



The Silent Crisis of Teacher Burnout: Systemic Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

Eric K. Appiah-Odame^{1*} , George Frempong²

¹ Aspen University, Denver, UNITED STATES

² Delmore Buddy Daye Learning Institute, CANADA

* Correspondence: ekappiah2@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Teacher burnout has become a critical issue in education, threatening the sustainability of schools by diminishing the well-being and effectiveness of educators. This qualitative study explores the causes, consequences, and potential interventions for teacher burnout through in-depth discussions with eleven participants. The study draws on thematic analysis to uncover key stressors, including excessive workload, lack of administrative support, and systemic pressures. Our findings highlight the impact of burnout on classroom management, teacher-student relationships, and institutional cohesion. The discussion underscores the importance of strategic planning by school districts, emphasizing the need for well-paced, teacher-friendly programming to support educators. The study concludes that reducing administrative burdens and fostering a supportive work environment is essential to mitigating burnout and ensuring a sustainable education system.

Keywords: teacher burnout, workload management, school leadership, educational policy, institutional support

INTRODUCTION

Teacher burnout has become a pervasive challenge in education, significantly impacting teacher retention, school effectiveness, and student learning outcomes. The increasing demands of educational institutions, including excessive workloads, administrative constraints, and systemic pressures, have eroded the enthusiasm and well-being of educators (Acheson et al., 2016; Taxer et al., 2018). While new initiatives and reforms are often introduced to improve education, they sometimes lead to unintended consequences—such as resentment, withdrawal, and resistance among educators. Burnout manifests in various ways, including absenteeism, declining professionalism, and classroom management difficulties, ultimately undermining the effectiveness of schools (McMurtry, 2024). Findings from Salvagioni et al. (2022) indicate that 62.5% of all cases of long-term absences are attributed to health problems, which confirms Kouzes and Posner's (2012) finding on leadership struggles, hence the need for top managers to understand the responsive coping skills. Educators experiencing burnout often face administrative sanctions, reduced sick leave, and financial penalties, while school leadership struggles under rigid institutional management structures.

The historical discourse on the experiences of teacher burnout highlights cognitive, emotional, and judgmental dimensions that affect educators' well-being (Freudenberger, 1971). This study draws on insights from a broader dissertation project that explores burnout among teachers, focused on the systemic nature and the need for institutional support to fill some gaps in the culturally responsive coping strategies (CRS) to overcome teacher burnout. The problem is the contention in policy-practice disconnectedness and lack of effective coping mechanisms with limited research in these areas regarding teacher burnout, which is a concern in many rural and remote northern schools and divisions in Manitoba, Canada. These CRS are founded on the job demands-resources theory (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024; Jennings et al., 2017). This leads to the research questions: first, *how do teachers define and experience burnout, and the impact it has on their interactions with colleagues, students, parents, and school administrators?* The second is, *to what extent do teachers feel burnt out in their daily tasks?* The purpose of this article examines the framework of factors contributing to teacher burnout (TB), its effects on communication and collaboration among stakeholders, and potential interventions as a framework to create a more sustainable educational environment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is grounded in Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (SDT) (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes collaboration as a foundation for learning and institutional resilience. Effective educational leadership relies on teamwork and shared responsibility rather than hierarchical micromanagement. What underpins the SDT to fit the analysis of TB are the CRS coping strategies to consolidate the job demands-resources theory (JD-R) as contained in the view of Bakker and Demerouti (2024) and Jennings et al. (2017) to aid in defining *the experiences and extent of teachers feeling about this construct TB*. The contextual background relevant to this investigation is the live experiences of burnout amongst teachers in rural and remote northern Manitoba settings. However, many school administrators prioritize (Fullan, 2014; Goodwin, 2013) rigid oversight rather than fostering open dialogue (Whitaker et al., 2015), leading to workplace toxicity, manipulation, and a lack of trust among staff (Levinas, 2003). In some cases, educators resort to gaslighting or shifting blame due to overwhelming stress, further straining school dynamics.

The impact of burnout extends beyond teachers to school leaders, program coordinators, and administrative staff. Frustrations arise when responsibilities are shifted rather than shared, such as when teachers expect principals to mediate student discipline issues rather than engaging parents directly. Additionally, chronic underfunding limits access to essential resources, including hiring educational assistants (EAs), student support services, and infrastructure improvements, making it difficult for teachers to meet students' needs

(Jennings et al., 2017; Tomas, 2024). Poorly coordinated school programming has exacerbated stress, leading to high rates of sabbatical leave, absenteeism, and staff turnover, thus adding to the systemic challenges.

Systemic Challenges and the Need for Reform

Teacher burnout is not solely caused by excessive workload but is also exacerbated by ineffective policy implementation and resource limitations. Manitoba's increasingly complex classrooms require adequate funding and support to ensure equitable education. A key concern is the unequal distributions from the education assistants (EAs), particularly in Indigenous and rural communities, where students with special needs often lack adequate support. Weak institutional capacity leads to ineffective program implementation, lower student success rates, and declining graduation rates, especially in remote K–12 schools. Furthermore, a lack of security personnel contributes to frequent student altercations, highlighting the urgent need for safety measures and conflict resolution strategies in schools. One of the most pressing concerns is the way accused educators are treated in disciplinary cases (Levinas, 2003; Kerr & Yoon, 2024). A notable example is the 2020 Abbotsford incident, where a teacher was investigated for assigning a lesson requiring students to research the “positive side” of residential schools (McMurtry, 2024). While the lesson plan was inappropriate, the punitive approach taken against the educator could have been replaced with a constructive dialogue and corrective measures.

This incident underscores the need for a balanced, restorative approach in educational administration rather than punitive reactions that exacerbate workplace stress. This need of exacerbating workplace stress according to Tomas (2024), calls for institutional healing and sustainable leadership practices (Jennings et al., 2017). Addressing teacher burnout requires systemic change rather than isolated interventions. Schools must prioritize truth, reconciliation, and healing to rebuild trust among educators, administrators, and policymakers. Collaborative problem-solving and supportive leadership structures Whitaker et al., 2015—rooted in SDT principles—are essential in fostering teacher well-being and professional resilience (Cuban, 1988; Moll, 2013). This study argues that addressing burnout is not just a matter of individual coping mechanisms but a necessary institutional transformation that ensures both educators and students thrive through effective collaborating efforts in linking the job demands-resources theory and the social development theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher burnout is a multifaceted issue that continues to challenge educational institutions worldwide. Despite the dedication of educators, their efforts often go unrecognized and undervalued, contributing to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and declining motivation (Capri & Guler, 2018). Until school districts address systemic challenges as explained in the JD-R model—such as excessive workloads, the timing and execution of educational programs, and inadequate institutional support—burnout will persist and worsen, and has historical links (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024) and Jennings et al. (2017) to aid in defining the extent of experiences. The JD_R model aligns the Social Development Theory (SDT) (Vygotsky, 1978) for collaboration to enhance learning for institutional resilience. In view of the SDT theory by Vygotsky, self-awareness acts as a catalyst and game changer, which are not often talked about and necessary for teacher's internal self-monitoring. The systemic challenges and need for reforms are contained in the causes of burnout, coping strategies, and organizational factors, which explain the literature reviews.

The Causes

They include aspects where many teachers report sleep deprivation, emotional fatigue, and disengagement, reflecting the increasing burden placed on educators (B. Patricia, personal communication, August 21, 2024). Most of the causes are historical in scope. The concept of burnout in education has been extensively explored over the past five decades. Freudenberger (1971) first introduced burnout as a psychological syndrome

characterized by chronic stress and exhaustion. Friedman (1991) further examined teacher burnout, identifying excessive workload, inadequate institutional support, and emotional distress as core contributing factors. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), developed by Maslach et al. (1996), remains one of the most widely used instruments for measuring burnout, focusing on three key dimensions:

Emotional Exhaustion: The feeling of being emotionally drained and unable to cope with daily teaching demands.

Depersonalization: A growing sense of detachment and cynicism toward students and colleagues.

Reduced Personal Accomplishment: A diminishing sense of professional efficacy and job satisfaction.

Educators experiencing burnout frequently report frustration, lack of motivation, and difficulty managing student behavior. The most recent empirical study that have highlighted some engagement of how workload and administrative support are given by Taxer et al. (2018) and Fullan (2014). Xue et al. (2023) stated that about 44% of K-12 educators reports of feeling of burnout often because of the considerable investment as aligns to time and psychological resources that goes into teaching. A comparison is made to the effect that excessive workload coupled with inadequate institutional support to educators (Friedman, 1991) confirms why the 44% of the teacher burnout stated in the works by Xue and group (Xue et al., 2023). Moreover, burnout negatively affects teacher-student relationships, leading to decreased instructional effectiveness and classroom engagement (Capri & Guler, 2018). Research suggests that organizational culture (Hofstede, 1991; 1997), including school leadership practices and institutional policies, plays a crucial role in either mitigating or exacerbating burnout (Hartigan, 2017). Leadership needs consensus building and when it is pursued collaboratively helps in reducing the attrition rate amongst teacher and enhance productivity, and this is the reason why factors that contribute to these burnouts are necessary for awareness.

Factors Contributing to Teacher Burnout

Burnout is often mistakenly attributed to personal shortcomings such as laziness or inefficiency, when it is a systemic issue linked to workplace stressors (Dexter, 2020). Factors contributing to burnout include: first, workload overload and policy constraints – Excessive teaching hours, administrative tasks, and curriculum mandates leave educators with little time for self-care and lesson preparation. The second is a lack of support from school administrators – Teachers often struggle with unsupportive leadership (Goodwin, 2013), where micromanagement and rigid policies replace collaborative decision-making (Friedman, 1991). Third, is challenging student behavior – Managing classroom disruptions without adequate institutional support contributes to teacher fatigue and frustration (Tomas, 2024). The fourth, is the limited resources and budget cuts – Reduced funding has led to a scarcity of educational assistants (EAs), mental health services, and essential classroom materials, further straining educators.

Organizationally, in rural and high-need urban schools, staff shortages and inadequate professional development opportunities make it difficult to maintain a healthy work environment which is set out leading to coping strategies. Teachers in these settings often juggle multiple responsibilities, leading to high turnover rates and lower student success outcomes, and impedes the positive role of school culture and leadership (Friedman, 1991). A positive school culture and effective leadership are critical in mitigating burnout. Schools that foster collaborative leadership, professional autonomy, and strong teacher-administrator relationships report lower burnout rates and higher job satisfaction ((Casullo, 2012; Hofstede, 1991; Grise-Owens et al., 2017). However, many school administrators fail to recognize the impact of rigid top-down management styles, which can lead to feelings of isolation and professional inadequacy among educators. Jennings et al. (2017) emphasize the need for a balanced approach to teacher workload, arguing that structured, well-paced programming can reduce stress and improve teacher well-being (Reid et al., 2024). The implications point to the fact that teachers who feel supported are more likely to demonstrate creativity, adaptability, and resilience, which in turn benefits student learning.

Coping Strategies

The implications for teaching and learning in addressing burnout requires rethinking traditional educational structures to prioritize teacher well-being. The gradual release of responsibility model—which involves “*I do, we do, you do*” instructional strategies—has been shown to reduce teacher stress and promote student independence (Hargiss et al., 2023). In subjects like mathematics and science, guided teaching-learning-assessment models help distribute cognitive load, making instructional planning more manageable for educators. Recent discussions around Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education suggest that AI-powered tools could help reduce teacher workload by automating administrative tasks and providing personalized student support. However, concerns remain about the potential displacement of educators and the ethical implications of AI-driven learning models (B. Patricia, personal communication, August 21, 2024). Nevertheless, thoughtful integration of AI, when aligned with teacher expertise (Dweck & Yeager, 2019), could enhance instructional practices and alleviate burnout-related pressures (Appiah-Odame, 2024; Ferlazzo, 2024). The literature on teacher burnout highlights the urgency of institutional reform to create sustainable teaching environments. Addressing burnout requires a multi-pronged approach.

The urgency includes reevaluating workload expectations to allow teachers sufficient time for lesson planning and self-care and providing leadership training to promote supportive and collaborative school management. Other approaches are investing in teacher support systems, including mental health resources as lamented by Kimama et al. (2024), Xue et al. (2023), professional development Salvagioni et al. (2023), and classroom assistance (Dawes et al., 2024). The final in context is by encouraging creative and flexible teaching methodologies that empower educators rather than burden them. By shifting from a reactive to a proactive model, educational institutions can strengthen teacher resilience, improve student outcomes, and foster a healthier learning environment for all stakeholders. Since strong leadership (Hassan & Mohamed, 2024; Joo et al., 2024) is fundamental, this strengthens and shapes positive work environments in making great schools. This study draws on insights from a broader dissertation project that explores burnout among teachers with noted gap(s) that include coping mechanisms beyond individual resilience, underrepresentation of rural and remote contexts, as well as policy-practice disconnectedness, centered on, and explained by the job demands-resources model.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative in-depth discussion method followed by a document review from preceding research, which used a semi-structured open-ended question, which is well-suited for exploring educator’s burnout experiences. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical analysis, or mixed-methods research and combines qualitative and quantitative techniques, this study relies partly on in-depth discussions and document review designs that dwelled on the narrative responses from participants to provide deeper insights into the phenomenon of teacher burnout (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormond, 2012). In the larger dissertation earlier completed, a purposive sampling strategy was used for selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Creswell et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2013; Miles et al., 2013) amongst active teachers. This approach allowed for the selection of educators with firsthand experience of burnout, ensuring rich and meaningful data collection under ratings of “Always” as highest and “Often” as least or sometimes. The primary data collection method was through semi-structured open-ended interviews, which facilitated open-ended discussions and encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences (Connelly, 2016; Jennings et al., 2017). All participating candidates in this research fully understood the study’s purpose, benefits, risks, and funding levels before accepting to voluntarily offer information, where they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to protect their identity. They signed a

consent form to participate. By nature of the sampling strategy, some eminent biases such as the researcher's opinion would be made available to participants through member-checks and proof-reading as a way of ensuring respect for those involved. The study aimed to capture insights into the challenges teachers face, their coping mechanisms, and their perceptions of support from school leadership.

Research Questions

This study was guided by two key research questions:

- How do teachers define and experience burnout, and what impact does it have on their interactions with colleagues, students, parents, and school administrators?
- To what extent do teachers feel burnout in their daily tasks, as measured on a scale of: very little, sometimes, often, and always?

These study questions were designed to explore both the subjective experiences of burnout through qualitative in-dept discussions and document reviews, its broader implications on school environments, and interpersonal relationships.

Ethical Considerations, Confidentiality and Data Security

Before data collection commenced, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Aspen University to ensure compliance with ethical research guidelines. Additionally, permission was sought from the selected school division in Manitoba, and participants were informed of their rights, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the ability to withdraw at any stage. All participant identities were anonymized using pseudonyms, and data were stored securely. Interview recordings and transcripts were saved on password-protected drives, with backup copies stored on an external hard drive. This qualitative case study provides an in-depth exploration of teacher burnout through the lens of educators themselves and the effort they put in overcoming context-specific systemic factors in the field of practice. By employing thematic analysis, triangulating data, and ensuring ethical integrity, the study aims to contribute meaningful insights into how burnout develops, how it impacts school environments, and what interventions may help address it.

Sampling and Data Collection

A total of eleven educators from the broader dissertation research project were initially invited to participate, as shown in Appendix A on page 18. Following their responses, four educators were subsequently selected for a semi-structured in-depth discussion as a follow-up interview based on their willingness to share further experiences, primarily on teacher burnout in their practice in the lens of their schools. Participants' responses to the two research questions were fluid, and no Likert Scale was employed; except, inferences were drawn from what was shared with the lead researchers. These participants were drawn from both rural and urban high-need school settings and had a minimum of nine years of teaching experience. The overview of participants' socio-demographic characteristics is referenced in **Table 1**, to highlight gender, age range, and educational background.

The rationale for the in-dept discussion group selection was based on inferences drawn from the larger doctoral research where resonated themes pointed to burnout due to excessive workload with less support from the school administrations. The discussion group from the large sample space was selected due to availability, and their interest based on lived experiences in affiliations as members of teacher welfare organizations concerning the topic in discussion to offer more support for data collection. There were no restrictions as to who could participate. Data were collected through virtual interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams, each lasting 25 to 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded with participant consent and later transcribed for analysis.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of all Respondents

No	Demographic Characteristics	Teachers		Principals	
		Total	%	Total	%
1.	Gender				
	Male	3	27%	3	75%
	Female	8	73%	1	25%
2.	Age				
	30-40	1	9%	0	0%
	41-60	10	91%	2	18%
	>60	0	0%	0	0%
3.	Educational Qualifications				
	High School	11	100%	2	18%
	Bachelor's degree	11	100%	2	18%
	Bachelor & Master's degree	4	36%	1	9%

To enhance validity, each participant received a copy of their transcribed interview for review and verification, ensuring their perspectives were accurately captured (Creswell et al., 2018; Dexter, 2020). To triangulate findings, the study also incorporated pre-interview field assessments and structured discussions within the focus group to ensure consistency in emerging themes, including member checks.

Data Analysis, Credibility and Trustworthiness

The thematic analysis (TA) approach was used to analyze the interview transcripts. Data were coded to identify key phrases and concepts, categorized into themes to note emerging patterns related to teacher burnout, and subsequently, analyzed across cases for commonalities and differences explored among participant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2013; Miles et al., 2020, Miles et al., 2013). The data analysis process followed three approaches namely (a) Individual case narratives – Each teacher's experience was examined separately, (b) Aggregated analysis – Common themes across all participants were identified, and (c) Cross-case comparison – Variations in burnout experiences based on school context (rural vs. urban) were analyzed. Themes were arranged chronologically and thematically to provide a cohesive narrative of how burnout develops, manifests, and affects teacher well-being and school environments.

To enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings, the study followed several key practices. The first is the collegial review support where other educators reviewed the research questions and data interpretations for validity. The second is member checks which gave participants the opportunity to review their own transcribed interviews to confirm accuracy, and finally, the use of MAXQDA 2022 software released in 2021. This software is a qualitative analysis tool which was employed for systematic coding and theme identification. Interview data were input into the MAXQDA software which transcribe and provided codes and themes. The researcher(s), after collecting raw data from respondents, read and re-read the interview transcripts, made notes to become familiar with the data, and subsequently, assigned initial codes. The initial assigning of codes was done by highlighting relevant pieces of the information and keeping electronic notes. Related resonating codes were then grouped under potential themes. These themes were reviewed to ensure coherence and make

sense to the topic under investigation to ensure structure and robust frame of the data. After developing robust grouping, descriptive names are assignments to reflect the content under each theme in order to assist in telling compelling effective reports to be communicated to readers. The codes and themes from the researcher's notes were compared to the codes and themes associated with that from the MAXDAQ 2022 software for validations.

In short, key improvements in this study involved more structured and logical organization with each section clearly delineated, which improved clarity and coherence in simplified themes form for readability and validation. There is greater methodological rigor which clearly explains the sampling process, ethical considerations, and analytical framework (Creswell & Poth, 2013). The rigor and validation (Cypress, 2017) which embeds the analysis of data ensured reflexivity became integral foundational source in ensuring transparency and quality of the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Member-checks were done by returning the transcribed interview data to participants for authentication and acceptance to ascertain the presented data reflect the views of each participant. The notes made for the research were incorporated appropriately into the manuscript. There is also an enhanced academic tone that aligns with best practices in qualitative research, and places stronger emphasis on validity and trustworthiness for highlighting and ensuring data integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Focus Group Narrative Analysis

From an initial 27 educators, 11 (41%) participated in the final dissertation research through purposive sampling. In this post-dissertation study, 37% of the invited participants agreed to contribute to further discussions, as outlined above in Table 1. Participation was based on availability, willingness to engage in virtual meetings, and openness to sharing their experiences. The focus group discussions were conducted via Zoom, ensuring a structured, ethical, and cost-effective data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2013). This platform allowed the researcher to monitor participant responses, gestures, and interactions while maintaining confidentiality and research integrity. Participants engaged in a roundtable facilitation style, where they shared insights on teacher burnout, its impact on professional relationships, and institutional challenges. The case study approach provided deeper insights into how teacher burnout affects educators' professional interactions, workload management, and emotional resilience (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The following narratives illustrate the lived experiences of four educators, emphasizing key themes and patterns that emerged from the discussions, which serves as case descriptions of this core group in the study to expound on the findings by the researchers. The following narratives illustrate the lived experiences of four educators, emphasizing key themes and patterns that emerged from the discussions, serve as case descriptions of this core group in the study to expound on the findings by the researchers. The narratives from the small sample space of four ensured that the findings were presented in more illustrative rather than comprehensive form.

Case Narrative 1: A-JT (Mathematics and Science Teacher, 13 Years Experience)

In response to *how do teachers perceive burnout, and how does it impact their interactions*, A-JT, an experienced Mathematics and Science teacher with acting administrative experience, described burnout as excessive workload, lack of support, and pressure from program managers. He highlighted that administrator, while responsible for program oversight, often failed to minimize teacher burden. Despite the passion for teaching, he struggled with extended work hours, lesson planning, student behavior management, and administrative demands (Goodwin, 2013). He also expressed frustration over being asked to facilitate programs for other grades, which took time away from his own students and responsibilities. Sometimes, teacher's wonder how to accomplish everything within the short time frame, it's overwhelming. Accounting for

how frequent teachers experience burnout, the respondent rated a burnout level of “Often,” citing it to daily stressors from student disengagement, classroom misbehavior, and administrative inefficiencies. A lot of time is expended in lesson planning and material collections, but students show very little interest in learning engagement. Some students rip the worksheets, or leave the classroom under false pretenses, or provoke altercations. Some return with disruptive laughter, undermining learning efforts. This was an expression from a participant who shared concerns about students’ behaviors in the use of social media and power struggles with teachers that contributes to workplace frustration.

Case Narrative 2: F-OC (Physical Education and Science Teacher, 18 Years Experience)

For the burnout *impact on communicating and collaborating in schools* (Whitake et al., 2015), candidate with pseudonym F-OC a Physical Education and Science teacher, reported that burnout significantly impacted ability to communicate effectively with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. The sheer number of responsibilities became overwhelming leading to withdrawal and reduced engagement with colleagues (Kimama et al., 2024). This candidate noted that administrators appeared intimidating, making open dialogue difficult (Goodwin, 2013). He believed that a more supportive leadership approach could have alleviated stress and improved workplace interactions. Response for research question 2 on how frequently teachers experience burnout, F-OC rated a burnout level of “Always.” This individual described how balancing full-time teaching with graduate studies resulted in exhaustion, ultimately affecting family life and mental well-being. It felt like a borrowed life—juggling teaching, coursework, grading, and having to attend to family life. There is barely very little sleep, and home life suffers, which resonates the finding from the JD-R study (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024). This physical education and science teacher noted that frequent sick leaves has become necessary for mental health recovery. However, substitute teachers were often unqualified and disrupts learning flow and compounds stress.

Case Narrative 3: B-CG (Home Economics Teacher and Counselor, 15 Years Experience)

Responses on *how burnout impact teaching effectiveness*, B-CG, an experienced home economics teacher and counselor, highlighted policy overload as a primary contributor. B-CG described how the school board and provincial mandates imposed unrealistic expectations in limiting teachers’ autonomy. She particularly criticized the forced integration of technology in practical, hands-on courses like Home Economics, which often created more frustration than benefits. Students do not remember passwords, they break laptops, or misuse devices in class, and disrupts lessons, yet teachers are held responsible instead of the students. She argued that teachers should have the flexibility to apply best instructional practices instead of being burdened by top-down policies that disconnect from classroom realities. For research Question 2, the frequency that teachers experience burnout was rated at the level of “Often.” This individual noted that the increasing complexity of daily tasks diminished her enthusiasm (Kimama et al., 2024) for teaching. Although she loved helping students develop life skills, she attested constant administrative pressures and lack of support is making her tilt towards considering early retirement.

Case Narrative 4: D-BH (Mathematics, Chemistry, and Physics Teacher, 19 Years Experience)

In response to *how burnout influence school culture and leadership*, D-BH expressed that while he maintained strong relationships with students and parents, institutional inefficiencies and administrative pressures contributed significantly to teacher burnout. This was in response to how burnout influence school culture and

leadership (Cuban, 1988), which he criticized school leadership for inadequate support in handling student behavior issues, stating that teachers were often left to manage disciplinary concerns alone. He advocated for more transparent communication between administrators, teachers, students, and parents to foster a healthier school climate regards teacher's capacity to manage classroom behavior (Dawes et al., 2024) which enhances teachers' capacity. *"When parents confront teachers over student misbehavior, principals listen to complaints but rarely involve teachers in discussions, and this alienates educators and exacerbates stress."*

A change in practice by involving teachers in cases when dealing with students' issues with parents concerning misbehavior and infractions in school should be the way forward as such practices foster positive school-family relationship building. The research question which solicited for inputs on how frequent teachers experience burnout, this respondent gave "Often" for the burnout level, thus acknowledging both frustrations and rewarding aspects to teaching. The frustrations in the view of Kimama et al. (2024) compromise the quality of education (Dawes et al., 2024). He emphasized that burnout could be reduced through collaborative leadership and more supportive institutional frameworks. The key findings and emerging themes from these case-by-case narratives showed the following recurring themes. The first theme is excessive workload and lack of support. Teachers face unrealistic expectations without adequate institutional backing. Secondly, the diminished communication and collaboration. Administrators often fail to engage teachers in decision-making, exacerbating stress (Goodwin, 2013). Thirdly, the policy overload and autonomy loss. Rigid mandates reduce teachers' ability to adapt lessons to student needs. The fourth theme is burnout's impact on family and well-being. Emotional exhaustion affects personal lives, forcing some educators to consider early retirement.

These findings indicate that teacher burnout is not merely an individual challenge but a systemic issue requiring urgent intervention. Addressing workload distribution, leadership engagement, and school policies is essential to improving teacher well-being and sustaining educational quality. In discussions through the lens of cross-case analysis of findings, the qualitative data analysis revealed multiple factors contributing to teacher burnout, as reported by the four in-depth study participants. Through the cross-case analysis, it becomes possible to compare commonalities and differences across multiple cases (Khan et al., 2008). The most prevalent themes included (a) lack of administrative support (Grise-Owens et al., 2017) – teachers often felt neglected or undermined by school leadership. The second is (b) student behavioral challenges – disruptive classroom environments exacerbated stress and diminished instructional effectiveness. The third is (c) excessive workload – the burden of teaching responsibilities, administrative tasks, and extracurricular duties created unsustainable working conditions. The fourth (d) absenteeism and turnover – many educators took frequent sick leaves or considered early retirement due to burnout. The fifth and final (e) interference from school boards – rigid mandates and top-down management approaches left teachers feeling powerless and overburdened.

Additionally, burnout negatively impacted classroom management as teachers became less patient, more reactive, and disengaged from students. Participants also expressed high expectations for administrators to provide support, but many felt that school leadership failed to advocate for teachers' well-being (Casullo, 2012; Grise-Owens et al., 2017). From the findings, four key themes emerged. First, unstructured programming burnout – the lack of flexibility in educational programming contributed to teacher stress. Secondly, burnout's impact on classroom management increased emotional exhaustion hindered effective instruction and student engagement. Thirdly, burnout's effect on professional interactions strained relationships with administrators, parents, and colleagues created a toxic work culture (Hofstede, 1991). Finally, conflict resolution and its consequences – inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms resulted in unresolved tensions and teacher attrition.

Unstructured Programming and Its Contribution to Burnout

A lack of structured and supportive programming was a major source of burnout across all participants. Teachers struggled with unrealistic expectations placed on them by school leadership and district-level mandates. D-BH expressed frustration that his principal dismissed concerns about excessive workload, attributing the issue to school board directives, whereas B-CG noted that rigid mandates restricted teachers' autonomy, making self-regulation and classroom management (Dawes et al., 2024) more difficult. In a different view, F-OC and A-JT highlighted administrative inaction in addressing student behavioral issues adds to daily stress. In the context from A-JT, *"We report student infractions, but administrators do little to support us. Instead, we are told to 'take control of our classrooms' without any real solutions."* The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools help in reducing struggles with workload. It is the discretion of teachers who rely on AI to provide personalized learning materials for student support, and this do not mean AI is replacing educators. Instead, in view of Ferlazzo (2024) these tools are to be controlled by teachers for effective use to benefit students learning (B. Patricia, personal communication, August 21, 2024). Such applications enhance instructional practices and reduce stress triggers amongst teachers.

Further, participants described a culture of mistrust within schools, where teachers reported one another to district authorities rather than fostering collegiality. A-JT, who once held an acting principal role, stepped down due to the toxic work environment (Dawes et al., 2024). This contributor further said, *"Teachers form cliques, reporting each other instead of working collaboratively. It creates division and stress."* The combination of excessive workload, lack of structured administrative support, and peer conflicts created an unsustainable work environment, leading to emotional exhaustion and diminished motivation. Themes resonating include (a) excessive workload, (b) lack of support, and (c) managerial pressure from above (d) sheer number of responsibilities, (e) intimidation from administrators, and (f) impact on teaching effectiveness. The other resonating themes include (g) overloaded policy, (h) limiting teacher autonomy, (i) pressures from administrators, (k) inadequate support, and (l) students' misbehaviors links participants narratives and themes.

Connections Between Narratives and Themes

Cross-comparison of resonating themes from participants alludes that extended work hours, compounding administrative demands, and frustrations are the main connectors to inability to balance full-time teaching leading to some grave extent, mental health breakdown needing extended time for recovery by many teachers. Strong leadership strategies provide serve as catalyst for the required transparency through effective communication in building strong social dimensions in the view of Vygotsky (1978) as inferred by Casullo (2012) leading in high energy cultures in enhancing teacher capacity building. It is worthwhile for teachers to have that flexibility to apply best instructional skills at their disposition which releases stress and lessens the increasing complexities associated with daily tasks. With such leadership strength, frustrations turn to become rewards in overcoming the possibility of compromising the quality of education an indication that explains the JD-R (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024) and Jennings (2014). The burnouts (Acheson et al., 2016) emanating from emotional exhaustions due to the lack of supportive institutional collaborations (Xue et al., 2023) do not give way to school boards excessive interferences, thus creating conducive exposure for educators to give their all in education. The Vygotsky (1978) SDT speaks to how collaborating enhances learning for institutional resilience by creating self-awareness necessary for teacher internal self-monitoring. The above comparison leads to discussing of the (a) the impact of burnout on classroom management, (b) burnout's effect on professional interactions, and (c) conflict resolution and its consequences on teacher burnout.

The Impact of Burnout on Classroom Management

All four participants expressed concern over the negative impact of burnout on their ability to manage classrooms effectively. B-CG and F-OC found it increasingly difficult to maintain discipline while balancing instructional responsibilities. A-JT shared how students' defiance, lack of engagement, and behavioral disruptions (Dawes et al., 2024; Kimama et al., 2024) made teaching frustrating and demotivating. D-BH reported that students frequently ignored assignments, which led to declining academic performance and increased parental confrontations (Levinas, 2003). Some candidates mention being ineffective in their roles, and that they constantly manage behavior instead of teaching. It became evident students do not engage in lessons, and when teachers try by enforcing rules, there is a push back from students. The constant struggle drained teachers' emotional energy, making it difficult to create positive learning environments. These educators expressed that they were spending more time controlling student behavior, which attest to compromising teaching quality (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024) than delivering lessons. At certain times, students disrupt class with laughter, insults, or defiance and power struggle ensue where these teachers decide to give up Jennings et al. (2017). As a result, the consideration for early retirement becomes the safe option for those nearing career ending such as participant B-CG, while A-JT adopt to withdrawing from extra roles, which further reduce instructional effectiveness.

Burnout's Effect on Professional Interactions

Burnout negatively affected teacher interactions with students, colleagues, parents, and administrators. Teacher-parents banter resonated in the report given by D-BH in the sense that frequent conflicts with parents are often blamed on teachers for poor academic performance of students' rather than addressing the root cause, which is students' lack of taking responsibility. B-CG highlighted a hostile work environment, where administrators failed to support teachers in disciplinary matters, which ties to that of A-JT of overwhelming due to frustration (Lussier & Achua, 2016). In the latter's discussions, he felt alienated, stating that principals and school leaders dismissed concerns about workload and behavior issues, to connect having to deal with extra assignments when parents believe their children over teachers (Kerr et al., 2024). To an extent, most parents assume teachers are at fault even when the evidence points otherwise – D-BH. Further, F-OC noted that burnout caused isolation, making it difficult to communicate effectively with colleagues. Instead of collaborating to find solutions, teachers often withdrew or avoided difficult conversations because of low energy (Casullo, 2012). F-OC discussed that the burnout makes teachers pull away from others and rather try to focus on surviving each day, which speaks to student-work-teacher disconnectedness in the view of Dawes et al. (2024) and Hartigan (2017), mindfulness to stress reduction. These findings suggest that teacher burnout fosters a culture of disconnection, which reduces teamwork, lowers morale, and impacts overall school climate.

Conflict Resolution and Its Consequences on Teacher Burnout

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with existing conflict resolution strategies, stating that workshops and interventions were often ineffective or unavailable. Criticisms were laid concerning mandatory professional development (Jennings et al., 2014) training programs, such as Violent Threat and Risk Assessment (VTRA) and Working Effectively with Violent and Aggressive States (WEVAS) failed to address real classroom challenges. Teachers felt unprotected when accusations were made against them, leading to career instability and emotional distress. In a conversation, it was posited *"Accusations against teachers are handled harshly. We are often presumed guilty without proper investigation"* – (C. Gupta, personal communication, October 16, 2024). Participants also noted that poor hiring practices, where underqualified individuals were placed in key positions weakens the support systems for teachers. *"Inexperienced administrators and counselors don't understand the realities of teaching, leading to disconnection between teachers and administrators which become pregnant with poor decision-making"* – D-BH.

These factors compounded stress and frustration, making it harder for teachers to remain engaged in their roles. Many began considering exit strategies, such as taking prolonged sick leave or leaving the profession entirely. As a lead into implications for policy, the findings confirm that burnout is a systemic issue, requiring urgent intervention from school administrators, policymakers, and teacher support networks concerning making job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024) to ensure teacher well-being. Some recommendations given include the restructuring of workload expectations – reducing non-teaching responsibilities to allow educators to focus on instruction. Teacher support for development in Vygotsky's view (Vygotsky, 1978) for enhancement is vital in implementing clearer behavioral management policies, with active administrative involvement. The enhancement facilitates in positive mental processes developments. Improving conflict resolution frameworks establishes transparency and fairness in procedures for handling accusations and dispute resolutions (Kerr et al., 2024). The final recommendation is to strengthen professional collaboration by encouraging peer support groups and mentorship programs to reduce isolation and foster teamwork. Failure to address these concerns leads to further teacher attrition, declining educational outcomes, and weakened institutional effectiveness. Moving forward, systemic reform is needed to ensure that educators receive the necessary support to boost and thrive in their roles, reduce the administrative time of managing too many assessments, and focus on instructing students to better prepare them to become holistic learners.

CONCLUSION

This research presents that teacher burnout is a growing crisis with far-reaching consequences for education systems, impacting teacher retention, student learning outcomes, and institutional effectiveness. Our findings from this study reveal that burnout manifests through frequent absences, reduced teacher engagement in extracurricular activities, increased teacher requests for sabbatical leave, and early teacher retirements, and it is complex as exemplified by the descriptions according to JD-R. The interconnections between strained teacher-administrator relationships and lack of institutional support exacerbate burnout, leading to frustration, professional disengagement, and emotional exhaustion. The engagement requires linking the CRS and the JD-R to ensure quality teacher-student relationships in consistent with the SDT model. To mitigate these challenges, we stress that leaders in educational institutions must rethink policy implementation, workload distribution, and teacher support structures through regular consultations with social intervention programs to reflect the SDT approaches with these teachers. These interventions to curtail the excessive teacher burnouts is not about following a routinized structure, but includes:

Reducing excessive workload: Schools should streamline program schedules and limit administrative burdens on teachers.

Enhancing administrative support: Principals and school leaders must be proactive in providing resources and advocating for teacher well-being.

Reevaluating top-down management: Schools need decentralized leadership models that foster collaboration and adaptability.

Strengthening teacher mental health and professional growth: Encouraging Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can sustain organizational energy and resilience.

First, leadership in schools can use findings in addressing burnout for strong leadership-capacity building, a fundamental in shaping positive work environments in enhancing specific areas in the JD-R and fulfilling the CRS. It is about celebrating teachers and providing avenues for effectively taking time to consult, work with and learn from both sides of the aisle. Effective school administrators cultivate a culture of trust, transparency, and collaboration, ensuring that teachers feel valued and supported through frameworks that are responsive to the new era where technology is the leading edge in forming an ecosystem where we are interconnected. Rigid, bureaucratic policies, however, often alienate educators, making it difficult for them to thrive in their roles.

Schools should prioritize leadership strategies that empower teachers, rather than burdening them with excessive oversight. Additionally, policy interventions should focus on improving teacher well-being through structured support systems, and the first is providing qualified classroom support staff through the hiring competent counselors and educational assistants (EAs) to assist teachers. The second intervention is reevaluating budget allocations in ensuring that funding prioritizes educator resources over bureaucratic expansion. The third intervention is the implementation of sustainable strategic plans by assigning designated personnel to oversee behavior intervention plans (BIPs), individual education plans (IEPs), and adapted education plans (AEPs). Secondly, to move beyond fear, building a resilient teaching workforce, this study underscores the urgency of transforming school cultures to reduce fear-based leadership and punitive policies. Fear of administrative reprimands, lack of job security, and public scrutiny discourages educators from advocating for themselves or their students. Instead of a system driven by reactionary decision-making, school divisions must foster environments where teachers are empowered to innovate, collaborate, and grow. As final reflections, the success of educational institutions depends on the well-being and strong mental capacities of their teachers. The findings from this study reinforce the need for systemic reforms that prioritize educator support, mental health, and professional development. As educators step beyond fear and advocate for meaningful change, school leaders must recognize their responsibility to cultivate inclusive coping mechanisms, adaptable, and sustainable learning environments.

In conclusion, the future of education lies not in rigid structures, but in fostering resilient, empowered teachers who feel supported, valued, and prepared to inspire the next generation. This is a call to action for school leaders, policymakers, and educators to collaboratively work towards an education system that prioritizes teacher well-being as a fundamental pillar of student success. Teacher frustration over being asked to facilitate programs for other grades, which takes time away from one's own students and responsibilities, compounds the sheer number of responsibilities and make people overwhelmed. The overwhelming leads to withdrawal and reduced engagement with colleagues, and that more supportive leadership approach could alleviate stress and improved workplace interactions. Through effective collaboration, learning and institutional resilience increases by confirming and affirming Vygotsky's SDT model on the concept of social interaction and cultural context, pivotal in alleviating stressor which leads to teacher burnouts. Burnout is reduced through collaborative leadership and more supportive institutional frameworks such as the integration of stress management professional development programs for teacher wellbeing. When teachers have the flexibility to apply best instructional practices instead of being burdened by top-down policies that disconnect from classroom realities, they become empowered with renewed commitment in the work they do around students. Through the reviews of selected literature, it is revealed that effective leadership is fundamental in strengthening and shaping ideal work environments in making great schools for teachers and students to thrive. Hence, school districts/boards taking advantage of this need can address systemic challenge regards excessive workloads, timing and execution of educational programs, and resourcing for adequate institutional support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher burnout continues to be a pressing challenge, with many educators leaving the profession or transferring to different school jurisdictions due to excessive workload, emotional exhaustion, and lack of institutional support. This trend has worsened post-COVID-19, prompting the Department of Education in Manitoba and other educational bodies to explore strategies to attract more individuals into teaching. However, focusing solely on recruitment and addressing burnout issues only, rather, improving teacher retention should be a priority. The following recommendations aim to mitigate better future teacher burnout improvement for overall quality educational outcomes:

Reduce Non-Teaching Workload

- Limit administrative and non-instructional responsibilities to allow teachers to focus on effective classroom instruction.
- Provide classroom support personnel, such as educational assistants (EAs), counselors, and behavioral specialists, to help manage student needs.

Enhance Teacher Well-Being and Professional Support

- Establish mental health resources for teachers, including peer support groups and access to counseling services.
- Promote Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to foster collaboration and reduce professional isolation.

Improve Administrative Leadership and Support

- Train school leaders to recognize signs of burnout and implement teacher-centered policies that balance workload and well-being.
- Encourage collaborative decision-making, allowing teachers to have a voice in program implementation and school policies.
- Address Institutional Challenges and Policy Reform: Implement structured interventions to prevent excessive turnover, administrative leave, and absenteeism, which disrupt student learning.
- Develop district-wide frameworks to create balanced programming and avoid excessive curricular demands.
- Advocate for increased funding to sustain adequate staffing levels and improve resource allocation.

To build on these findings, future studies should aim to expand the sample space size to include a larger and more diverse group of educators to allow for greater statistical analysis. There is the need to investigate the long-term effects of burnout interventions through a longitudinal study using quantitative approach.

LIMITATIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into teacher burnout, several limitations must be acknowledged. The first constraint is limited population sampling. The study focused only on teachers and principals, without considering perspectives from students, parents, policymakers, or support staff. The study was conducted within a specific geographic setting, limiting the generalizability of findings to broader populations. Second is small sample size. The data were collected from only four participants, which, while providing rich qualitative insights, does not allow for broad generalization. Future research should increase the sample size and incorporate statistical analysis for more comprehensive findings. Third is subjectivity in data collection. The researcher was the sole interviewer, data collector, and analyst, which may introduce personal biases in data interpretation. Future studies should include multiple researchers or interrater reliability measures to increase objectivity.

Ethical Considerations

Ensuring ethical integrity was a key priority in this study. In compliance with Aspen University's ethical policies, the researcher completed: Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification (Record ID: 37644295, issued on November 16, 2020). Institutional Review Board (IRB) training on June 7, 2022, securing approval before data collection commenced. To protect participants' rights and confidentiality:

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and pseudonyms were used to anonymize data. The data were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher. These measures ensured compliance with ethical research standards, protecting participants from privacy breaches or professional repercussions.

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Appendix A. Participant Biography Survey

Participant code	Grade level of Teaching	Degree(s) and Content area	No. of years in current teaching position	No. of years of application of effective evaluations (SBG)
A-JT (M)	7 – 12 Rural	2 Bachelors, 2 Masters Mathematics and Sciences	13	13
B-CG (F)	6 – 9 Urban	Bachelor and Masters Home Economics and Counseling	15	12
C-MA (M)	9 – 12 Rural	Bachelors Mathematics and Sciences	23	22
D-BH (M)	9 – 12 Rural	Bachelors Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Yearbook.	19	19
E-MC (M)	9 – 12 Rural	Bachelors Mathematics, Sciences, Physics, Biology	>10	>10
F-OC (M)	9 Rural	Bachelors and Masters Physical Education	18	Not sure
G-MCN (F)	9 - 12 Rural	Bachelors Home Economics, Life/Work Planning, ELA, Social Studies.	1 18 years previous.	1
H-DD (F)	7 – 12 Coach Rural	Bachelors and Post Baccalaureate ELA, Literacy, and Consultancy.	37	19
I-CA (M)	9 – 12 Rural	Diploma, Bachelors, Masters French Immersion.	19	19
J-KM (M)	6 – 8 Urban	Bachelors Music and Band	28	23
K-ST (M)	7-12 Rural	Bachelors and Masters ELA	17	17