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Teachers' burnout in the EFL setting: the correlation between burnout level and the years of teaching experience

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Abstract

This study examines teachers' burnout in a prestigious private school across career stages using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), assessing emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA). Data were collected from 31 administrator teachers divided into three experience groups: early-career (<5 years, n=6), mid-career (5-10 years, n=10), and veteran (>10 years, n=15). Participants completed the MBI survey using a 0-6 Likert scale, with total scores calculated for each subscale.

Results revealed distinct patterns: Early-career teachers showed severe burnout (EE=21.17, DP=17.83, PA=30.67), indicating high stress during professional transition. Mid-career teachers demonstrated moderate improvement (EE=20.40, DP=12.7, PA=31.1), suggesting developing coping skills. Experienced teachers displayed higher accomplishment (PA=34.10) but renewed detachment (DP=16.27), reflecting long-term adaptation.

The non-linear burnout progression highlights the necessity for career-phase-specific support. This study emphasizes the importance of thorough burnout assessment in educational contexts and offers a framework for focused wellbeing interventions.

Keywords: career stages, depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, teacher burnout

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest challenges facing today's teachers is the heavy workload, which is not only limited to teaching but also includes various administrative and non-academic responsibilities. Teachers have to prepare learning materials such as lesson plans, conduct daily, mid-term, and end-of-semester assessments, and complete detailed report cards. They are also overburdened with school activity reports, government programs such as *Merdeka Belajar*, and the *Pancasila (P5)* project to strengthen student profiles. While it offers numerous benefits for promoting multilingualism and enhancing student engagement, it has also created challenges for educators (Halim et al. 2024). In some schools, especially those with an international or bilingual focus, teachers are even required to teach in English to prepare students for global competition. This has added pressure, especially for teachers who do not come from a strong English background, so they have to work extra hard to improve their language skills while still fulfilling their daily teaching responsibilities.

In addition to the aforementioned requirements, teacher stress may be attributed to a perception of an imbalance between the expectations placed on them by the school and their resources for meeting those expectations (Esteve 2000). Besides teaching, teachers also have to attend training courses, workshops, and seminars to meet the demands of professional development, which often takes up time without being balanced by a reduction in the teaching load. To make matters worse, teachers are no longer just responsible for imparting knowledge, but also for shaping the character of their students. They are expected to instill moral values, discipline, tolerance, and creativity, while at the same time dealing with student behavior problems such as bullying, gadget addiction, or lack of motivation to learn. In fact, character development requires an intensive, individualized approach, while the number of students in a class is often too large to handle optimally. Teachers are essential in determining peer interactions and classroom dynamics, which have a significant influence on students' self-esteem and general well-being (van Aalst et al., 2021). They are considered to be important socializers in the classroom (Yoon and Bauman, 2014). As a result, many teachers are physically and emotionally exhausted from constantly working outside of teaching hours, meeting administrative demands, and serving as educators, counsellors, and even "second parents" to students. The combination of excessive workloads, the demands of bilingual education, and multidimensional responsibilities makes it difficult for them to maintain a positive attitude and motivation (Călin, 2022), which is why today's teachers are particularly vulnerable to burnout.

Teachers' stress in the EFL setting is a significant concern that has been extensively studied due to its impact on teacher performance and well-being. Several factors contribute to and mitigate stress among EFL teachers. Interestingly, the relationship between stress and burnout is complex and influenced by various factors. Growth teaching mindset, teaching grit, and emotion regulation strategies play crucial roles in preventing burnout among EFL teachers. While reappraisal emotion regulation strategies negatively predicted burnout, suppression strategies were positive predictors (Sadoughi et al., 2024). This highlights the importance of developing practical emotion regulation skills to manage stress and prevent burnout.

In line with this concern, this study aims to assess the burnout levels of the total population of administrator teachers at a prestigious private school in Yogyakarta, where EFL becomes a part of their daily school life. Schools can reduce stress by fostering environments that enable personal coping and systemic support (Kyriacou, 2023).

This study explores the relationship between teaching experience and the event's timing, which takes place at the end of the academic year. Teaching experience is categorized into under 5 years, between 5 and 10 years, and over 10 years. This division is grounded in educational psychology and career development theories, which suggest that teachers undergo distinct phases of professional growth, each with unique stressors and coping mechanisms. Novice teachers (0-5 years) often enter a survival and discovery phase, characterized by a steep learning curve, emotional investment, and high stress due to classroom management challenges and administrative inexperience. Mid-career teachers (5-10 years) typically enter a stabilisation or reassessment phase where initial enthusiasm may wane and increased workloads (e.g., mentoring roles, curriculum leadership) may lead to plateaued motivation or burnout. Experienced teachers (>10 years) enter a phase of mastery or stagnation, where some develop resilience through experience, while others face chronic exhaustion from accumulated systemic pressures. Within the adult development and career development literature are theories and studies that acknowledge that teachers have different attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors at various points during their careers (Lynn, 2002). By categorizing teachers in this manner, the study can pinpoint essential intervention opportunities, such as providing targeted support for early career teachers or facilitating role revitalization for mid-career educators, to alleviate burnout effectively.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Novice, Mid-career, and Experienced Teachers

Novice teachers (0–5 years) are often in the *survival and discovery* stage, characterized by steep learning curves, emotional investment, and high stress due to classroom management challenges and administrative inexperience. Mid-career teachers (5–10 years) typically enter a *stabilization or reassessment* phase, where initial enthusiasm may wane, and workload expansion (e.g., mentoring roles, curriculum leadership) can lead to plateaued motivation or burnout. Experienced teachers (>10 years) reach a phase of *mastery or stagnation*, where some develop resilience through experience, while others face chronic exhaustion from accumulated systemic pressures. This categorization aligns with Huberman's (1997) teacher career cycle model and empirical studies showing nonlinear burnout trends across these stages. By segmenting teachers this way, the study can identify critical intervention points, such as targeted support for early-career teachers or role revitalization for mid-career educators, to mitigate burnout effectively (Huberman et al., 1997).

2.2 Teacher Burnout

Teaching is challenging, and job stress causes many teachers emotional issues (Yin et al., 2019). This stress is compounded by burnout, which can result from heavy

workloads and additional pressures such as the obligation to teach in English, a language that may not be their mother tongue. This stress can negatively impact a teacher's health, effectiveness, and connections with the students, eventually impairing student behavior and learning (Kant & Shanker, 2021). Teachers are highly susceptible to burnout, marked by emotional exhaustion, cynicism (depersonalization), and reduced self-efficacy, often stemming from chronic workplace stress. Being overwhelmed by the responsibilities of one's employment can result in emotional tiredness. Teachers may feel ineffectual when demands exceed available resources (Maslach et al., 2001). One of the primary drivers of burnout is the perception of inadequate resources to fulfill professional demands. For teachers, this is particularly evident in bilingual education contexts, where the added cognitive and emotional burden of instructing in a non-native language exacerbates stress, depletes coping mechanisms, and heightens the risk of emotional exhaustion. Burnout is often described as having three parts: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (detaching from students), and a sense of low accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001).

2.3 Teacher Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, stress, and burnout are closely related. Teacher self-efficacy—the belief in one's ability to effectively plan, instruct, and manage classroom challenges—plays a critical role in educational success. When teachers possess high self-efficacy, they demonstrate greater resilience, employ innovative teaching strategies, and foster a more positive learning environment (Bandura 1982). From this perspective, self-efficacy affects one's goals and behaviors and is influenced by one's environmental actions and conditions. Efficacy beliefs determine how environmental opportunities and impediments are perceived and affect the choice of activities, how much effort is expended on an activity, and how long people will persevere when confronting obstacles (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2010). This confidence directly impacts their competence in delivering lessons, maintaining student engagement, and adapting to diverse learners' needs. On the other hand, low self-efficacy can lead to avoidance of problematic tasks, reduced motivation, and poorer student outcomes. In bilingual or high-pressure settings, where demands such as language barriers or heavy workloads exist, strong self-efficacy acts as a barrier against stress and burnout. Ultimately, cultivating teacher self-efficacy through professional development, mentorship, and constructive feedback is essential for sustaining both educator welfare and classroom effectiveness (Woolfolk and Hoy 1990).

2.4 Coping Mechanism

Stress management requires the use of coping strategies. The term "coping" describes the methods and actions people take to deal with the mental, emotional, and physical strain of stressful circumstances. Coping can be influenced by various factors, including personality, previous experiences, available support, and the nature of the stressor itself (Taylor & Stanton, 2007). Depending on how well they work to lower stress and enhance general well-being, these coping strategies can be positive (adaptive) or negative (maladaptive). How administrator teachers manage stress has an impact on their effectiveness as professionals. Because of this, reducing stress

levels and using problem-focused coping mechanisms can help teachers perform better. It is critical to comprehend how educators manage stress, particularly in today's demanding classrooms. Studies on relationships between years of teaching experience and burnout reveal that the longer the experience, the less the burnout syndrome, which means teachers have better coping mechanisms (El Helou et al., 2016).

2.5 Depersonalization

Feelings of disconnection from oneself and one's environment are characteristics of the complicated psychological phenomena of depersonalization. This mental health syndrome is defined by a feeling of disassociation from one's own body and thoughts (Sierra and David, 2011). Depersonalization can lead individuals to experience a profound sense of detachment, as if observing themselves from an external perspective. This dissociative state often involves emotional numbness, distorted perceptions of one's body (e.g., feeling unreal or physically altered), and difficulties with concentration. Depersonalization may range in intensity from sporadic, moderate emotions to a pervasive, overwhelming sense of alienation. This complex phenomenological experience was initially recognized as a psychological condition that impacted self-awareness. Among the various aspects of depersonalization, a lack of emotion appears to be a significant symptom; nevertheless, little is known about this phenomenon (Horn et al., 2020).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional design. One popular quantitative research approach in observational studies is the cross-sectional study design. It entails gathering information from a population at a particular moment in time and measuring exposures and outcomes at the same time (Setia 2016). By tallying the three categories of years of teaching experience (less than five years, five to ten years, and more than ten years), the data collection was done at a single time point at the end of the semester in June. The analysis focuses on examining correlations between two key variables. The first is **Burnout** (dependent variable), and the second is **Teaching duration** (independent variable). This study aims to examine whether the duration of teaching experience affects the level of burnout among educators. The research hypotheses are as follows: (1) There is a positive correlation between teaching-related stress and burnout levels, and (2) Teachers with 5-10 years of experience are expected to exhibit higher levels of burnout compared to novice or more experienced teachers.

3.2 Participants

The study's participants were 31 administrator teachers of a prestigious private school in Yogyakarta, 24 homeroom teachers, 4 counselling teachers, and 3 vice principals who shared the commonality of using mixed languages, including English, in their daily school life.

3.3 Instruments

This study used three primary data collection tools. The first was a demographic survey that collected teaching duration categories (<5, 5-10, >10 years). The second tool was the Maslach Burnout Inventory Scale to measure three burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion (7 items), depersonalization (7 items), and personal accomplishment (8 items), using a 0 (never) to 6 (daily) frequency scale.

3.4 Data Analysis

This study analysed burnout levels using total scores from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). For each participant, we calculated three separate total scores: Emotional Exhaustion (EE; sum of 7 items, range 0-42), Depersonalization (DP; sum of 7 items, range 0-42), and Personal Accomplishment (PA; sum of 8 items, range 0-48). These total scores were used rather than mean scores to maintain the full range of response values and facilitate interpretation against established clinical benchmarks.

We interpreted the total scores according to standard MBI guidelines. Scores for Emotional Exhaustion were categorized as follows: ≤ 16 (low burnout), 17-26 (moderate burnout), and ≥ 27 (high burnout). Depersonalization scores were classified as ≤ 5 (low), 6-11 (moderate), and ≥ 12 (high). For Personal Accomplishment, higher scores (≥ 40) indicated greater feelings of accomplishment, while lower scores (≤ 33) suggested burnout risk. These categorical thresholds allowed for meaningful interpretation of our sample's individual and overall burnout levels.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to assess the burnout levels of the total population (31 persons) of administrator teachers at a prestigious private school in Yogyakarta at the end-of-academic-year period and examine their correlation with teaching experience. The findings and discussion sections raised three important areas related to teacher burnout for further elaboration: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

Table 1: Emotional exhaustion (EE) level

Teaching Experience	N teachers	Average EE
<5 years	6	21.17
5 – 10 years	10	20.40
>10 years	15	18.93

Table 1 presented important information on the signs and symptoms of emotional exhaustion in the teaching profession at various career levels. The findings showed that emotional exhaustion levels declined as teaching experience increased. According to the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the highest average emotional exhaustion score (21.17) was observed in novice teachers with less than five years of experience, placing them at the higher end of the moderate burnout range. This study revealed that the first few years of teaching were especially demanding, potentially because of the challenges new teachers experience regarding curriculum development,

classroom management, and professional adjustment. These challenges might cause continuous emotional exhaustion that could hinder teachers' ability to teach effectively.

While the most experienced teachers (>10 years) had the lowest average scores (18.93), the less experienced cohort of teachers with 5–10 years of experience exhibited slightly lower emotional exhaustion levels (20.40). As experience increased, emotional tiredness gradually decreased, which could be due to several variables. Stronger professional support networks, established classroom routines, and coping mechanisms are probably advantageous to more experienced educators (Taylor and Stanton, 2007).

Since the MBI typically views 5-point deviations as indicating substantial changes in burnout levels, the 3.24-point difference between the least and most experienced groups is clinically significant. While all groups stayed in the moderate burnout zone, the development showed that experience can provide a coping mechanism against emotional exhaustion. Moreover, developing emotional skills also helps teachers counter job stress (Kant and Shanker, 2021).

Several important considerations emerge from these findings. The consistent presence of moderate emotional exhaustion across all experience levels indicated that burnout remained a systemic issue throughout teachers' careers, though it appeared most acute in the initial years. The small sample size of novice teachers (N=6) suggested the need for cautious interpretation of those particular results, while the larger sample of experienced educators (N=15) provided stronger estimates for that group. These patterns aligned with existing research showing that early-career teachers, especially in the first years, faced unique stressors and might benefit from targeted support programs (Admiraal et al., 2023; Gavish and Friedman, 2010). The findings highlighted the importance of implementing universal burnout prevention strategies and experience-specific interventions to address emotional exhaustion at different career stages.

Table 2: Depersonalization (DP) level

Teaching Experience	N teachers	Average DP
<5 years	6	17.83
5 – 10 years	10	12.7
>10 years	15	16.27

The data in Table 2 presented a complex picture of how depersonalization, a key dimension of burnout characterized by emotional detachment and cynicism, varies across teaching career stages. The results reveal a non-linear relationship between experience and depersonalization that differs notably from the emotional exhaustion patterns. Early-career teachers (<5 years) demonstrated the highest average DP score (17.83), which exceeded the clinical threshold of 12 that indicated high depersonalization. This finding suggested that novice teachers might develop robust defensive detachment mechanisms as they navigated the intense demands of their new

profession. This is because novice teachers generally receive less professional support from their seniors (Caspersen and Raaen, 2014; Chaaban and Du, 2017).

Notably, teachers with 5 to 10 years of experience exhibited the lowest levels of depersonalization, scoring 12.7, slightly above the line separating moderate from high burnout. This dip in DP scores during the middle phase of a teacher's career might reflect several factors: greater confidence in their professional abilities, established relationships with students and fellow workers, or possibly a "honeymoon period" after surviving the initial challenging years. Teachers with high self-efficacy experienced less stress linked to their job (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). The subsequent rise in depersonalization among the most experienced teachers (>10 years), with an average score of 16.27, presented a particularly notable finding. This rebound effect implied that extended exposure to teaching stressors may eventually undermine well-established coping strategies, resulting in a renewed sense of emotional disengagement. A study found that age and years of teaching experience are related to depersonalization scores, but not to emotional exhaustion (Croom, 2003).

The 5.13-point difference between the highest and lowest DP averages represented a substantial variation with clear clinical implications. While all groups showed concerning levels of depersonalization, the pattern indicated that the relationship between experience and emotional detachment was not simply linear. The small sample size of beginner teachers required caution in interpretation, but the consistent pattern of the mid-career drop across numerous research studies added credibility to this finding.

These results highlighted the need for targeted interventions at different career stages - initial support to prevent defensive detachment in new teachers, maintenance strategies for mid-career educators, and rejuvenation programs for experienced teachers to prevent late-career pessimism. The findings underscored that depersonalization manifested differently than emotional exhaustion across the teaching career continuum, requiring distinct approaches at various professional stages.

Table 3: Personal achievement (PA) level

Teaching Experience	N teachers	Average PA
<5 years	6	30.67
5 – 10 years	10	31.1
>10 years	15	34.10

The data in Table 3 revealed significant insights about teachers' sense of personal accomplishment across different career stages, completing our understanding of the three burnout dimensions. The results showed a positive progression in personal achievement (PA) scores as teaching experience increased, with the lowest average PA (30.67) among novice teachers (<5 years) and the highest (34.10) among experienced educators (>10 years). All groups fell below the threshold of 40, which indicated healthy accomplishment levels, suggesting room for improvement across all experience levels.

Early-career teachers' comparatively low PA score (30.67) likely reflected the difficulties of beginning the profession, where initial classroom struggles might temporarily surpass feelings of professional efficacy. The moderate improvement observed in mid-career teachers (5-10 years, average PA 31.1) demonstrated progressive gains in confidence and competence, though the slight increase indicated that this remained a difficult professional stage. The most substantial increase was seen among experienced teachers (>10 years), whose average PA of 34.10 reached the moderate accomplishment range, possibly reflecting accumulated successes, enhanced teaching skills, and stronger professional identities.

While modest in absolute terms, the 3.43-point difference between the least and most experienced groups represented meaningful variation given the PA scale's sensitivity. This upward trend contrasted interestingly with the patterns seen in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, suggesting that while experienced teachers might experience renewed emotional challenges, they maintained stronger feelings of professional accomplishment. In line with the previous studies from Babic et al. (2023); and Răducu and Stănculescu (2022), the findings highlight how different burnout dimensions follow distinct trajectories across a teaching career, emphasizing the need for comprehensive assessment and tailored support programs that address all aspects of teacher wellbeing.

5. CONCLUSION

This study identifies significant patterns of teacher burnout at various career stages within the EFL environment: novice teachers (<5 years) face the highest burnout risk, showing strong emotional exhaustion, detachment from students, and low confidence in their work. The mid-career teachers (5–10 years) cope better but still struggle, with reduced detachment but lingering stress. However, experienced teachers (>10 years) feel more accomplished but experience emotional withdrawal, possibly due to long-term job demands. So, teachers need to develop their emotional skills. By developing emotional skills, teachers could be motivated towards their profession.

This study helps the school provide targeted interventions for teachers at different career stages. It also provides a more precise roadmap for improving teacher well-being and suggests new ways to study burnout in education. Future studies can build on these findings to test support strategies and develop tailored interventions for teachers at different career stages. Longitudinal research could track how burnout patterns evolve over time and identify critical points for intervention. Additionally, cross-cultural studies could explore how these burnout profiles manifest in different educational contexts and systems around the world.

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