

# Current Research Situations and Mitigation Strategies of English Teacher Burnout in High School

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## **Abstract:**

Burnout is a concept first proposed by Freudenberger (1970), which refers to a comprehensive reactionary state of extreme fatigue in the service industry. This state of affairs tends to cause some negative emotions and behaviors of the staff, which in turn affects the quality and efficiency of the work. Teachers are high-risk people with burnout. As part of the high-risk group, English teachers' job burnout has also received attention from researchers in recent years. This paper aims to give the strategies on mitigating the burnout of English teachers based on the predecessors.

**Key words:** Teachers burnout; English teacher; Mitigation strategies

中文摘要：职业倦怠是由 Freudenberger（1970）首先提出的一个概念，指服务行业职员所感受到的一种身心极度疲惫的综合反应状态。这种状态容易导致职员产生一些负面情绪和行为，进而影响工作质量和效率。教师是职业倦怠的高发人群。作为高发人群中的一部分，英语教师职业倦怠近年来也受到研究者们的关注。本文旨在总结前人的基础上对英语教师职业倦怠提出缓解建议。

关键词：教师职业倦怠；英语教师；缓解策略

## **1. Introduction**

Job burnout was firstly put forward by Freudenberger in 1970s, which was described as a situation of collapse and exhaustion caused by excessive energy, capacity, and the need for resources. As one kind of the job burnout, teacher burnout was firstly put forward by Willard Mc Guire(1979), who was the president of the America National Education Association. He pointed out that teacher job burnout liked a new sickness that was torturing teachers.

From then on, professional burnout gradually attracted more and more attention in education research. In 1979, the chief of American Education Association claimed that teacher burnout has become a big problem which had a negative impact on the teachers, who devoted themselves to imparting knowledge to the young kids. (McGuire, 1979). Teacher is the key factor to determine the development of students' learning and education. Therefore, the standard for education and requirement to teachers are gradually being improved. Teachers are faced with increasing difficulties and demands that make them vulnerable to burnout. There is no doubt that the pressure of teachers is also magnified by a wide margin. More and more teachers cannot devote themselves heart and soul to teaching and learning. They feel burnout and have no time to develop themselves.

In 2005, Human Resource Research Institute and School of Public Administration of Renmin University of China conducted a survey about teacher burnout and psychological health in China. The result showed that 82% of the teachers were under great stress and 30% of the responders were experiencing a high level of burnout. The severe situation of teacher burnout in China cannot be ignored.

Teachers burnout has significant implications not only for teachers' health, job satisfaction and motivation, but also for student's behavior and learning. Most teachers can cope successfully with stress. However, burnout is different from stress and it is not easy to cope with. Therefore, it is especially important to understand burnout among teachers. As a result, English teachers in high school take with a lot of pressure and cannot feel a sense of achievement, and gradually they feel the disappearance of enthusiasm of teaching, indifference to the students. In secondary schools, some phenomena of job burnout are easily found among English teachers, such as showing their tiredness and irritated emotions, holding negative attitudes towards teaching, treating students in callous or even dehumanized ways, experiencing a high degree of job dissatisfaction, leaving the teaching job temporarily, which cause a lot of trouble in their teaching and do great harm to their health.

## **2. Studies on job burnout at home and abroad**

### **2.1 Definition of Job Burnout**

The term "Job Burnout" was first used in Greene's novel *The Case of a Failure* in which an architect suffered tiredness of his work and then chose to give up his job. From then on, "Job Burnout" began to draw people's attention and gradually raised researchers' concerns among western countries.

In 1974, American clinical psychologist Freudenberger firstly put forward the definition of "Job Burnout" that belongs to one of the occupational pressures, especially in-service industries. According to Freudenberger (1974: 45), burnout is "a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relation extravagant striving for unrealistic expectation".

In 1981, Peters defined burnout as burnout or depletion of personal mental, physical and emotional resources. The main characteristics of it are: fatigue, apathy, disillusionment, depression, indicating that the individual has exhausted his energy or the energy of adaptation.

Although different people gave different explanations of burnout definition, there is a definition that be used widely. That is Maslach & Jackson s explanations. They stated that the concept of job burnout including three dimensions, that is, individual pressure, interpersonal relationship and self-assessment. She and her cooperators described job burnout as a kind of syndrome that individuality who works in service easily suffers. This syndrome had three types, that is, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.

All in all, there are many definitions of job burnout, but the most widely used definition is coined by Maslach. The author of this paper also chooses his definition.

## **2.2 Teacher Burnout**

### **2.2.1 Definition of Teacher Burnout**

Teacher burnout was firstly put forward by Willard Mc Guire (1979), who was the president of the America National Education Association. He stated that teacher job burnout liked a new sickness that was torturing teachers. After that, more and more researchers began to concern teacher burnout. However, different researchers have different definitions on this topic.

Esteve (2000) defined teachers' job burnout as a feeling of imbalance. This imbalance was characterized by the relationship between school's demands on teachers and the resources that teachers possessed to cope with these requirements. It referred to the long negative effects on the personality of teachers. That was because rapid social changes produced the psychosocial conditions in which it directly affected the environment where the teacher works.

Maslach et al. (2001) further conceptualized burnout as multidimensional concept, which consisted of three dimensions, that is, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refereed to the feeling of having depleted emotional resources and having no willing to do for one's job. Another dimension of burnout, depersonalization, referred to that worker demonstrated the negative and indifferent manners toward colleagues for the sake of dealing with heavy workload and intense work pressure. And the third dimension, called reduced personal accomplishment referred to that individuals felt insufficient and unsuccessful self-perception in the job and the sense of accomplishment was not as productive as expected. These dimensions coped with different aspects of burnout. Emotional exhaustion was related with dimension of individual stress. Depersonalization was related with interpersonal dimension. And reduced personal accomplishment was related with a self-evaluation dimension.

Wang Hefei (2004) defined teachers' job burnout as a kind of psychological state of somber mood and physical and mental exhaustion which were caused by job pressure, nervousness and low sense of accomplishment when they dealt with work in education and teaching activities, such as the negative psychological reaction to attitude and behavior.

Studies of teacher burnout.

### 2.2.2 Previous studies on the teacher burnout

As to the causes of teacher burnout, Faber (1991) pointed out that social, organization and individual are three main reasons. Society expects too much from teachers, which makes teachers feel stressed. Besides, lack of public respect and social support for teachers triggered the increase of teacher burnout. Pines and Arosen(1988) found that social support came from recipients, co-workers and administrations.

In terms of organization factor, Smylie (1999) recognized that teachers were faced with greater pressure and challenges stemming from more diverse and needy student populations. Dillion and Tanner (1995) pointed out that job burnout was apt to be triggered by heavy working load.

With regard to the individual factor, numbers of studies showed that teacher burnout was significantly related to particular demographic variables, such as gender, age, years of teaching and marital status. Byrne investigated 415 secondary teachers in Hong Kong in 1991, then he discovered that in the dimension of emotional exhaustion female teachers appeared to undergo a higher of job burnout than the male. Borg and Falzon (1989) pointed out teachers who have over 20 years teaching experience proved to suffer more serious degree of burnout than those with less teaching experience. Russell et al (1987) found that married male teachers feel higher personal accomplishment.

Ju recent years, people realize the problem of teacher burnout in China. On the basis of achievements abroad, some Chinese researchers started to localize test scales that is suitable for testing teacher burnout in China. Forexample, Wang Guoxiang (2003) drew up EBI (Educator Burnout Inventory). WangFang and Xu Yan (2004) revised MBI and put forward "knowledge exhaustion" as unique dimension of teacher burnout except for the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Xu Fuming(2004) and others also developed an inventory of elementary and secondary schoolteachers and tested its validity and reliability.

Zhao Yufang and Bi Chongzeng (2003) found that male teachers are apt to suffer higher degree of emotional exhaustion than the female. Wang Fang and Xu Yan (2004) also pointed out male teachers underwent a little higher level of burnout than the female in the dimension of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.

Tang Fanggui and Peng Yan (2008) found that income is correlated with job burnout. They pointed out teachers with lower income suffered from a higher burnout level. Chu Yuanhui (2010) claimed that teachers with more teaching year would have less professional enthusiasm in teaching.

Although there are many studies of teacher's burnout, there are few investigative studies on burnout among EFL teachers in senior high school. Senior high school English teachers are different from other teachers. They face more stress and challenges. So, this paper studies on job burnout of senior high school English teachers. The aim of this study is to examine the status quo of job burnout and to explore the difference in terms of demographic variables on job burnout. And the author wishes to give inspiration to those teachers to reduce and overcome job burnout.

### **3. Mitigation Strategies of Burnout in High School English Teachers**

Based on other scholars' findings a, the implications are proposed to help and alleviate the burnout of high school English teachers from the perspectives of society, high school and teachers themselves.

#### **3.1 Strategies for society**

Most studies show that high school English teachers suffer high level of burnout in emotional exhaustion. M. Cronin (1988) stated "one of the most valuable communication concepts for dealing with burnout is the development of a social support system" In order to change the serious condition of teachers' burnout in this dimension, a system of security and supervision should be established from the perspective of the whole society. Students and their parents expect too much and think too high demands for English teachers. Teachers are easy to be depressed and anxious under the parents 'excessive attention to test scores What's more, people believe that English teachers own high social status, more holidays and comparatively high income. However, that is not the truth. So, it is essential for the society to create an environment which is full of respect, trust, understanding and encouragement

Among the studies, low income is part of the reasons why teachers feel burnout. Gary and Freeman (1987) claimed that when teachers have not got enough reward for their achievement, the possibility to burnout would be increased. So, both the society and the government should pay attention to teachers' welfare and treatments. The study found that male teachers and married teachers' burnout level are higher than the female and single teachers. That is because male teachers, especially married male teachers are confronted with great economic pressure in terms buying house and looking after not only their family but also their parents.

Therefore, the government should raise teachers' salary, set up fund for teachers who are in need, reward teachers who have outstanding contributions, especially for head teachers or teachers who teach graduating class. Only in this way, working as a teacher will not be just for living and teachers will pay more attention to improve teaching quality.

#### **3.2 Strategies for School**

Faber (1991) argues that physical conditions which are poor were down teachers and teachers in such schools will feel suffocated. So, school should strive to improve teachers' economic condition and working environment. Besides arranging work properly, especially for that of middle-aged teachers between 30 to 40 years old, schools should evaluate teachers and their work in a comprehensive way.

Maslow (1942) believed that human needs are various but they have differences in important degree and sequence. Therefore, school leaders should listen to the voice from teachers' hearts and pay attention to establish an equal and intimate relationship with teachers to know more about their dissatisfaction, demands and expectations in work, and then try their best to fulfill teachers' needs and concerns, What's more, school should provide professional assistance and learning opportunities for teachers with less than 5 years teaching experience or teachers with junior second title, because the study shows that teachers with younger age, less teaching experience and with junior second title have

more chance to have job burnout. For example, establishing English teachers' working team or founding an online communication platform both are good ways for English teachers to communicate with each other.

### 3.3 strategies for Teachers

From the perspective of teachers themselves, they should firstly be aware of their current condition of job burnout and pay great attention to this situation. Because of the high level of emotional exhaustion, English teachers should try to relieve their mood in time. For example, they can try to share depressed mood with friends, family members or colleagues. Besides, to create a harmony working environment, they should promote cooperation and mutual trust with colleagues and school leaders. In addition, strengthening physical exercises, maintaining good eating habits and sleeping habits will help teachers develop a physical shield to prevent burnout.

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