



Teachers' workload, stress, and burn out: A phenomenological study

Venus B Bongao¹, Bessylyn A Macariola¹, Myra B Peña¹, Victoria E Tamban², Lerma P Buenvinidam³, Myrna O Medrano⁴

¹ Malaban Elementary School, Department of Education, Biñan City, Philippines

² Assistant Professor, College of Teacher Education, Laguna State Polytechnic University, Laguna, Philippines

³ Professor, College of Teacher Education, Laguna State Polytechnic University, Laguna, Philippines

⁴ Chairperson Alumni Office, Laguna State Polytechnic University, Laguna, Philippines

Abstract

This study aimed in assessing the implications of workload to stress that leads to burnout of teachers. Qualitative phenomenological study was employed in this study. Most of the participants said that the management leadership, classroom management, evaluation, materials, lesson planning, standards, expectations, student issues or backgrounds, collaboration, organization, and time management are the main causes of their stress. In addition, the interviewees also reported being passionate about teaching, helping students improve their learning, interacting with students, and feeling positive about their teacher identity. We concluded that the three major categories have been established among the teachers of perceived causes of work stress are time pressure, resource shortage, excessive paperwork and role overload. Our conclusion similarly with the study that teachers' stress and workload are becoming a growing concern contributing to burnout from job dissatisfaction (Davidson, 2009; Otero *et al.*, 2010), which stems from three aspects of stress, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and accomplishment. We recommended that the time management should be considered by the teachers especially those who are having work overload and excessive paperwork. We also suggested that coping mechanism activity needs to be include to the school improvement plan or school action plan.

Keywords: teachers' workload, stress, phenomenological study

Introduction

Teaching is a stressful position, and both physical and emotional exhaustion is commonplace (Buchanan, 2017). It is stressful due to the high social-emotional demands and interpersonal relationships between teachers and students and because it is an attention-intensive job in which teachers must be flexible and creative concerning the vast decisions that must be made (Roesser *et al.*, 2013). Stress related to interpersonal relationships decreases a teacher's sense of achievement and increases emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Cui *et al.*, 2018). Although teaching can bring a sense of personal satisfaction, it also carries with it stress due to demands from students, 2 demands from parents, demands from administration, work overload, lack of professional identity, and a deficiency of being recognized for hard work (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Davidson (2009) claimed that the most important factors contributing to emotional exhaustion are heavy workload and classroom management, which impact stress. In other words, the management of the classroom is connected and combined into the workload. Davidson's qualitative data, such as teachers describing situations in the classroom dealing with student discipline, support the element of emotional exhaustion found in Tsouloupas *et al.*'s quantitative study (2010), which measured the impact of teachers' perceptions on student misconduct. Together, both studies indicate that teachers' impressions of their own achievement and student abuse are central views in influencing emotional levels. Some of the major sources of stress for teachers include student behavior (Clunies-Ross *et al.*, 2008; Tsouloupas

et al., 2010), classroom management (Pas *et al.*, 2010), workload (Sonntag *et al.*, 2010), emotional reactions and behaviors (Chang, 2009), cognitive and psychosocial interactions (Margolis, 2008), self-efficacy (Otero *et al.*, 2010; Skaal, 2010). Teacher stress can be theorized as an imbalance concerning factors of risk and factors of protection (Prilleltensky, Neff, & Bessell, 2016). Teacher well-being is currently very tenuous because of high demands of accountability set forth by political influence that places the brunt of the burden upon teachers (Moore, 2012). The amount of stress put upon teachers is increasing as more states adopt new tenure policies, termination processes, and evaluation strategies based on students' progress (Lavigne, 2014). This stronger accountability for teaching performance has increased teachers' feelings of stress and burnout (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty & Harrington, 2014). Burnout is defined as a prolonged reaction to chronic emotional stress that stems from emotional exhaustion leading to cynicism and inefficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Job burnout is described as physical and mental exhaustion caused by job stress (Cui *et al.*, 2018).

The concept of job burnout emerged as an important academic research topic in the 1970s and gained the attention of researchers and policy makers during subsequent decades (Rosenow, 2013; Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). It is a well-researched and accepted academic subject; there are currently over 6,000 scholarly writings published concerning burnout (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2009). Numerous studies have reported high levels of stress and

high levels of burnout in schoolteachers (Abel & Sewel, 2001). The high levels of occupational stress can have detrimental effects upon teacher performance, student performance, physical and mental health, and job satisfaction (Klassen, 3 2010). High levels of stress can lead to depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and, often, untimely burnout, and stress levels are inversely related to teacher self-efficacy (Klassen, 2010). A downhill spiral can occur: stress creates depression and can lead to burnout, which represents an increasing global health epidemic, in turn producing a financial burden on workers, families, and the healthcare system (McTernan, Dollard, & LaMontagne, 2013). However, research concerning the impact of depressive symptoms on teachers are seldom touched on in qualitative studies (Van Aalderen, Breukers, Reuzel, & Speckens, 2014). The effects of work related stress in teachers and teacher satisfaction is not well understood (Ouellette *et al.*, 2018).

This study is anchored from the philosophy of Margolis ' (2008) empirical research on social and professional dynamics demonstrated that emotional and psychosocial interactions are the most important factors leading to pressure for teachers. The psychological facets include self-knowledge and acceptance while isolation, colleagues, and leadership are the psychosocial relationships.

As with the drive to engage students and build relationships with administrators, all these variables affect pressure through the connection to emotion. A similar point was made by Jenning and Greenberg (2010) in their study.

This empirical based research aimed to create a better understanding of the process, role and contribution of huge workload on educators' stress, which also explores the pressure and burnout of teachers.

There is a growing body of literature and research that addresses the problem of job stress and burnout for teachers, considering how teachers respond and deal with issues of classroom management through decision-making (Pas *et al.*, 2010), stress and burnout effects on the longevity of teachers in the profession (Klassen & Chiu, 2010), the relationships of teachers in the workplace (Otero *et al.*, 2010), and teaching.

Teacher stress and burnout coupled with demands to improve students' standardized test scores place teachers at risk for being dissatisfied with 4 their jobs (Moore, 2012). Job satisfaction is essential in every profession; unless one is satisfied with his or her job, it is nearly impossible to perform duties honestly and efficiently (Qamar & Ahmad, 2015). Because of job dissatisfaction, an alarming number of teachers leave the profession after one year (Moore, 2012).

In the last few decades, a significant number of teachers have departed the teaching profession due to overwhelming responsibilities and expectations that are unobtainable (Stewart, 2015).

Teacher stress and burnout (TSB) is related to many factors that are detrimental to not only the instructors but to administration, district personnel, students, and communities.

Research has shown that teachers' sense of stress, teaching efficacy, and job satisfaction are not only related to teacher motivation and longevity, but are also related to student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012).

It was shown in Figure 1, the conceptual framework of this study.

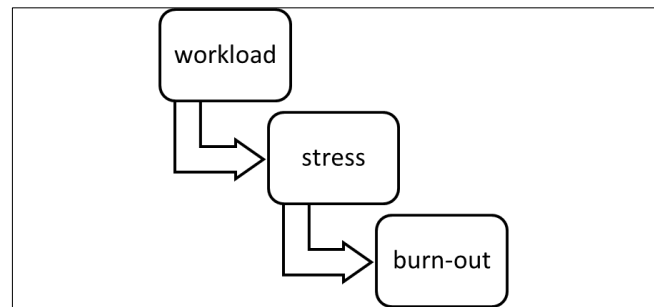


Fig 1: Workload-Stress-Burn-Out

Materials and Methods

Qualitative phenomenological research design was applied in this study. Phenomenology is the analysis approach that the researchers used. It is a qualitative method of research used to describe how a certain phenomenon is experienced by human beings. A phenomenological study tries to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings, and responses to a specific situation.

Phenomenological work helps researchers to examine experiences and sensory perception (different from abstract perceptions) of the studied phenomenon and to develop understanding on the basis of these experiences and perceptions. Therefore, the research approach is based on the experiences and sensory perceptions of either the author or others.

The purpose of this approach is either to use the researcher's own direct experiences acquired during the research process to describe and analyze the phenomenon in order to generate in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon; or to use the experiences acquired by other people to describe and analyze the phenomenon in order to generate in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon (Smith, et. Al. 2009).

This study involved an empirical phenomenological research design using Moustakas' modified Van Kaam method of analysis involving individuals who provided separate descriptions of their experiences.

A phenomenological study's primary objective is to examine the significance of a person's or group's interactions with a particular phenomenon (Simon & Goes, 2011). This qualitative method is based on ontology, a metaphysics branch that deals with "being" nature (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005, p. 3).

The researcher used one-on - one interviews to collect data on the stress of teachers and their perceived effect on their mental and physical well-being to help fulfill the purpose of this study. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insight into the causes of teacher stress in primary schools in rural areas and the psychological and physical health effects.

The participants of the study were the 7 teachers out of 81 which based on the results got the highest level of stress.

Demographic Profile of Participant

- Dhina, participant 1 is female, 30 years old, married, BSEd English and 8 years in service as teacher.
- Liza, participant 2 is female, 27 years old, single, with Master Units, specialized in General Education, and 5 years in service as teacher.
- Cora, participant 3 is female, 29 years old, married, with Master degree, specialized in General Education, and 6 years in service as teacher.

- Digna, participant 4 is female, 25, single, with Master units, specialized in General Education, and 3 years in service as teacher.
- Paula, participant 5 is male 32 years old, married with Master Units, specialized in General Education, and 7 years in service.
- Gina, participant 6 is female, 30 years old, single, with Master Units, specialized in Science, and 6 years in service.
- Gracia, participant 7 is female 28 years old, married, with Master Units, specialized in General Education, and 5 years in service.

Results and Discussion

Management leadership, classroom management, evaluation, materials, lesson planning, standards, expectations, student issues or backgrounds, collaboration, organization, and time management ranked in order of importance are the main causes of stress emerging from the interviews and participant reflective journals.

Participant 7 explained stress comes from: 1) Preparing for creative lessons is stressful, and then 2) my "self" or my perceived self-assessment, or the students' assessment of what I do when I do a lesson is stressful, like "had I done a good job? Then, I think, 3) the problems that children bring with them are stressful. So I work with kids who may be in foster care, have problems with abuse, don't have food at home, they tend to stress me out.

Participant 5 said stress comes from changing lessons and collaborating with others: whether my colleague is prepared or not, going forward on the writing curriculum. Management expects me to lead in this situation and if he doesn't want to help, I plan to go ahead and set up my own writing curriculum. Also decided to tell him I think he's making a mistake by not embracing the "regrouping" idea of setting up our two classes in "levels."

Participant 2 said, "Time management and staying up-to-date with the material I'm sharing with them on a weekly basis is a challenge."

In addition, the interviewees also reported being passionate about teaching, helping students improve their learning, interacting with students, and feeling positive about their teacher identity. Nonetheless, they recorded the overwhelming level of stress and disillusionment among themselves as well as their teaching idealism as their career has faded.

In any occupation, pressure arose. Nonetheless, high occupational pressure, like teaching, was correlated with helping professions. It has been known as a teaching profession that is exposed to high stress (Kyriacou, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Kyriacou (2001) described stress as the experience of negative emotions resulting from some aspects of their teaching work. Extensive research has been carried out to investigate the relationship between occupational stress and teaching (Hanif *et al.*, 2011; Gardner, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Mukundan & Ahour, 2011; Nur Aqilah & Juliana, 2012; Stoebebe, 2012).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Three major categories have been established among the teachers of perceived causes of work stress are time pressure, resource shortage, excessive paperwork and role overload.

Our conclusion similarly with the study that teachers' stress and workload are becoming a growing concern contributing to burnout from job dissatisfaction (Davidson, 2009; Otero *et al.*, 2010), which stems from three aspects of stress, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and accomplishment (Chang, 2009; Margolis, 2008; Sonnentag, Kuttler, & Fritz, 2010; Tomic & Tomic, 2008). Some of the main sources of teachers' stress include student behavior (Clunies-Ross *et al.*, 2008; Tsouloupas *et al.*, 2010), classroom management (Pas *et al.*, 2010), workload (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010), emotional reactions and habits (Chang, 2009) ^[14], psychological and psychosocial relationships (Margolis, 2008), self-efficacy (Otero *et al.*, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), and context or environment (Davidson, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

Classroom management techniques such as student behavior management, time on task, emotional reactions (Clunies-Ross *et al.*, 2008), constructive responses, and behavioral skills (Jennings & Greenberg, 2010) are correlated with stress and emotional fatigue. Notwithstanding this, the classroom also uses few established methods (Clunies-Ross *et al.*, 2008). Likewise, student activity attitudes of teachers often affect overall levels of stress (Pas *et al.*, 2010).

We recommended that the time management should be considered by the teachers especially those who are having work overload and excessive paperwork. We also suggested that coping mechanism activity needs to be include to the school improvement plan or school action plan.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to humbly thank the Hon. Mayor Arman R. Dimaguila of Biñan City, Mr. Ronualdo Roscain, the Planning Officer of Biñan City, the President of Laguna State Polytechnic University, Dr. Mario R. Briones, the Vice President of R & D, Dr. Roberto C. Agatep, the Director of R & D, Prof. Christian Paul de la Cruz, Associate Dean Karen A. Manaig of College of Teacher Education, and the student-participants for their support on the completion of this study.

References

1. Abba N, Chadwick P, Stevenson C. Responding mindfully to distressing psychosis: A grounded theory analysis. *Psychotherapy Research*, 2008;18(1):77-87. doi:10.1080/10503300701367992
2. Baer RA. Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 2003;10(2):125.
3. Berard W-D, Hallam A, Geiwitz A, Kerzner MR. Meditation as teaching and learning tool. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 2009;7(1):105-113.
4. Bowen GA. Grounded theory and sensitizing concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2006;5(3):1-9.
5. Bowen GA. Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 2009;9(2):27-40. doi:10.3316/qj0902027
6. Bowen S, Witkiewitz K, Dillworth TM, Marlatt GA. The role of thought suppression in the relationship between mindfulness meditation and alcohol use. *Addictive Behaviors*, 2007;32(10):2324-2328. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2007.01.025

7. Bowen S, Witkiewitz K, Dillworth TM, Chawla N, Simpson TL *et al.* Mindfulness meditation and substance use in an incarcerated population. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*,2006:20(3):343-347. doi:10.1037/0893-164x.20.3.343
8. Brock BL, Grady ML. *Rekindling the flame: Principals combating teacher burnout.* Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 2000.
9. Buckley C, Waring M. The evolving nature of grounded theory: Experiential reflections on the potential of the method for analyzing children's attitudes towards physical activity. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*,2009:12(4):317-334. doi:10.1080/13645570802221198
10. Burgoon JK, Berger CR, Waldron VR. Mindfulness and interpersonal communication. *Journal of Social Issues*,2000:56(1):105.
11. Cahn BR, Polich J. x Meditation (Vipassana) and the p3a event-related brain potential. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*,2000:72(1):51-60. doi:10.1016/j.ijpsycho.2008.03.013
12. Carson SH, Langer EJ. Mindfulness and self-acceptance. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive Behavior Therapy*,2006:24(1):29-43. doi:10.1007/s10942-006-0022-5
13. Carson S, Shih M, Langer E. Sit still and pay attention. *Journal of Adult Development*,2001:8(3):183.
14. Chang ML. An appraisal perspective of teacher burnout: Examining the emotional work of teachers. *Educational Psychology Review*,2009:21(3):193-218.
15. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331768074_Teachers'_Experiences_of_Occupational_Stress_in_Public_Primary_Schools [accessed Oct 29 2019].