resentment and cynicism (toward students). Last, an employee demonstrates inadequate personal achievement by executing their job responsibilities with a sense of self-doubt sabotaging personal accomplishment (Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh, 2015; Dawes et al., 2024; Rezai, 2024; Hanju and Shiquan 2024). Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh further define teacher burnout as a sense of psychological exhaustion that originates from complex working conditions causing frustration and fatigue (2015).

Although the onset of burnout is gradual, once it takes hold of an employee it becomes permanent – making it an occupational albatross for individuals and their employers, respectively. Burnout is even more dire when relating to education, because education is viewed as foundational to healthy governments and societies. It is widely accepted – and expected – that students are taught by inspiring teachers who are competent in their respective fields of study

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while simultaneously modeling good citizenship and temperance (Mahmood and Shaheen, 2024).

However, studies show that teacher burnout threatens this universal truth. The effects of teacher burnout manifest itself through disengagement, low teacher performance, low student performance, frequent absenteeism, decreasing classroom management issues, and social exclusion. These results are troubling, because it compromises a foundational pillar of a healthy, democratic society. Therefore, the teacher burnout pandemic has been subject to intense research to identify its cause and effect among educators to prevent the erosion of meaningful education thus preserving favorable societies.

Equally troubling to burnout is the implication on the current teacher shortage. Darling-Hammond and Podolsky (2019) point to shortages as an inadequate quantity of qualified individuals willing to offer their services for available jobs under prevailing wages and conditions. That is, not only are teachers struggling to remain effective within their occupational discipline resulting from burnout, but it is also exacerbated by an anemic supply of prospective educators only furthering burdensome conditions.

Problem Statement

Teachers across the continuum of education are experiencing burnout. What factors lead to burnout within the teaching profession? Moreover, what policy recommendations can be taken to address the implications of burnout?

Review of Literature

Job burnout is described as a state of physical, mental, or emotional exhaustion caused by job pressure (Peng et al., 2016). People-oriented jobs – police, postal workers, nurses, doctors, and teachers – are considered high-risk populations to experience job burnout (Hong et al., 2022). Demerouti et al. proposed the job demands – resources (JD-R) model as a key occurrence mechanism of burnout to inform the study (2001). JD-R focuses on risk factors related to the goals, aims, and pressures of the job. Job demands refer to sources of ambient pressure, including workload, time pressure, job responsibilities, and work-family conflict. Job resources include organization atmosphere, labor compensation, incentives, and psychological capital (Demerouti et al., 2001).

In this instance, teachers exhibit substantial tension. When job demands outpace job resources, psychological energy consumption exceeds its availability, leading to burnout (Peng, Feng, et al., 2019). It is important to note that as a service industry, educators must employ emotional labor to their craft. Emotional labor is distinguishable from manual labor and mental labor, and it can be defined as the process of individuals adjusting their emotions, perceptions, and behaviors to meet organizational goals (Morris and Feldman, 1997). Diefendorff et al. further categorized emotional labor among three labor strategies: expression of natural emotion; surface acting; and deep acting (2005). Each of the three labor strategies utilizes job resources differently.

The JD-R model explains that the expression of natural emotion is that which occurs organically when conforming to organizational demands. In other words, there is no conscience effort by the employee to direct one's natural state. As such, natural emotion is not demanding

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upon the employee. In fact, studies show that employee expression of natural emotion improves vocational happiness (Fernandez-Dols and Crivelli, 2013; Zeng et al, 2020).

Deep acting is a phenomenon when an employee changes both their emotional expression and their internal emotional experience. Like thespian method acting, an employee who experiences deep acting is one who becomes synonymous with their work, leading to high levels of achievement and of truth. In this instance, job resources are positively affected thereby creating a flywheel effect upon perceived resources, because the employee works with equanimity (Yin, 2023).

Surface acting requires an employee to change one's external emotional expression while not altering internal emotions. As such, tension exists within the employee, because the duality is at odds with one another causing disharmony and thereby reducing job resources. If pervasive, surface acting can be attributable to employee burnout (Yin, 2023).

Psychological capital is another employee resource subject to the effects of burnout. Psychological capital is defined as a comprehensive psychological resource and a power source to promote individual growth that influences occupational attitudes and behaviors (Avey et al., 2011). It is believed that employees who possess healthy psychological capital are better insulated from burnout than those employees who are deficient. Indeed, a study among nurses and their organizational commitment seemingly reduced the incident rates of burnout (Peng et al., 2013).

Yin (2023) applied emotional labor strategies and psychological capital and its effects on burnout among college professors. The results showed that emotional labor strategies and psychological capital were significantly correlated with job burnout, with a finding that psychological capital moderated the effect of emotional labor strategies on job burnout (p. 5).

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A cross-sectional study on the relationship between mentalizing and teacher burnout was conducted in Serbia and found that employees with good capacity for mentalizing reduce emotional exhaustion and burnout (Safiye et al., 2023). Mentalizing is a form of imaginative mental activity that consists of interpreting perceived human behavior based on intentional mental states such as needs, desires, feelings, beliefs, goals, purposes, and reasons. Moreover, mentalizing is a process that enables individuals to correctly understand their own and other people's behavior in interpersonal relationships, as well as regulated their own emotions and impulses well (Safiye et al., 2023).

The study further categorized two forms of extreme mentalizing – hypomentalizing and hypermentalizing. Hypomentalizing refers to individuals who are deficient in or have a low capacity to understand the natural world of behavior around them and often lack faith in ability to know the mental world or favor erroneous beliefs that behavior is determined by external forces rather than mental states. Conversely, hypermentalizing results from one's overzealous assumptions about intentional mental states regardless of fact (Safiye et al., 2023). Surprisingly, the study found that hypomentalizing proved to be a positive predictor of personal achievement indicating that employees who lacked effective mentalizing skills experienced pride when personal accomplishment was achieved. Moreover, hypermentalizing was a negative predictor of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and a positive predictor of personal accomplishment. Expectedly, it was observed that employees who enjoyed higher socioeconomic status and who were married with child(ren) experienced less burnout. (Safiye et al., 2023). Ultimately, the findings were conclusive: capacity for mentalizing and burnout among teachers are interrelated with good mentalizing capacities serving as strong predictors of reduced levels of burnout among teachers (Safiye et al., 2023).

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Contemporaneously, a study investigated the relationship between teachers' psychological resilience, burnout, and organizational ostracism. The study recognized human capital as the most important resource enhancing an organization's competitiveness and effective functioning (Polat et al., 2023). In this instance, protecting the human capital of teachers from burnout was seen as critical, because of their crucial role in the development of societies. The study sought answer to the cause of burnout among teachers by examining psychological resilience.

Multiple definitions of psychological resilience exists in the literature. Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) define psychological resilience as a dynamic process involving positive adjustment in the face of a severely challenging situation or a trauma. Rutter (2012) views psychological resilience as an ability that allows individuals to cope with difficulties, negativities, stress, and distress. Hermann et al. identify psychological reliance as a positive adaptation process in the face of difficulties that may arise in distressing situations. Last, Hunter and Warren (2013) define it as a learned process facilitated by coping strategies. Despite similar elements within each definition, literature does not reach consensus as to whether psychological resilience is a personality trait, a process, or an outcome (Polat et al., 2023).

Notwithstanding, Polat et al. (2023) underscored that educational literature determined resilience as an important personality trait that influences the teaching-learning process. Gu and Day (2007) found that teacher resilience is a necessary condition for effectiveness. The authors found that resilience is closely related to a strong sense of professionalism, self-efficacy, and motivation to teach which are also necessary for them to be able to encourage their students to succeed (Polat et al., 2023). Importantly, they determined that psychological resilience was not a personal characteristic but that it was heavily influenced by an individual's social environment

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within their community and, decidedly, within their organizational environment (Polat et al., 2023). Polat et al. found that teachers' psychological resilience was generally low.

The research turned to organizational ostracism, which is when an employee is ignored by other employees within the workplace or when one is excluded from the group. It is debated whether this phenomenon is inevitable among social groups and, by default, work groups. Regardless, Wang, Lu, and Jiang (2013) believe that ostracism is a negative situation that occurs as a result of the relations between employees and their managers. As such, the intersection between supervisor and employee groups can contribute to the prevalence of organizational ostracism.

Ostracism within educational institutions produces negative feelings and attitudes among teachers, which can damage interpersonal relations and decrease school success (Polat et al., 2023). Therefore, one can infer that healthy workplace environments which exhibit good leadership, maintain clear and consistent policies and procedures, and provide ample capital (both human and physical) can effectively reduce teacher burnout and, importantly, improve employee retention. Accordingly, it can be stated that helping teachers build stronger psychological resilience could also help them face the challenges in the workplace better (Polat et al., p.13). More importantly, their results indicate that developing teachers' psychological resilience not only results in positive outcomes for internal stakeholders, but it can reduce or eliminate negative factors that could inhibit success and well-being thereby avoiding burnout.

A 2021 study examined the relationship between burnout and one's work-related sense of coherence (Work-SoC). Work-SoC is defined as the extent to which teachers perceive their work as manageable, meaningful, and comprehensible (Brady et al., 2021). Teaching is a job that requires providing constant instructional and emotional support to others and these demands have only proliferated with rising societal expectations. Although the research was a small

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sample, the research found age and tenure as a mitigating factor. Moreover, perceived work stress and quality were positively related to burnout. However, work quantity was not significant when examined through the lens of Work-SoC (Brady et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the findings support that high levels of Work-SoC have a mitigating factor upon burnout and low levels of Work-SoC lead to greater incidence rates of burnout – even when accounting for age, work stress quantity and quality, and life stress.

Sideridis et al. (2023) investigated the role of parental disengagement and its relationship to teacher burnout in Saudi Arabia. The researchers cited a teacher burnout rate of 36% within K-12 Saudi Arabian schools as impetus to explore its cause. They relied upon the WHO's updated definition of burnout to include increased pessimism about one's job, decreased professional efficacy, and energy depletion and tiredness (Sideridis et al., 2023). Data seemingly supports a relationship between parental disengagement and teacher burnout; that is, the lower evidence of parental engagement the higher incidence rate of burnout. However, in contrast to several other studies, their data found a positive correlation between age and burnout. It is plausible that the chronic demands upon teachers over one's career may increase the incident rates of burnout.

Student achievement may also be a factor contributing to teacher burnout. For example, research supported a link between expectation of math achievement and emotional tiredness (Klusmann et al., 2016). Against this backdrop, it can be argued that the increasing expectations upon student achievement in connection with high-stakes tests may correlate to teacher self-efficacy and prevalence of burnout.

A Chinese study on resiliency and psychological empowerment was examined among different genders. The purpose was to determine whether females experience higher rates of

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burnout than males, as some studies suggest. Results showed that burnout is equal among both genders but vary between its causes. For example, females displayed a link between departmental control and burnout. Conversely, males held a link between solving instructional challenges and burnout (Xue et al., 2024). For purpose of study, Xue et al. identified resilience as one's ability to recover quickly from adversity, and psychological empowerment as a range of cognitive experiences which result in a sense of meaning, competence, impact, and self-determination.

The likelihood of burnout was assessed by Alper Uslukaya (2024) using the JD-R model while controlling teacher self-efficacy and optimism. Data results showed statistically significant negative relationship between teacher self-efficacy and burnout, revealing that self-efficacy can be a protective factor against burnout (Uslukaya, 2024). The study also produced a significant, positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and perceived social support, one of the JD-R job resources. Therefore, it can be postulated that the increase of self-efficacy among teachers improves upon the social support of the workplace environment, thereby decreasing a likelihood of burnout among employees (Uslukaya, 2024).

Moreover, the study revealed a positive relationship between teacher optimism and perceived social support, confirming that support within the workplace is contingent upon the positive attitudes of human capital – administrators, teachers, and support staff collectively. The greater evidence of optimism within the workplace, the higher the level of social support among staff and the decreased likelihood of burnout among employees.

Teacher accountability has grown over the past several decades. Expectations by communities and special interest groups have only intensified this matter. Moreover, the inclusion of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), Section 504s, and high stakes testing

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required by State and Federal agencies has only exacerbated the pressures of the teaching profession. While well intended, accountability measures have a damaging effect on teachers which lead to higher rates of burnout (Wright, 2020). Li and Tsang (2023) investigated how teacher burnout is affected by external and internal accountabilities and emotion labor strategies of surface acting, deep acting, and expression of naturally felt emotion in China from labor process theory and emotional labor theory (p. 13). Their findings were complex when applied to the basic assumption of labor process theory and emotional labor theory. Surprisingly, there was an indicator that teacher accountabilities may increase a teacher's labor power potentially leading to a lower level of burnout. However, it should be noted that Chinese norms are regulated to examination culture, unlike western societies. Therefore, the correlation between increased accountability and decreased burnout from the Chinese study should be reviewed cautiously when applied to outside cultures.

A cognitive behavioral study was performed on teacher burnout in Iran. The researchers examined burnout among English language teachers to determine if interventions can have a mitigating factor when a group-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) program was implemented. It was found that the teachers who participated in CBT during the trial period experienced a significant reduction in burnout when compared to the non-participating group. It should be noted that the study did not collect any other data besides burnout, possibly ignoring unidentified, contributing factors to the results (Ghasemi et al., 2022).

Ha et al. (2025) conducted research immediately after the Covid-19 pandemic and subjected it to five continuous variables: teachers' perceived administrative support, job satisfaction, burnout level, the feeling of autonomy, and teaching experiences (p. 6). All but teaching experience were significantly correlated with each other. Moreover, all but teaching

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experience yielded negative correlations with burnout. Indeed, a teacher's perception of administrative support and burnout showed great statistical significance (Ha et al., 2025). This suggests that effective administrative support for teachers can lead to lower rates of teacher burnout.

Moreover, a study on the effects of empathy on preschool teachers was conducted. Empathy refers to the social cognitive ability to perceive and understand the emotions of others (Decety and Jackson, 2004). Although empathy by professionals is applicable at any grade level, early childhood all but requires it as it is high emotional labor demand environment (Hargreaves, 2000). It is argued that teachers with high levels of empathy can cope with the job stress more effectively than those professionals with low levels of empathy, causing greater stresses upon the teacher and contributing to burnout (Huang et al., 2020). As such, the study produced results wherein the researchers concluded that highly empathic preschool teachers can more sensitively detect and responds to children's emotional needs, thereby increase their engagement at work...serving as a protective factor at work against burnout (He et al., 2025).

Conversely, a separate study examined teacher supervision within early childhood education and care. Researchers Rose and Loomis (2025) set out to discover whether supervision moderated the relationship between teacher burnout and student teacher relationships (p. 1035). Surprisingly, the data rejected the hypothesis that feeling supported in task-related or work stress-related supervisory would serve as moderator to teacher burnout and student-teacher relationships. Notwithstanding, the authors believe further research is warranted as the causality between supervision and burnout cannot be summarily dismissed and, therefore, their findings should not be interpreted as final.

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Teacher victimization continues to trend in the wrong direction. Threats and violence within schools are not limited to students but includes its teachers (and other adult employees). Indeed, Stilwell et al. (2025) cite teacher victimization as a global epidemic, with prevalence in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Threats and violence include physical and verbal aggression, harassment, sexual harassment, and property damage (Stilwell et al., 2025). Interestingly, most programmatic assessments and interventions within schools are primarily student-centric, meaning that they ignore victimization amongst teachers. The research posits that a positive correlation will prevail between the rate of violence and the mental and physical health of its teachers – meaning that teachers will exhibit less physical and mental detrimental effects in the absence of or decreasing incident rates of victimization. It can then be inferred that teacher burnout will be moderated by schools with reduced teacher victimization.

A cross-sectional study was conducted among higher education teachers to determine whether burnout and well-being are connected. Pakdee et al. (2025) examined burnout in three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Strikingly, teachers indicated high levels among all three dimensions. Study participants identified several symptoms causing burnout, including excessive workload, symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress, and sleep deprivation. Additionally, these same participants identified themselves as having only low to moderate levels of quality of life. Like other studies, the researchers landed on the importance of health promotion, environmental support, and balance between efforts made and rewards achieved may decrease burnout and improve well-being through promoting personal accomplishment and resilience (Pakdee et al., 2025).

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) conducted a multi-part research series on the current teacher shortage. They indirectly cited burnout by way of underscoring many of the recurring

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themes within the teacher burnout literature. They are: low teacher pay; poor school climate affecting teacher satisfaction, morale, and expectations; lack of time for novice and veteran teachers to study, reflect, and prepare their practice; lack of sufficient, qualified teachers and staff instability; poor support systems; and, finally, a general lack of resources – especially in impoverished school communities (Garcia and Weiss, 2020). EPI asserts that nearly 14% of teachers leave the profession after one year. Moreover, they earn salaries on average of 21.4% less than comparable college graduates. Furthermore, an incredible 59% of teachers have second jobs to increase their household income. 50.4% of teachers identify deficient support and encouragement from school administration. 61.6% cite poor cooperation among staff members. 71.3% lack control over contents, topics, and what is taught in class. 89% of teachers say that they do not have say in professional development opportunities at the workplace.

Analysis

The literature review produced multiple themes relating to teacher burnout. First, the literature makes clear that burnout is not gender bias – meaning the rates of teacher burnout do not favor a particular gender. Moreover, burnout rates seem to correlate in schools with questionable leadership (i.e., principals, supervisors, directors, and superintendents). It is not surprising that teachers experience burnout due to unmanageable workload expectations. Furthermore, parent involvement – particularly a lack thereof – can contribute to teacher burnout rates. Startling enough, a fifth theme emerged in that the importance of social groups and optimism is crucial in supporting teachers who remain in the field the education.

In analyzing these themes, it is important to view each message through the lens of the following learning theories: Experiential Learning Theory/Social Learning Theory, Cognitive Learning Theory, and finally Connectivism Learning Theory. It is also critical to view these learning theories through multiple perspectives such as an organizational/behavioral perspective, a cultural perspective, and a historical perspective respectively.

Experiential Learning Theory/Social Learning Theory from a behavioral perspective

David Kolb, arguably a forefather of Experiential Learning Theory, suggests self-initiated meaningful learning occurs through direct experience. The Experiential Learning Theory suggests that knowledge is gained from a cycle in that the learner has an experience and then he/she/they reflect on that experience which begins a cycle of feeling, watching, thinking, and then doing (Institute, 2023). Therefore, learners are continuously gaining information from the environment. What happens when the learner is now learning in negative environment caused by

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weak administration, lack of parental support, and a poor community image in the community?

Could the symptoms of burnout be linked to a learned behavior?

Likewise, in Social Learning Theory, Albert Bandura believes people learn from observing and then imitating others. In an essence, one watches and then replicates another's behavior (Bandura, 1971). In both the Experiential Learning Theory and the Social Learning Theory the learner observes the behavior of others, retains the consequences of the behavior, and then the learner adapts by reproducing the appropriate behaviors or skills necessary to be successful in that environment (Bandura, 1971). If the environment of the school is one that is dwindling due to poor leadership and unmanageable workloads and the environment produces negative behaviors which are witnessed and interpreted frequently, isn't it safe to say that teachers will begin to then imitate those witnessed behaviors?

Essentially if this is what a teacher is faced with on a day-to-day basis it is no wonder the data suggests "Teaching is considered a high-risk profession due to the high impact of occupational risk factors which can endanger educator's mental health and lead to burnout syndrome" (Safiye, et. al, 2025). However, teacher burn out rates could decrease in environments of "high social support than those with low social support" (Su, et. al. 2025). This data suggests educators are currently working in environments which are detrimental to their overall well-being and this combined with a lack of social support could be one of the major contributing factors to increased rates of burnout among teachers in the same buildings and within the same districts.

In fact, several studies have confirmed a "correlation between increased social support and improved individual performance (Su et. al., 2025). Moreover, it seems perceived social support can contribute positively to things such as employee motivation, satisfaction, and well-

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being, The data also suggests positive social support can reduce stress and potentially help to mitigate teacher burnout (Su, et. al, 2025). However, if teachers do not feel socially supported this can contribute to teacher burnout.

This may be especially true when teachers are observing their peers struggle with the same issues thus creating a cyclical pattern in which teachers are now group learning (Institute, 2023). In the article “Relationship Between Mentalizing and Teacher Burnout: A Cross-Sectional Study” it suggests many contributing factors to burnout such as the behavior of the students, poor working conditions, too much work, and a bad school ethos (Safiye, et. al, 2023). The latter includes bad interpersonal relations with colleagues, bad relations with the school management, and a bad way of managing the school. This article continues to note that this may be the result of erroneous beliefs that behavior is determined by external forces (Safiye et al., 2023).

School districts must begin to look at ways to “reignite the passion” for educational professionals and not “extinguish it” (American Educator, 2022). Moreover, if the school is one that does not support their teachers or takes the time to build a stronger school ethos, this could lead to increased rates of teacher burn-out in those buildings. In both the Experiential Theory of Learning and the Social Theory of Learning the environment of the school could begin to shape the behaviors of the teachers.

This may be particularly true in districts where the teachers perceive the school as not necessarily inclusive or supportive. If there is an importance placed on social groups, and yet the culture of the district does not support this, it is safe to say that the number of teachers may continue to dwindle in those buildings. In fact, there is a strong correlation between “well-being, career commitment, social support, and emotional labor” (Su, et. al, 2025). This data suggests

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teacher burn out rates could decrease in environments of “high social support than those with low social support” (Su et al., 2025). In fact, several studies have confirmed a “correlation between increased social support and improved individual performance (Su et al., 2025).

Moreover, it seems perceived social support can contribute positively to employee motivation, satisfaction, and well-being, The data also suggests positive social support can reduce stress and potentially help to mitigate teacher burnout. However, if teachers do not feel socially supported this can again lead to burnout.

Cognitive Learning Theory from a cultural perspective

According to the works of Piaget, Bandura, and Vygotsky, learning is more of a scientific approach. The Cognitive Learning Theory examines how internal mental processes and external factors impact the individual’s learning experience. This theory examines how memory, perception, and problem-solving shape the learner (Wichita, 2025). It suggests that the learner is constantly interpreting stimuli from the environment and then learning behaviors from that data. In this theory, the learner builds knowledge from their experiences and those experiences in turn shape their behaviors (Wichita, 2025). Thus, the learner is actively constructing their knowledge by interacting with the world or in the case of schools-- the culture of the school.

This approach would hypothetically work well when the environment is one that is conducive to problem solving. In fact, in schools where there is a culture or a community of support, there tends to be less incidents of teacher burnout. However, in districts in which teachers do not feel as if they are in a supportive environment there seems to be a direct correlation with higher levels of burn-out. Therefore, it is safe to say that if teachers are finding themselves in an environment which is not supportive to their needs (i.e. the culture of the

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building is one in which teachers must fend for themselves) then the teacher may begin to feel that they are in an ever present “problem solving” mode and a perceived lack of support from administration, parents, or the community could begin to contribute to higher levels of stress and anxiety. However, if the district potentially begins to build the environment as one that has support, it may be enough to help teachers break out of the cycle of “problem solving” they may feel occurs on a daily-basis.

In the article, “The Impact of Educational Leadership Standards on the Teacher Shortage Crisis: A Call for Change” teachers were surveyed as to why they were leaving the teaching profession, it is imperative to note teachers stated “supportive school leadership” influences teachers who decide to remain in the profession suggesting a strong school culture could reduce teacher burnout (Roberts & Singleton, 2024). In fact, the school culture needs to be one in which fosters the well-being of both faculty and staff, it creates and maintains a safe nurturing environment, it offers support and services, and promotes engagements (Roberts & Singleton, 2024). What happens when school culture is one which does not care about the well-being of the faculty and staff, and it does not create a safe environment, or offers support and services? The environment within the school and community could be one of the leading factors to higher levels of burn out especially in districts which do not foster or promote a strong school culture.

Connectivism Learning Theory from a historical perspective

George Siemens and Stephen Downes, considered by many to be the forefathers of Connectivism Learning Theory, look at how technology is shaping the modern-day learner. This theory examines how the learner interacts with technology, and how those results are subsequently shaping the learning process (Kropf, 2012). In Connectivism Learning Theory, the

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learner networks with others in ways such as the internet or across social media to broaden their perspectives (Kropf, 2012). Learners can collaborate across vast distances on a multitude of topics. The internet and social media allow for individuals to speak freely across continents in a matter of minutes. Information is exchanged at a rapid rate. In one respect this idea of connectivism is helpful to the classroom teacher; however, in a post-COVID world it may be proving a detriment.

From a historical perspective the face of education has changed since the pandemic of COVID 19 and its subsequent fall-out in the world of education. Many teachers post COVID report higher levels of stress and symptoms of burn-out. Could this be a result of the vast changes to education which occurred during the pandemic which shifted the classroom setting, and left teachers, parents, and students reeling from the changes which were implemented?

The COVID-19 pandemic “compelled K-12 education systems to immediately address unprecedented transformations” (Gambrell & Bennett, 2023). Teachers were deeply impacted and had to adapt. In fact, it seems COVID-19 created a “need for fast and compulsive education” and resulted in issues such as anxiety, increased workloads, low motivation, and time management problems (Gambrell & Bennett, 2023). Furthermore, the pandemic forced a transition from face-to-face learning to online teaching platforms.

Many schools posted online lessons, offered virtual instruction, or a hybrid of programming during the COVID pandemic. Virtual instruction gave rise to new teacher concerns such as learning multiple new programs, navigating platforms such as Google Classroom or Google Suite, We Video, and for the first time in modern education, teachers were no longer in a brick-and-mortar classroom, but in their living rooms. Long gone was the idea of a classroom. Now teachers were at home lacking necessary supplies, learning technology at a rapid pace, and

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shifting the entire way they taught. This historical shift left teachers with unmanageable workloads. The data suggests that the Theory of Connectivism may have proved detrimental during a historical time in which some teachers “experienced a high rate of burnout” especially during the pandemic (Pakdee, et al., 2025). In fact, it has been noted that the pandemic made teaching the toughest it has been in modern times for our educators (American Educator, 2022). Thus, it seems the COVID-19 pandemic greatly shifted the face of education, and it can be said to be a potentially contributing factor to teacher burnout on a global level.

Ethical Implications

Multiple ethical implications exist should teacher burnout continue. First, mental health of professional educators will continue to suffer. The moral obligation upon society to ensure that students are taught not only by educators who are experts in subject matter and pedagogy, but also that these same professionals are not profoundly damaged emotionally or psychologically by the educational institutions for which they serve. The erosion of mental health among educators is growing and the consequences are not limited to merely the teacher. Young minds are molded by the adults in the room. And, if these individuals suffer from burnout, the consequences are severe. Classroom management suffers leading to increased disciplinary issues among students. Quality of instruction deteriorates (Garcia and Weiss, 2020). Perhaps most disturbing is that findings show that burnout deteriorates the physical and mental health of teachers which sabotages a healthy relationship between teacher and student (Shaheen and Mahmood, 2024)!

Second, teacher burnout undoubtedly leads to poorer educational results within schools. Research shows that those schools where teachers identify with burnout often are accompanied by poorer academic achievement of students. Albeit there can be other underlying causes of underperforming schools (i.e., socioeconomic conditions, language barriers) but the correlation between teacher burnout and academic performance is affirmed by the research (Garcia and Weiss, 2020).

Third, administrative teams will be burdened by low morale among staff, increased disciplinary issues, and lower student achievement (Roberts and Singleton, 2024). Moreover, it is important to note that administrators are not immune to burnout (Ha et. al, 2025). How does an educational leadership team build a winning formula when subject to these challenges?

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Fourth, it can be argued that stakeholders will experience a lack of confidence within the school system evidenced by decreased student achievement, increased disciplinary issues, and high teacher turnover rates. Not only can the perceived value of the school decrease among community members, but their property values may also be subjected to negative volatility. It is not uncommon for property values to share a positive correlation with school performance. That is, the greater the property market value of the housing community the greater likelihood of higher performing schools exist. As property market values decrease, so too do the resources of the school community which only exacerbate the issues and the tenuous working and learning conditions of teachers and students.

Last, the teacher shortage will be augmented by premature resignation and retirement leading to greater demands upon those who remain (Garcia and Weiss, 2020). Tragically, the early exodus of newly minted educators will leave improbable workplace responsibilities in their wake (Ha et. al, 2025). Class size will continue to grow as vacancies persist. More students will receive instruction by ‘emergency’ permit teachers: the teacher of record is provided with a special certificate to meet statutory requirements while ignoring the fact that these individuals possess little to no pedagogical experience or any academic credentials on “how” to teach. While it is true that some emergency permit teachers will further their instructional repertoire by attending higher education programs, it is reasonable premise that these same teachers may experience burnout themselves when expected to balance the demanding workplace requirements with the rigors of collegiate coursework.

Recommendations

The literature points to several recommendations which may have a mitigating effect on teacher burnout. One policy recommendation is to ensure rigorous training requirements for individuals seeking to become school administrators. “The role of school management is prominent in the way of not only providing but also keeping the school environment a happy, healthy, and stress-free workplace for teachers” (Shaheen and Mahmood, p. 3, 2024). It is true that most school administrators obtain credentials to be eligible for administrative positions. However, it can be concluded that these administrative supervisory programs may be lacking in the key content areas where teachers suffer based on the pervasive existence of unhealthy school environments connected to deficient leadership.

Indeed, teachers identify school leadership as lacking (Garcia and Weiss, 2020). Student discipline serves as prime example of the importance of leadership. Boynton (2005) states that building wide discipline is as important as classroom management and may even contribute more to the climate of the school. Employing student discipline with equity can be an important step to build trust between principal and teacher. Indeed, vacillating decision-making by administrators causes great consternation for teachers and students alike. Teachers become reticent to discipline students when warranted, because they cannot be certain to have the full faith and credit of administration supporting their decision. Moreover, students become disassociated by the perceived inequities and favoritism towards certain groups over other ones. To that end, ensuring clear and consistent student discipline practices could be a low impact but highly effective step in the direction of reducing stress within the classroom for teachers and students alike.

Schools may also benefit from examining their accountability systems. “Teachers are looking to school leaders for relief from what feels like a crushing workload because of the

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elevated levels of friction, conflict, and emotional labor” (Wallace and Kinsey, p. 94, 2025). The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) surveyed its members and found that paperwork itself has a crippling effect on job performance. Therefore, the AFT puts forth the idea to convene a paperwork reduction committee (American Educator, 2022). Its purpose is to catalogue the amount of data and reports expected of teachers to identify ways to eliminate redundancies and increase efficiencies to ministerial work. Reducing duplicity or unnecessary steps can not only relieve staff of cumbersome work, but it can also demonstrate school leadership’s commitment to making the workplace better by listening to and acting upon employee concerns.

A third policy recommendation is to lower the emphasis on achievement goals. Standardized tests are too often overemphasized on whether a school is succeeding or failing. Indeed, Wallace’s book *Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic – And What We Can Do About It* (2023) explores the impact achievement culture and data driven testing has on school morale. A constant state of accountability in connection with student performance on a standardized test depletes one’s sense of professional efficacy. Indeed, it is commonplace for schools to place their worth on securing labels of “proficient” or “satisfactory” in connection with student performance on standardized tests. Failure to achieve these accolades leads to an increase of examination culture, and the typical response by administrators is to double-down on building-wide efforts to improve testing results. This only perpetuates a vicious cycle of constant scrutiny and perceived failure of staff.

The AFT takes the idea of eliminating high-stakes tests one step further by advocating for teacher led buildings as a response to the “de-professionalization” of the teaching profession. The AFT argues that teachers know what is best for students no different than doctors know what is best for patients. By restoring the freedom to teach without the burden of high-stakes tests and

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collecting and reporting on data that does not help students can renew teacher purpose and restore creativity in the classroom (American Educator, 2022).

AFTs concept of teacher-led buildings lends itself to teacher survey response that they have little to no influence over curriculum. In fact, 71.3% of teachers responded that they lack control over content, topics, and issues taught in class (Garcia and Weiss, 2020). Therefore, a fourth policy consideration is to empower teachers to develop their curriculum subject to the needs of their students. Better yet, teachers should be given latitude to employ their judgement, their professional experience, and their subject matter expertise to build successful students and classrooms. This is not a novel idea. Ha et al. (2025) suggest that these initiatives foster a supportive school environment that fosters a culture of collaboration and innovation as a catalyst to building professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs are defined as collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals (Dufour et al., 2004). At its core, PLCs identify critical questions with a focus on student outcomes through a full complement of educators.

A fifth policy recommendation is to increase teacher pay. Teachers enter the profession with many challenges. The learning curve of the profession is steep, and teachers need time to dedicate themselves to their profession. However, it is difficult to focus squarely on a new career amidst burdensome financial obligations. As shared, EPI reported that nearly 60% of teachers hold a second job, cutting into precious hours of the day solely to make ends meet. The physical, mental, and emotional toll of being educator is exhausting only to be exacerbated by “moonlighting” to fulfill financial responsibilities. It is far better for teachers to have downtime than worktime, especially when the work does not satisfy their professional obligations or

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enhance their repertoire! To invest in teacher compensation, especially at the entry level, can be a worthy investment that can not only reduce opportunities for burnout, but also retain its staff.

Mandatory time off is a sixth policy recommendation. Too often educators experience guilt for taking time off – even when ill. Indeed, North Carolina explored charging teachers for substitute coverage as a deterrent for absences (Williams, 2022). *Education Week* conducted an informal poll via LinkedIn wherein 78% of 1,500 teacher respondents do not believe that they can take advantage of (sick) leave. Reasons for not taking leave include belief that their students will fall behind, a substitute cannot be secured placing unfair burden on colleagues, the burdensome paperwork required of lesson plans, and catching up on missed work upon one's return (Whiteleather, 2024). Therefore, schools must normalize leaves of absence by creating mandatory time off from work while creating better systems of support for absent employees. School leaders must develop mechanisms and implement flexible scheduling to normalize employee time off as a necessary, healthy fringe benefit of the profession.

“Mattering” initiatives is proffered as a seventh policy recommendation. Returning to Wallace and Kinsey (2025), research underscores that if we want to address the mental health of young people, we need to go upstream and focus on building the support systems and resilience of the adults in their lives (p. 95). People need people for the fulfillment of their needs (Shaheen and Mahmood, 2024). Mattering initiatives can include ensuring that teachers have time to invest in personal friendships by reducing workload; regularly recognize employee accomplishments at faculty meetings and/or through private correspondence; providing positive feedback by leaving a contemporaneous note with kind observations whenever a classroom observation occurs; and providing a forum at faculty meetings for staff to share personal accomplishments or celebrations underscoring the importance of having healthy, non-work activities (Wallace and Kinsey, 2025).

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Work performed by Robinson, O'Reilly, and Wang (2013) center on the negative implications of organizational ostracism and its impact on employee well-being and performance. Therefore, an eighth policy recommendation is to task school leaders with establishing a culture of belonging. Together with “Mattering” initiatives, belonging initiatives can have a tempering effect on organizational ostracism. Social supports can act as a bulwark against organization ostracism. Creating opportunities for colleagues to collaborate on curriculum, share important information on students, and provide dedicated time for teachers to socialize. Indeed, Su et al. (2025) suggest that employees seek a balance between their orientation toward the organization and the organization’s orientation toward them through norms of reciprocity, and employees receiving organization support enhance their motivation to contribute to organizational goals...promoting organizational commitment (p. 3). This policy recommendation can be further informed by Social Exchange Theory.

Summary

Teacher burnout is not limited to geography, governmental system, or societal expectation. It is a ubiquitous issue plaguing teachers and educational institutions without discrimination. The teacher burnout literature is robust, and it speaks to all levels of the teaching continuum from Pre-K programs up to and including Higher Education. Nor does it seem as if it is limited to The United States of America; in fact, it is seemingly a global issue which will undoubtedly affect generations to come. When speaking of a global crisis, it is imperative to address such issues immediately.

The purpose of the paper was to collect available research connected to teacher burnout, especially the cause and effect of it. The evidence is both compelling and disturbing. The symptoms of teacher burnout build incrementally and, if not identified quickly, can become a permanent occupational disease for the affected employee. It is tragic to know that burnout is irreversible, raising ethical concerns for any organizational leader. Institutional performance – in this instance in the sphere of teaching and learning – is critical to the building of healthy societies by engaging students through dynamic teachers. Burnout jeopardizes the quality of educational services received by its students. More importantly, it seems burnout may be the root cause of the teacher shortage that is beginning to span the globe.

Literature provides multiple reasons for burnout. An unachievable goal by way of high stakes tests is one of them. Educators are held responsible for student performance on a standardized test. Teachers are blamed when students underperform, and they carry with them the burden to ameliorate the problem without the proper resources to do so.

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Teachers also find themselves in difficult workplace environments. Indeed, it is common for teachers to experience victimization by pupils. Threats are exhibited by students in several ways: verbal, physical, and even sexual. These experiences naturally have a negative impact on the well-being of teachers which lends itself to burnout.

Job demands routinely outpace job resources. Psychological energy of teachers is overwhelmed by the stressors of the profession. Teaching also requires emotional labor, and the research supports that teachers who expend too much psychological energy lend themselves victim to burnout. Evidence is greatly exhibited by teachers who employ surface acting as a strategy to fulfill their workplace responsibilities. In the absence of one's ability to express natural emotion or to approach through deep acting, educators seemingly grow vulnerable to burnout, because dissonance exists between their mental state and their job demands.

The research was not remis to identify the unintended consequences of burnout upon students. Indeed, teachers who suffer from burnout are more likely to disengage from their work, demonstrate deficient classroom management skills, and disassociate from their profession in general. In some cases, it is observed that some teachers engage in abuse towards students. This is an unacceptable reality in need of immediate attention. Teachers do not enter the profession with a desire to impose abuse upon their students. Likewise, students do not attend class expecting to fall victim to teacher abuse. Certainly, employers do not want their administrators or teachers to suffer from burnout effecting their work performance or judgement.

Notwithstanding, the causes of teacher burnout persist and the repercussions of it perpetuate to date. As the world of education continues to evolve in pedagogical practice, workload, and the learning environment, we "have done very little to change the structure of school on a wide scale" (American Educator, 2022). In fact, schools must invest greater

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resources to teacher training programs, mandatory time off, and incentive programs to improve the culture of the school. Administrators and school district officials need to begin to create an environment “where adults and children alike can thrive and grow, where there are relationships built on trust and respect, and where partnerships exist amount students, educators, families, and communities” (American Educator, 2022). It is imperative that educational institutions view their human capital not merely as deliverers of high-quality services, but also as human beings who share the same needs of everyone else: the need for value, fulfillment, appreciation, and physical and emotional health.

Fortunately, multiple policy recommendations can be pursued to mitigate this occupational disease. It is important for organizations to fixate on those issues which they exercise complete control over rather than those issues which they cannot. Educational institutions must focus on their culture and what steps they can take to foster better working environments to address the teacher shortage. It is more important to pour resources to retain staff while addressing the causes of occupation burnout by adopting policies favorable to employees than to lament over the lack of teacher candidates. The former can be controlled by leadership while the latter cannot.

Professional learning communities can break down organizational ostracism by allowing colleagues to collaborate on meaningful work: curriculum development, project-based learning, technology, classroom management ideas, and lesson plan development. Although personality differences will always exist among workgroups, it is likely for colleagues to find common ground within job-related activities. Fostering a PLC environment can serve to break down the personality divide that can otherwise lead to poor relationships among employee groups when left untreated.

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Improving onboarding practices of newly hired teachers can also assist with building positive morale. New teachers experience challenges and a difficult learning curve. To couple teachers with veteran staff by way of meaningful mentoring programs can provide the systemic support needed for new teachers to rely upon as they navigate through their early years. Starting salaries can further assist new teachers by providing them with a sustainable wage that does not need to be supplemented by a second job. The competitive salary may seemingly allow for new teachers to focus solely on their profession rather than working a secondary job during non-school hours to make ends meet.

Although teacher burnout is pervasive throughout the field of education, it can be mitigated. President John F. Kennedy (1963) stated during a commencement speech at American University that “our problems are man-made; therefore, they can be solved by man.” Indeed, burnout is an occupational disease caused by organizations led by people. Therefore, it can seemingly be cured by adopting healthier organizational expectations: improved leadership, clear and consistent policies and procedures, and empathy can begin to improve the physical, emotional, psychological, and social well-being of teachers. Together with the proposed policy recommendations, it is possible to build healthier workplace environments.

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