



Language Teachers' Burnout and Gender

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of gender on the three burnout dimensions; emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP) and personal accomplishment (PA) among English language teachers in Malaysia. This study was a quantitative survey study. The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986) was used to collect the data to determine the burnout levels of the teachers with respect to its three dimensions. These Data was collected from 28 English language teachers (50% female). Descriptive and inferential statistics including frequency, percentage, means, standard deviations, and t-test were used in the analysis. The results showed that gender was not a predictor of burnout in this sample. The study can have useful implications for educational administrators who deal with language teachers.

Keywords: burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, gender, language teachers

1. Introduction

The term 'burnout' for the first time was introduced by Freudenberger (1974) in his *Staff Burnout*. He found that those young social workers who were working in substance abuse projects became depressed after a few years. Burnout refers to chronic exhaustion and reduced interest. Such a problem arises for those working extensively with other individuals, especially when those individuals are troubled. It can be considered as one type of job stress. As Maslach (1993) mentioned, there are three components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.

According to Maslach (1993), emotional exhaustion refers to the depletion of psychic energy or the draining of emotional resources. Depersonalization refers to the development of negative, feeling and attitudes toward the clients. Reduced personal accomplishment happens when one feels insufficient and apathetic towards the others and evaluates one's work with recipients negatively. Depersonalized individuals feel psychologically drained. Teaching is an example of those professions that cause burnout. Teachers especially experience depersonalization more than other subdivisions of burnout, because their daily work life isolates them from the other teachers (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990). Actually, teachers have interactions with others throughout a day, but most of these interactions are with the students. So, teachers have little interaction with the other staff including the other teachers who can understand their needs. The more the teachers become isolated, the more the risk of burnout increases.

The goal of this study is to determine the level of burnout among English language teachers in Malaysia. This is



done by measuring their level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment, using Maslach Burnout Inventory. Secondly, this study intends to clarify whether respondents' gender can contribute to significant differences in their burnout levels. The following research questions were addressed:

RQ₁: What are the levels of burnout components among the Malaysian English teachers?

RQ₂: Do male and female Malaysian English teachers have significantly different emotional exhaustion (EE) scores?

RQ₃: Do male and female Malaysian English teachers have significantly different depersonalization (DP) scores?

RQ₄: Do male and female Malaysian English teachers have significantly different personal accomplishment (PA) scores?

Before discussing the results, a review of the related literature and the research methodology will be presented in the following sections.

2. Review of Literature

A review of the related literature indicates inconsistent results concerning the effect of individuals' gender on their burnout. According to some researchers (e.g. Bauer et al., 2007; Farber, 1998; Haberman, 2004; Labone, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2001; Maslach et al., 2001), male teachers are more subject to burnout than female teachers. However, based on the findings of Lau et al. (2005) as well as Timms and colleagues (2006), female teachers experienced burnout more than male teachers. In addition, several other researchers found no differences in burnout rates between male and female teachers (Bachelor & Gold, 1988; Durr, 2008; Farber, 1984; Holloman, 1999).

Based on the findings of Batel (1998), there are significant relationships among several demographic variables and burnout. Among those variables, degree, educational stage, years of experience, number of students, pre-service training, supervisor support, number of children, peer support, choice, and salary were found to be significantly correlated with at least one dimension of burnout. Other variables that also caused significant differences in burnout levels included city, sex, marital status, children, citizenship, specialization, availability of materials, in-service training, and hobby.

In another study, Comerchero (2008) investigated the effect of sex, tenure status, efficacy, adaptive perfectionism, and maladaptive perfectionism on teachers' burnout. Based on the result of his study female teachers had higher level of emotional exhaustion, while tenure status had negative correlation with depersonalization, and positive correlation with personal accomplishment. These findings reveal that sex and tenure status are effective in experiencing burnout among teachers.

In a study carried out by Stevens (2007), it was found that there were statistically significant differences in the variables of sex, teaching experience, teacher personality, and school type. Based on the differences in sex, teaching experience, and personality, it is concluded that they are important variables to consider. In a study carried out by Kou (1987) on the relationship between teacher burnout and teacher demographic variables in Chinese junior high school teachers, it was concluded teachers' age, length of tenure, and location of school were not considerably correlated with teacher burnout.

Antoniou, Polychroni, and Vlachakis (2006) examined the effect of sex and age on burnout. They found that levels of occupational stress among female teachers were significantly higher than male teachers'. Besides, it was revealed that levels of burnout were higher among younger teachers. On the contrary, Ogus, Greenglass, and Burke (1990) compared burnout between male and female teachers, and found that men experienced higher levels of depersonalization than women. In another study, Wofford, Daly, and Juban (1999) investigated the relationships between stress propensity construct and subjective stress with sex. They reported that the relationship is higher for women than men.

In a review of 19 studies of gender differences in occupational stress, Jick and Mitz (1985) concluded that women have more psychological distress in workplace, while men experience more physical distress. A meta analysis of 183 studies on the relationship between gender and burnout conducted by Purvanova and Muros (2010) rejected the idea that females suffer from burnout more than men. Based on Purvanova and Muros's results, women have emotional exhaustion slightly more than men ($\delta=.10$), while men suffer from depersonalization more than women ($\delta=-.19$).

In the teaching profession, gender has been known as an important factor in predicting burnout. According to Martin (2000) and Lackritz (2004), males experience depersonalization more than women among elementary

and high school teachers. Martin (2000) supported this hypothesis stating that the main explanations for job-related burnout focus on themes including the desirability of controlling one's emotions, traditionally related to a self-reliant, self-controlled man. In the same line, Lackritz (2004) revealed women have higher levels of emotional exhaustion, while men experience higher scores on depersonalization. With respect to personal accomplishment there was no difference between males and females.

There are many studies which found that when experiencing high levels of workload, women are more in danger of burnout than men (Lippel, 1999; van Dick & Wagner, 2001). In a study carried out in Malaysia by Mukundan and Ahour (2011), it became clear that a high frequency of female teachers had respectively moderate, low, and high levels of emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DR), and reduced personal accomplishment (PA). However, based on some studies, there is no significant difference between males and females in relation to burnout. For instance, based on the research carried out by Rosenbaltt (2001), Evers, Brouwers and Tomic (2002), Hastings and Bham (2003), and Sünbül (2003) on the relationship among locus of control, burnout and job satisfaction among teachers, it was revealed that there was a positive correlation between internal locus of control and low burnout and high job satisfaction. Also, it became clear that females had lower level of depersonalization than men and that younger teachers experienced higher level of burnout. In a study conducted by Gavrilovici (2009) on the burnout level of 178 primary, secondary, high school, and special school teachers in Iasi County of Romania during 2007-2009, it was reported that those teachers with job experience of more than 17 years experienced significantly higher level of emotional exhaustion than those who had lower work experience. However, no significant difference was found between the teachers' work experience and their levels of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Similarly, their results showed there were no effects of gender and marital status on any dimension of burnout.

As this review of literature clearly shows, studies investigating the effect of gender on individuals' burnout have led to results which lack consistency. There is therefore a need for further research in this respect.

3. Methodology

The researchers followed a survey method. The following section will present the respondents, data analysis method and the instrument used in this study.

3.1 Respondents

The respondents were 14 male and 14 female English language teachers in Malaysia. Their age ranged between 20 and 50. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the respondents.

Table1. Demographic Information

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	14	50
	Female	14	50
Age	Low	19	67.8
	Moderate	5	18
	High	4	14.4
Race	Malay	16	57.1
	Chinese	1	3.6
	Indian	8	28.6
Academic Qualification	Other	3	10.7
	Bachelor	16	57.1
	Master	7	25
Job Experience	Others	5	17.9
	Below 5 years	17	60.7
	6-10 years	6	21.4
	11-15 years	1	3.6
	16 and above	4	14.3

The teachers were from different races. Most of them (16, 57.1%) were Malay; 1(3.6%) was Chinese; 8(28.6%) were Indian; and 3(10.7%) from others races. Majority of the respondents (16, 57.1%) had a bachelor degree.



The teaching experience of the respondents ranged between below 5 years to above 16 years, with a majority 17(60.7%) having below 5 years.

3.2 Data Analysis Method

Data analysis was conducted by the use of SPSS version 20. Independent samples t-test was the statistical procedure employed to analyze the data. The percentile of 33.3 was considered low. The scores which fell between 33.4 and 66.6% were considered moderate, and the rest were considered high.

3.3 Instruments

Data were collected using two different questionnaires. The first questionnaire was sociodemographic data form which was designed to gather information regarding gender, age, ethnicity, academic qualification, and length of service the second questionnaire was the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) for measuring burnout. It consists of 22 items forming three subscales: Emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment and depersonalization. From among the 22 questions, Emotional Exhaustion included nine items, Depersonalization five items, and Personal Accomplishment eight items. MBI describes burnout syndrome in terms of (a) high levels of Emotional Exhaustion, (b) high levels of Depersonalization, (c) reduced Personal Accomplishment. Each item in the subscale was accompanied by a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'never' (0) through 'every day' (6). A high score on this scale meant a high level of burnout. High internal consistency (EE=.90; DP=.79; PA=.71) and test-retest (EE=.82; DP=.60; PA=.80) reliability values have been reported for this scale (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1996).

4. Results

4.1 Levels of Burnout Components

The first research question concerned the levels of burnout components. According to Table 2, 35.7% of these teachers suffered from low EE and 57.1% of them had moderate level of EE; however, only 7.1% of the teachers under the study showed high EE level.

Table 2. Levels of burnout components

Component	Low		Moderate		High	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	%	Frequency
EE	10	35.7	16	57.1	2	7.1
DP	19	67.9	9	32.1	0	0
PA	0	0	21	75	7	25

The results showed moderate and low levels of EE and DP but moderate and high levels of PA indicating an overall low to moderate level of burnout among the teachers.

As for the level of DP, 67.9% of the teachers indicated low DP level, while 32.1% of them had moderate levels of DP. Interestingly, none of the respondents indicated high level of DP. With respect to PA level, respondents revealed no low level of PA. However, more than three quarters of them, 75%, had moderate PA level and 25% indicated high level of PA.

4.2 Gender and Emotional Exhaustion

This and the following two sections present the findings for the next three research questions. Table 3 presents the independent samples t-test results for the effect of gender on the three burnout components.

Table3. Independent samples t-test with reference to gender

Component	Gender	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	t value	Degree of freedom	Significant value
EE	M	14	25	9.8	1.905	26	.06
	F	14	18	9.9			
DP	M	14	9.7	6.6	1.33	17.54	.316
	F	14	7.7	2.8			
PA	M	14	33.7	6.6	.170	26	.867
	F	14	33.4	4.2			



The results have been presented as (mean \pm standard deviation, $n=28$). The second research question examined whether male and female teachers indicated different EE scores. According to the results, the male respondents indicated higher scores of EE (25 ± 9.8) than females (18 ± 9.9). Independent samples t-test was used to test the statistical significance of this difference. As it could be observed, $t(26)=1.905$, $p=.06$. That is, the significant value (.06) was greater than alpha at .05 level of significance; therefore, it is concluded that there is no sufficient evidence to support a significant difference between male and female teachers in their EE scores.

4.3 Gender and depersonalization

The third research question sought to determine whether teachers' gender could result in any significant differences in their depersonalization scores. According to the results, the male respondents indicated slightly higher DP scores (9.7 ± 6.6) than females (7.7 ± 2.8). As for the statistical significance of this difference, t-test results, $t(17.54)=1.33$, $p=.316$, showed a significant value of greater than .05 that indicates male and female teachers are not significantly different in their DP scores.

4.4 Gender and personal accomplishment

The final research question was whether teachers' gender could make any significant differences in their PA scores. According to the results, the male respondents indicated higher levels of PA (33.7 ± 6.6) than females (33.4 ± 4.2). Based on the t-test results, $t(26) = .170$, $p=.867$, the significant value was higher than .05, so it indicates there is no significant difference between female and male teachers in their PA level.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of gender on burnout level of English language teachers in Malaysia. These findings showed that in general gender has no an effect on burnout level of these teachers. These findings are in line with those of several studies (e.g., Bachelor & Gold, 1988; Durr, 2008; Farber, 1984; Holloman, 1999) that also reported no significant differences between males and females burnout levels. The findings are, however, not consistent with those of Bauer et al. (2007), Farber (1998), Haberman (2004), Labone (2002), Leithwood et al. (2001), and Maslach et al. (2001) who found male teachers more subject to burnout than female teachers. Moreover, our results turned out to be different from those of Lau et al. (2005) as well as Timms and colleagues (2006), who reported female teachers experienced higher levels of burnout than male teachers.

One possible reason for this inconsistency might be that the sample size in this study was small. A small sample size can lead to Type I error (i.e., failing to reject a null hypothesis that is, in fact, false). This small size limits the ability to generalize the results. Another reason can be that there may be other intervening variables which lead to the different results. For instance, the work setting such as the relationship both among the teachers and between teachers and the principal can influence the results.

6. Conclusion

Based on the result of this study a foundation is provided for research in the field of the effect of demographic variables especially gender and burnout level in encouraging administrative support with respect to the three successive burnout dimensions. Indeed, teacher burnout must be viewed as one of the key issues that teachers encounter in the schools and classrooms.

School administrators should pay attention to two questions: (1) what factors cause teacher burnout; and (2) how the levels of burnout can be reduced. They should be concerned with teachers' job burnout since increasing demands may have negative effect on their well-being, and thus on the well-being of their students. The administrators in schools and language centers should take into consideration their teachers' mental well-being. They can organize meetings, seminars, workshops, professional development courses, and other activities to help teachers cope with and even prevent burnout. On the other hand, there are some basic steps that teachers themselves can take to improve their physical and mental conditions.

The present study had a major limitation that should be acknowledged at this point. The sample of the present study was a small number of English language teachers working in Malaysia. The findings, therefore, cannot be generalized to the whole population of English language teachers. Further research is, therefore, necessary in this area.



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