



Teacher Burnout: Causes, Consequences, and Insights from Science Teachers

Ulas Kubat

Abstract

Teaching is a demanding profession characterized by challenging working conditions and high stress levels. Within the school environment, various factors significantly contribute to teacher burnout syndrome. These include excessive workload, restrictive school policies and an unsupportive school climate, conflicts between teachers and administration, a lack of teacher involvement in decision-making processes, insufficient recognition, and student behavioral and disciplinary problems. Teachers can experience burnout syndrome irrespective of demographic factors such as age, years of service, or gender. Therefore, understanding the causes and consequences of burnout is critical for both teacher performance and student achievement. In other words, comprehending teacher burnout and implementing preventive measures is essential for fostering a healthy educational environment. A qualitative research methodology was employed in this study. The findings indicate that the primary causes of teacher burnout are excessive workload, lack of administrative support, and disrespect from students and parents. Furthermore, the most prevalent negative consequences of burnout identified were attrition from the profession, high stress levels, and physical and emotional exhaustion.

Keywords:

Science Teacher, Teacher Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Lack of Support, Student Misbehavior.

Literature Review

Teaching is a profession characterized by high levels of stress. Consequently, many teachers today experience physical and emotional problems due to occupational stress. Occupational burnout among teachers is a prevalent and highly complex condition that can have adverse emotional, physical, and psychological effects on educators. Regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, or years of service, many teachers can experience burnout syndrome, which is profoundly debilitating. Burnout is a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. It manifests as an insensitivity towards the people individuals encounter in their professional duties, a feeling of emotional depletion, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment and competence. Burnout is primarily observed in professions that require extensive face-to-face interaction with people (Amigo et al., 2014; Günay & Demiralay, 2016).

Occupational burnout is a widespread issue affecting professionals across various sectors globally (Kostev et al., 2024). Burnout emerges as a critical problem that impacts teachers' lives, psychological well-being, and mental health. Teachers experiencing burnout

syndrome often report not receiving necessary support from their administrators, being excluded from school decision-making processes, lacking the desire to prepare for lessons, and feeling disconnected from their colleagues at the same school. Therefore, understanding the causes and consequences of burnout is crucial for both teacher performance and student achievement. In other words, comprehending and taking preventive measures against teacher burnout is essential for fostering a healthy educational environment.

Burnout is a complex phenomenon with significant implications for both individuals and organizations (Maslach & Leiter, 2021). Teachers' exposure to stress, feelings of depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion are indicators that they may be experiencing burnout syndrome. Teachers suffering from burnout have a significantly increased risk of developing health-related issues, experiencing higher stress levels, and reporting extreme job dissatisfaction. Due to these adverse conditions, teachers may leave the profession (Hester et al., 2020). Approximately half of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years, often due to job stress. In the United States, about 25% of new teachers leave within three years, and nearly 50% leave within the first five years. Not only students but society as a whole has much to lose from teacher burnout, making it imperative to find solutions to this problem (Wong et al., 2017).

The quality of education provided by teachers who are burned out or emotionally exhausted is often very low. When teachers are under high stress and struggle to cope, their relationships with students are highly likely to be negatively affected, leading to adverse academic and behavioral outcomes for students. Similarly, burned-out teachers create an inefficient teaching and learning process, which can result in lower student achievement. Teacher burnout can reduce students' intrinsic motivation, thereby diminishing their learning and engagement in the educational process.

The primary causes of teacher burnout are suggested to include excessive working hours, student disrespect, a demotivating school environment, lack of administrative support, being pressured to perform extra tasks outside their duties, and poor relationships among colleagues (Bousquet, 2012). Teacher burnout generates significant negative effects on the education system, including rising teacher attrition rates, consequent declines in instructional quality, low student achievement, and diminished student motivation (Madigan & Kim, 2021). In this context, various factors within the school environment, such as excessive workload, student disciplinary issues, school policies, negative conflicts between teachers and administration, lack of teacher involvement in decision-making, and a lack of recognition, are highly influential in causing teachers to experience burnout syndrome.

This study, which aims to reveal the views of Science teachers on teacher burnout, sought answers to the following questions posed to them:

What is teacher burnout? What causes teacher burnout?

What are the consequences of teacher burnout?

What can be done to eliminate teacher burnout?

Research Model

This study employed a qualitative research method, which "involves a process aimed at presenting perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic manner in their natural setting" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005, p. [Please add page number]). Among qualitative research designs, a phenomenological approach was adopted. Phenomenological research seeks to uncover and

convey the hidden meanings of everyday life experiences (Robson, 2002). The main objective of the phenomenological approach in qualitative research is to describe the essence of all participants' experiences regarding a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Study Group

The study group consisted of 22 Science teachers working in the province of Muğla during the 2020-2021 academic year spring semester. Convenience sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was used in the research. This sampling method provides speed and practicality to the research while being less costly (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). According to this sampling method, respondents are selected based on their proximity and availability (Robson, 2002).

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form, developed by the researcher based on a literature review, was used as the data collection instrument. For this purpose, a literature review was conducted initially. In the second stage, opinions were sought from four science education specialists and four assessment and evaluation faculty members to ensure content validity. The interview form consisted of a total of four questions designed to determine Science teachers' views on teacher burnout. The interviews conducted for the research were recorded using an audio recorder. The data were collected in April and May 2021.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques. The transcripts were initially coded independently by the researcher and another science educator. The analyses were then combined to reach a consensus. The researchers subsequently met to discuss and reconcile any discrepant codes until full agreement was achieved. The inter-coder reliability was calculated as 92.44%. A reliability coefficient above 70% is considered acceptable for research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula was used for this calculation: $P = [Na (\text{Agreement}) / (Na (\text{Agreement}) + Nd (\text{Disagreement}))] \times 100$.

The participating teachers were coded as ST1, ST2, ST3, ... ST21, ST22 (e.g., ST1 refers to the first science teacher, ST7 to the seventh, and ST12 to the twelfth).

Findings

This section presents the findings related to the four research questions, organized thematically with supporting direct quotations from the participants.

1. What is teacher burnout?

The codes and frequencies obtained for the question "What is teacher burnout?" are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Codes and Frequencies for the Definition of Teacher Burnout

Code	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Alienation from the Profession	13	ST2, ST3, ST4, ST7, ST8, ST10, ST11, ST13, ST17, ST19, ST21, ST22
Lack of Support	8	ST4, ST6, ST8, ST12, ST14, ST18, ST20, ST21
Feeling Unappreciated	6	ST3, ST9, ST15, ST17, ST18, ST20
Student/Parent Disrespect	4	ST7, ST12, ST16, ST19

Science teachers expressed their views as follows:

“I don’t feel that I am valued as a teacher at the school.” (ST3)

“Because of all this stress I experience, I have become increasingly detached from my profession.” (ST7)

2. What causes teacher burnout?

The codes and frequencies for the causes of teacher burnout are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Codes and Frequencies for the Causes of Teacher Burnout

Code	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Excessive Workload	16	ST1, ST3, ST4, ST7, ST8, ST9, ST10, ST11, ST12, ST14, ST15, ST18, ST19, ST20, ST21, ST22
Lack of Administrative Support	11	ST4, ST5, ST7, ST8, ST9, ST11, ST12, ST14, ST18, ST20, ST21
Student Indiscipline	10	ST4, ST7, ST9, ST10, ST12, ST14, ST16, ST18, ST20, ST22
Parental Disrespect	8	ST1, ST7, ST8, ST9, ST12, ST15, ST19, ST22
Exclusion from Decision-Making Processes	8	ST4, ST7, ST9, ST10, ST11, ST14, ST15, ST20

Science teachers expressed their views as follows:

“When we face problems, we cannot receive adequate support from the administration.” (ST4)

“I believe student disrespect primarily stems from the family environment in which they were raised. Therefore, the student's family background is crucial for discipline and respect.” (ST16).

3. What are the consequences of teacher burnout?

Table 4 Codes and Frequencies for the Consequences of Teacher Burnout

Code	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Leaving the Profession	16	ST2, ST3, ST4, ST5, ST7, ST8, ST10, ST11, ST12, ST13, ST14, ST16, ST18, ST19, ST21, ST22
Stress	15	ST1, ST3, ST4, ST5, ST6, ST8, ST10, ST11, ST12, ST13, ST14, ST18, ST19, ST20, ST21
Physical/Emotional Exhaustion	12	ST3, ST5, ST6, ST7, ST8, ST10, ST12, ST13, ST15, ST17, ST19, ST22
Loss of Interest in the Profession	11	ST1, ST3, ST5, ST7, ST10, ST13, ST14, ST16, ST19, ST21, ST22
Low Student Academic Achievement	11	ST2, ST3, ST5, ST6, ST10, ST13, ST14, ST16, ST19, ST21, ST22
Conflict with Administration	8	ST1, ST3, ST8, ST13, ST14, ST16, ST19, ST21
Depersonalization & Emotional Exhaustion	6	ST5, ST7, ST10, ST13, ST14, ST19

Science teachers expressed their views as follows:

“I can say that I often experience communication problems with my fellow teachers, especially with those in administrative positions. I haven't been able to find solutions to many of these problems I encounter.” (ST8)

“We are dealing with tasks that are unrelated to our primary duties. The administration’s unreasonable demands, students’ disrespectful behaviors, and parents’ constant, unnecessary complaints... Despite all these adversities, we are trying to cover the curriculum.” (ST19).

4. What can be done to eliminate teacher burnout?

Suggested solutions for eliminating teacher burnout are presented in Table 5

Table 5 Codes and Frequencies for Solutions to Eliminate Teacher Burnout

Code	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Balancing Workload	5	ST7, ST10, ST15, ST20, ST22
Involvement in Decision-Making Processes	5	ST3, ST5, ST9, ST11, ST19
Treating Teachers with Respect	3	ST7, ST12, ST15
Receiving Recognition from Administration	3	ST5, ST8, ST17
Emotional and Psychological Support	3	ST6, ST13, ST18
Supportive Work Environment	2	ST13, ST16
Healthy Communication with Parents	2	ST7, ST21

Science teachers expressed their views as follows:

“There is too much responsibility on teachers... Administrative pressures, parents, and students... All these negative pressures need to be eliminated.” (ST13)

“We do not receive any recognition from the administration for our work. At the very least, a word of praise would be appreciated by all teachers.” (ST17)

Discussion and Conclusion

Teachers fulfill numerous and diverse roles, including lesson preparation and planning, managing student disciplinary issues, collaborating with colleagues, and assessing and grading student work. Given this complex and intense workload, it is not surprising that teachers frequently experience "burnout" and leave the profession. Therefore, eliminating teacher burnout is critically important from multiple perspectives.

The findings regarding the consequences of teacher burnout highlighted depersonalization, low student academic achievement, stress, and emotional exhaustion. Depersonalization can be attributed to factors such as excessive teaching load, administrative pressure, and a lack of communication among staff.

Leaving the profession emerged as the most frequently cited consequence of teacher burnout. These results underscore the multifaceted nature of the challenges teachers face. Among the most significant consequences is stress, physical, and emotional fatigue. Similarly, Akman et al. (2010) found that, depending on certain variables, teachers experience burnout with varying intensities across the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. These findings reveal the necessity of improving teachers' coping strategies for work-related stress and their working conditions.

Enhancing teachers' working conditions and creating supportive physical and social environments can positively impact teacher burnout. A comfortable and safe work environment can increase teacher motivation. Factors such as course load, administrative pressure, high expectations, and stress are prominent contributors to the emergence of burnout. It is well-established that professions requiring intensive interpersonal communication carry a higher risk of burnout. Teaching is inherently a high-stress profession. The research results indicated that half of the teachers ($n=11$) reported experiencing stress and physical and emotional exhaustion, confirming the high-stress nature of the teaching profession.

Consequently, providing teachers with emotional and psychological support is essential. This support can aid them in coping with stress and managing emotional difficulties. Offering counseling services in schools could be instrumental in this regard.

When teachers are exposed to stress-induced factors like burnout and physical and emotional fatigue, it can lead to feelings of alienation towards their school and the teaching profession itself. Eliminating these factors, which severely reduce professional motivation and cause burnout, is vital for several reasons. The results from this research help us understand the challenges, physical strain, and emotional weariness teacher's encounter in their professional lives. Psychosocial stressors in the workplace that cause burnout include increased workloads, long working hours, extra duties, and ambiguous roles (Jugdev et al., 2018).

Low student academic achievement was identified as another consequence of teacher burnout. A teacher experiencing burnout will likely be less motivated to prepare lessons effectively, leading to student disinterest and apathy towards the class. This vicious cycle has a high potential to lower both student and teacher motivation, further exacerbating the feeling of burnout among teachers. Significant correlations have been reported between teachers' emotional exhaustion and students' evaluations of teaching quality (Klusmann et al., 2008). Compared to their less burned-out colleagues, teachers with low emotional exhaustion are more likely to excel in classroom management and have students with higher academic achievement.

The findings from this research reveal that excessive workload, lack of necessary administrative support, and disrespectful behaviors from students and parents are the most significant difficulties contributing to teacher burnout. Student disrespect and apathy can diminish teacher motivation and increase feelings of burnout. Therefore, students' insensitive and undisciplined behaviors play a crucial role in triggering burnout among teachers. To address these issues, it is necessary to strengthen the authority of school disciplinary boards, ensure that administrators respect teachers, and value the opinions of schools and teachers. Similarly, being subjected to conflicts with administration and a lack of support can reduce teachers' job satisfaction and is associated with emotional exhaustion. The research finding on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization aligns with the results of the study conducted by Aksu and Baysal (2005).

An examination of the results related to reducing burnout points primarily to measures that need to be taken by school administrators. It is crucial for school leaders to take steps to minimize their negative impact on teachers. Practices such as assigning excessive workloads and meaningless extra tasks, which can sometimes amount to mobbing, must be stopped immediately by school administrators. An excessive teaching load can increase burnout; therefore, curricula should be reviewed. School administrators should foster positive communication with teachers rather than conflict, balance high expectations placed on them, and address processes that cause emotional problems, such as mobbing. Thus, establishing a supportive school environment could be highly effective in preventing teacher burnout. Parents should also support their children's education and collaborate with teachers. In cases of student disciplinary issues, the teacher should work with the parent to understand the causes and find solutions together.

School administrators must support teachers and address their emotional and professional needs. They should listen to teachers' problems and strive to find solutions. Issues should be discussed with teachers, and their ideas and suggestions should be valued. A thorough understanding of the causes and consequences of burnout and taking preventive measures based on this understanding are essential for reducing the risk of burnout. Furthermore, identifying ways to eradicate teacher burnout could help retain qualified teachers in the profession longer and prevent them from leaving altogether. The long-term retention of qualified teachers is a significant factor in enhancing the quality of education.

In conclusion, the development of healthy societies is possible with healthy teachers. Reducing burnout among teachers and creating a healthy work environment are of paramount importance.

References

- Aksu, A., & Baysal, A. (2005). İlköğretim okulu müdürlerinde tükenmişlik [Burnout in primary school principals]. *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Yönetimi Dergisi*, 41, 7-24.
- Amigo, I., Asensio, E., Menendez, I., Redondo, S., & Ledesma, J. A. (2014). Working in direct contact with the public as a predictor of burnout in the banking sector. *Psicothema*, 26(2), 222–226. <https://doi.org/10.7334/psicothema2013>
- Bousquet, S. (2012). Teacher burnout: Causes, cures and prevention. University of North Florida. ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED534527.pdf>

- Günay, G. Y., & Demiralay, T. (2016). Serbest muhasebeci ve mali müşavirlerin iş stresi, tükenmişlik sendromu ve iş-aile yaşam dengesi arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi [The investigation of the relationship between job stress, burnout syndrome and work-family life balance of freelance accountants and financial advisors]. *Elektronik Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 15(58), 917–935. <https://doi.org/10.17755/esosder.52707>
- Hester, O. R., Bridges, S. A., & Rollins, L. H. (2020). ‘Overworked and underappreciated’: Special education teachers describe stress and attrition. *Teacher Development*, 24(3), 348–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2020.1785549>
- Jugdev, K., Mathur, G., & Cook, C. (2018). Linking workplace burnout theories to the project management discipline. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 11(1), 198–221 <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-04-2017-0036>
- Klusmann, U., Kunter, M., Trautwein, U., Lüdtke, O., & Baumert, J. (2008). Teachers' occupational well-being and quality of instruction: The important role of self-regulatory patterns. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 100(3), 702–715. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.100.3.702>
- Kostev, K., Oswald, S., Frajerman, A., Haro, J. M., & Jacob, L. (2024). Trends in burnout and related sick leave duration in working-age adults followed in general practices in Germany between 2012 and 2022. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 172, 52–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2024.01.009>
- Madigan, D. J., & Kim, L. E. (2021). Does teacher burnout affect students? A systematic review of its association with academic achievement and student-reported outcomes. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 105, 101714. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101714>
- Maslach, C. (2003). Job burnout: New directions in research and intervention. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12(5), 189–192. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.0125>
- Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2021). How to measure burnout accurately and ethically. *Harvard Business Review*, 99(4), 211–221.
- Wong, V. W., Ruble, L. A., Yu, Y., & McGrew, J. H. (2017). Too stressed to teach? Teaching quality, student engagement, and IEP outcomes. *Exceptional Children*, 83(4), 412–427. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402917690729>