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## The Impact of Teacher Burnout on Student Achievement

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### Abstract

This reflective article examines the impact of teacher burnout on student engagement and academic achievement in secondary schools in northern Belize. Teacher burnout, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, is a global concern rooted in high professional demands and insufficient resources. The discussion focuses on the dimensions of burnout and their influence on student outcomes, revealing that elevated burnout levels diminish instructional effectiveness, strain teacher-student relationships, and lower student motivation and performance. Drawing on the Belizean context, the article emphasizes the need for evidence-based strategies to mitigate burnout, including targeted professional development, strengthened administrative support, and improved working conditions. Ultimately, it advocates for systemic interventions to sustain teacher well-being and foster positive, high-quality educational environments.

**Keywords:** Secondary education, quality education, well-being, inclusive education, teachers' professional development

### Resumen

Este artículo reflexivo examina el impacto del agotamiento docente en la participación estudiantil y el logro académico en las escuelas secundarias del norte de Belice. El agotamiento docente, caracterizado por agotamiento emocional, despersonalización y disminución del sentido de logro personal, es una preocupación global que tiene su origen en las altas demandas profesionales y recursos insuficientes. La discusión se centra en las dimensiones del agotamiento y su influencia en los resultados de los estudiantes, revelando que niveles elevados de agotamiento reducen la efectividad de la enseñanza, dificultan las relaciones entre docentes y estudiantes, y disminuyen la motivación y el desempeño estudiantil. Basándose en el contexto beliceño, el artículo enfatiza la necesidad de estrategias basadas en evidencia para mitigar el agotamiento, incluyendo desarrollo profesional focalizado, fortalecimiento del apoyo administrativo y mejoras en las condiciones laborales. En última instancia, aboga por intervenciones sistémicas para mantener el bienestar docente y fomentar ambientes educativos positivos y de alta calidad.

**Palabras clave:** educación secundaria, educación de calidad, bienestar, educación inclusiva, desarrollo profesional docente

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***Introduction***

Burnout and stress continue to be a worldwide problem among teachers, leading to anxiety and depression (Agyapng et al., 2022). This highlights the critical need for addressing teachers' psychological and mental health, as these conditions can significantly influence the quality of education provided to students. Teachers are often at the forefront of shaping the academic and emotional well-being of their students, yet their well-being is frequently overlooked. The stress associated with the teaching profession can be attributed to several overlapping factors, including excessive workload, emotional demands, lack of support, and the pressure to meet educational standards. These stressors contribute to three major, interrelated mental health issues: burnout, anxiety, and depression. The effects of these issues extend beyond the individual teacher, as they can negatively influence teachers' physical health, emotional stability, job satisfaction, and productivity.

Teacher burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (World Health Organization, 2020), can have profound implications for educators and their students. Numerous studies have documented the prevalence of burnout in teaching, highlighting its potential adverse effects on job performance and student outcomes. Maslach and Leiter (2016) emphasize that burnout is not merely an individual issue but a systemic problem that can arise from high demands and insufficient resources within the educational environment, indicating that when teachers experience burnout, they are more likely to disengage from their profession, leading to higher turnover rates and diminished student engagement.

While teacher burnout may be prevalent in northern Belize, potentially impacting student achievement and teacher retention, research is limited or nonexistent. This indicates that such a research gap should be addressed. Understanding the relationship between teacher burnout and student performance is crucial for developing strategies to improve educational outcomes and retain qualified educators.

***Problem statement***

According to Shen et al. (2015), teacher burnout is considered a significant issue

within school environments. Therefore, it is a global concern that has emerged within educational systems, reflecting a widespread challenge affecting educators' personal and professional lives. Kanwal et al. (2023) asserted that when teachers feel overworked and stressed, they are less effective at delivering instruction, resulting in lower student engagement and academic achievement. Hence, they may often need help to maintain the energy, empathy, and motivation to foster positive and productive learning environments. Gilmour et al. (2022) contend that a growing body of evidence attests that teachers' experience with burnout may be related to the role a teacher fulfills in a school, such as being a special or general education teacher, as well as to the needs of the students they instruct. As a result, this causes a decline in teacher well-being, which may have significant consequences for students and impact their educational experiences, engagement, and achievement.

Teacher burnout effects extend beyond individual classrooms and have implications for the educational system. Therefore, it is imperative to provide solutions to this issue. When teacher burnout is prevalent, students may experience less motivation to participate, a reduced sense of belonging, and a potential decline in educational outcomes. Unconsciously, the teacher transmits their demotivation to the students, thus causing a ripple effect on student achievement and engagement. Furthermore, burnout can lead to increased teacher turnover, disrupting students' learning continuity and burdening schools with the need to recruit and train new staff continually. High turnover rates can weaken the stability and cohesion of the school environment, affecting student performance and morale.

Therefore, this article analyzes how teacher burnout explicitly impacts student engagement and achievement, recognizing that burnout does not occur in isolation and has broader implications for educational quality and student success. Understanding how teacher burnout affects students can help reveal teacher well-being's indirect consequences on student outcomes. Ultimately, this article seeks to provide actionable insights to educational stakeholders, such as administrators, policymakers, and mental health professionals, by highlighting the need for systemic interventions that support teacher well-being.

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**Methodology**

To ensure transparency and replicability, a thorough search was carried out using academic databases such as ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. Additionally, grey literature sources such as government reports, policy documents, and publications from educational organizations were reviewed. The search terms, which were restricted to English-language publications from 2000 to 2022, included keywords and Boolean operators such as teacher burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, student engagement, student achievement, and Belize.

**Results and Discussion**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified burnout as an “occupational phenomenon” in the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) (World Health Organization, 2020). WHO (2020) further describes burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, which is a risk for individuals who work with others in some capacity, mainly in the health and education systems. However, work-related burnout (WRB) is the degree of physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion perceived by the individual as related to their work (Bauer et al., 2006, as cited in Belay et al., 2023). Work-related burnout is a psychological syndrome that results from the ineffective management of prolonged work-related stressors and is a growing and widespread global health problem, affecting a significant proportion of the working population in every country (Belay et al., 2023). Burnout has also been defined as the state of exhaustion or energy loss that occurs when individuals are incapable of meeting the high demands caused by their excessive workloads. Burnout is a longstanding issue among educators, with a reported prevalence of moderate to severe burnout ranging from 25.12 to 74% (Agyapung et al., 2024). In addition, Maslach and Jackson (1981), as cited in Agyapong et al. (2024), expanded upon this definition, introducing the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), a widely used tool to assess burnout levels. Their framework

ascribes three core dimensions to burnout: emotional exhaustion (the feeling of being drained and overwhelmed), depersonalization (a growing cynicism or negative attitude toward colleagues and students), and reduced professional efficacy (a sense of ineffectiveness in one's role).

The literature also points to external factors contributing to teacher burnout, such as inadequate administrative support, lack of professional development opportunities, and challenging classroom environments (Baker et al., 2018). Teachers who feel supported and valued within their schools are more likely to remain engaged, thereby positively influencing student achievement. The dimensions of teacher burnout are critical to understanding its complexity and varying impacts on educators. Emotional exhaustion is often seen as the primary component of burnout and reflects the depletion of emotional resources necessary for teachers to engage constructively with their students. The teacher has feelings of being overextended, drained, and depleted of emotional resources. In addition, these teachers may feel overwhelmed by their workload and unable to cope with the emotional demands of teaching. Symptoms often include fatigue, stress, and a sense of hopelessness. This component can lead to feelings of frustration, irritability, and a pervasive sense of hopelessness. Muyano et al. (2021) assert that teachers are often involved in many emotional scenarios with their students that may include them displaying compassion and/or empathy. While experiencing compassion, one experiences a feeling of care and concern for a person; empathy involves sharing a feeling with them and engaging with a person who is suffering, which could lead to emotional exhaustion (Klimecki et al. 2013, as cited in Muyano et al., 2021). Given the importance of teacher-student relationships for students, and not only directly but also due to the impact on teachers' well-being, intervention programs that specifically address teachers and are based on the mindfulness core concept of compassion seem a promising avenue.

Depersonalization, the second dimension, emerges as teachers adopt cynical attitudes as a psychological defense mechanism against overwhelming emotional demands. This detachment can manifest as decreased empathy for students and colleagues, severe repercussions for the classroom environment, and a loss of satisfaction in the teaching profession (Agyapong et al., 2024). Reduced professional efficacy, the third dimension,

refers to a teacher's perceptions of their competence and achievement within their professional role (Moyano, 2021). When teachers feel ineffective, they are less likely to implement innovative teaching strategies or effectively connect with their students, which can perpetuate a cycle of disengagement and dissatisfaction.

### *Cause & Prevalence of Teacher Burnout*

Teachers leaving the profession due to burnout is problematic since teaching requires specific training and skill, and individuals with no previous teaching history will find it challenging to step into the role of teachers with long-term experience. The causes of teacher burnout are diverse and often interrelated, reflecting the complexities of the educational landscape. Academic pressures, workload, and standardized assessments are significant contributors to burnout. Teachers frequently report feeling overwhelmed by the volume of administrative tasks, grading, and lesson planning that consume their time, leaving little space for reflection, growth, and creativity (Madigan & Curran, n.d.).

Additionally, the lack of administrative support can exacerbate feelings of isolation and disempowerment among educators. When teachers perceive a lack of support from their peers or administration, their ability to manage stressors diminishes, further amplifying burnout's effects. Classroom dynamics also play a vital role. High student-to-teacher ratios, behavioral challenges, and diverse student needs can lead to heightened stress levels (Calin & Seucea, 2022). Teachers often feel unprepared to address these challenges, leading to feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

Specific demographics within the teaching profession may be more vulnerable to experiencing burnout. For instance, early-career teachers tend to report higher levels of stress and burnout, potentially due to their inexperience in managing classroom dynamics and navigating institutional demands. Furthermore, teachers in high-need schools or those serving marginalized populations often face increased stressors, further exacerbating burnout levels. This has been observed in rural areas in Belize, such as More Tomorrow Primary School (News 5), which started the school year with just one teacher and one principal. The principal had to take over the teaching and administrative responsibilities of more than 50% of her student population. Scholars have widely acknowledged that teacher burnout is a

significant issue affecting educational systems worldwide. According to the American University, 50 percent of teachers considered quitting in 2021, citing stress as one of the primary reasons. On the other hand, Belize is experiencing a shortage of teachers due to teachers migrating to other countries (brain drain) for better opportunities. In contrast, others have opted to change to different professions and fields unrelated to education. The Belizean Ministry of Education has explained that there is not much they can do about this issue. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education CEO recognized that teacher shortages are a problem worldwide, one not only faced in Belize (Channel 5 Belize, 2024). Hence, to address this crisis, government and education leaders must find strategies to combat teacher burnout and build supportive teaching environments.

#### *Teacher Burnout & Student Engagement*

Student engagement is a critical component of educational success, encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. According to a study by Klassen (2010), high levels of teacher burnout were associated with lower student engagement, as fatigued teachers exhibited reduced enthusiasm and energy in the classroom. Consequently, students may mirror these attitudes, leading to apathy toward learning and a disconnection from the educational material. Moreover, teachers suffering from burnout are often less likely to employ innovative teaching strategies that encourage student participation. Instead, they may resort to more traditional, less interactive methods, which do not cater to diverse learning styles. This shift can lead to a lack of motivation among students, as their need for an engaged and responsive learning environment needs to be met. The emphasis on merely completing lessons and getting through the syllabus can compromise students' quality of education. The lack of personalized feedback can hinder students' understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, stunting their academic growth.

#### *Teacher Burnout & Student Achievement*

In addition, a meta-analysis conducted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) found that high levels of teacher burnout were linked to lower student performance on standardized tests and other measures of academic success. Teachers experiencing burnout often lack the motivation to develop lessons that inspire high-level thinking and skill acquisition, leading

to suboptimal educational experiences for their students.

Burned-out teachers usually struggle to maintain effective instructional practices and may lack the energy to provide the necessary support and feedback that facilitate student learning (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Furthermore, the quality of instruction declines when teachers experience burnout, as they may rely more heavily on routine and less effective teaching methods, reducing opportunities for student growth and achievement. This is often observed during impromptu and unannounced teacher evaluation check-ins. As asserted by Agyapong (2024), emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among teachers can lead to lower levels of enthusiasm and commitment to teaching, which are critical for fostering a productive learning environment. As teachers become less invested, their ability to motivate and support students diminishes, leading to lower student performance and a decrease in student-teacher relationships. Burnout can increase teacher absenteeism and turnover, further disrupting students' learning continuity and reducing achievement levels (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). In September 2024, about 57,000 teachers and other private educational staff quit their jobs in the United States (Statista Research Department, 2024). The number of quits among educational service staff reached its highest point since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2022. High turnover rates due to burnout can lead to inconsistent teaching quality, making it challenging for students to maintain progress in their academic work.

### *Teacher-Student Relationship*

Being a teacher has been rated as one of the most stressful jobs, as it is interpersonally and emotionally highly demanding (Milatz & Schober, 2015).

Interpersonal relationships, for example, with students, can be demanding and draining but can also be an important source of enjoyment and reward in a teacher's daily life.

However, what happens with this relationship when a teacher is burned out, overworked, and overstressed? Empirical research of student-teacher relationships within the attachment theoretical framework is based on the assumption that a teacher is a significant person in a student's life and vice versa. Teachers who develop affectionate bonds with their students feel valued and rewarded by them and feel that this affective work deposits itself in effective learning for the students (Hargreaves, 2000, as cited in Milatz & Schober, 2015) should feel supported. Thus, teachers' well-being may profit from close relationships.

However, when teachers are burnt out, they experience emotional exhaustion. Thus, these teachers may feel depleted and less capable of managing the relational demands of teaching, such as providing emotional support, patience, and attentiveness to individual students' needs. This depletion can lead to a decreased ability to engage with students empathetically, and as a result, students may feel less understood and less supported by their teachers (Cui, 2022). Emotional exhaustion often makes teachers withdraw emotionally, creating a less supportive classroom atmosphere and negatively impacting students' emotional security and engagement. Cui (2022) further asserted that this emotional disconnection undermines the trust and rapport essential for positive teacher-student relationships and makes students less likely to seek help, express themselves, or feel motivated in the classroom. Students perform better when they perceive their teachers as caring and emotionally available. Thus, the emotional distance often characteristic of burned-out educators can adversely affect students' academic motivation and emotional well-being.

### ***Conclusion***

The literature review examined the impact and/or consequences of teacher burnout on students, revealing some evidence that teacher burnout is associated with worse academic achievement and lower-quality student motivation, leading to student disengagement in the classroom. Still, there needs to be more evidence of teacher retention in Belize. There is a clear need for more studies in this area. Nonetheless, the present literature provides preliminary evidence that teacher burnout can affect the students they teach.

Theoretical models aimed at understanding how teacher well-being can impact the effectiveness of classroom instruction suggest that burnout will affect the experiences and outcomes of students (Madigan & Kim, 2020). Furthermore, Grayson and Alvarez (2009) assert that when teachers struggle with their well-being, including when they experience burnout symptoms, they are more likely to have adversarial relations with their students, become annoyed when students do not follow instructions, and have negative views of their students. This reveals that such factors will likely impact students' experiences and outcomes. Perhaps the most outstanding component of the literature is that teacher burnout

is associated with worse student academic achievement. Students being taught by a teacher suffering burnout tend to perform worse on formative and summative assessments than those taught by teachers not experiencing burnout.

Therefore, this suggests that burnout can directly affect teachers' ability to prepare for their classes, including the materials they produce and, most importantly, the delivery, resulting in less effective instruction and subsequent achievement.

Literature continuously reveals that schools must prioritize and promote interventions for teachers' well-being. In which testing and implementing interventions that improve teachers' well-being is not enough, as coping skills are essential in addressing stress and burnout (Agyapng et al., 2022). The expectation is that these initiatives will prevent or reduce anxiety and depression, which will positively impact student achievement.

### ***Recommendations***

Research of this nature is crucial to closing the gap in Belize's education system, and it confirms that the influence of burnout on student achievement and engagement is a critical issue in education. Research posits that teacher burnout leads to the undermining of student motivation. The three dimensions of teachers' burnout are somewhat interrelated, but each might play a different role concerning undermining students' motivation development (Shen et al., 2015). It is likely that teachers can influence students' motivation in education not only through instructional styles but also through their own outward emotions and motivation. Nonetheless, to prevent teachers' burnout, Shen et al. (2015) assert that it is important to improve teachers' working conditions and classroom environments. Also, there is a need for school systems to offer comprehensive workshops addressing stress and time management, relaxation training, and coping skills to strengthen teachers' resources for resisting burnout (Carson et al., 2011, as cited by Shen et al., 2015). With this in mind, the following recommendations are made:

- *Implement Supportive Interventions:* Schools should develop intervention programs focused on reducing teacher burnout by promoting emotional well-being and resilience. Programs based on mindfulness and compassion could help teachers

manage stress and maintain positive teacher-student relationships. This could be in the form of workshops and seminars, such as having a mental health day.

- *Enhance Administrative Support:* Strengthening administrative support for teachers can mitigate feelings of isolation and disempowerment. Providing resources, professional development opportunities, and a supportive work environment can help reduce burnout levels. According to Weeks (2023), support for teachers can include allowing additional time when possible, encouraging them to set healthy boundaries, actively seeking their input and feedback, and providing them with greater autonomy.
- *Promote Work-Life Balance:* Schools should encourage a healthy work-life balance by managing workloads and reducing unnecessary administrative tasks. This can allow teachers more time for reflection, growth, and creativity, ultimately benefiting student achievement. Hicks (2023) highlights that work-life balance can be achieved by setting boundaries, practicing self-care, connecting with colleagues, taking breaks, reflecting, and prioritizing.
- *Foster Positive School Culture:* Creating a positive school culture that values and supports teachers can enhance job satisfaction and reduce burnout. Encouraging collaboration and recognizing teachers' efforts can improve morale and engagement.
- *Address Classroom Challenges:* Schools should provide resources and training to help teachers manage diverse classroom dynamics effectively. Reducing student-to-teacher ratios and offering strategies for handling behavioral challenges can alleviate stress and improve teaching effectiveness.

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