

The Effect of the Level of English Teachers' Burnout on the EFL Learners' General English Achievement at Senior High School

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Abstract The present study was carried out to determine the effect of the level of the teachers' burnout on EFL learners' General English Achievement (GEA) at senior high school. To this goal, two groups of participants were selected non-randomly. The first group was 9 English teachers from Izeh, Khuzestan that were selected according to their level of burnout among 30 English teachers by Maslach (1981) burnout Inventory. They were selected from all available professional experienced teachers having university education. They were female learners with the age ranging between 25 and 40 years old. They hold 5 to 28 years of experiences. The second group of the participants was the third grade senior high school students. The students were female with the age ranging from 14 to 16 years old. Cambridge English Preliminary test that is a well-known standard test was given to the students as a pre-test to test students' English language proficiency and to homogenize them. 90 students were selected among 200 hundred students by the pre-test according to their English language proficiency level. Then, the pre-test was administered as the post-test after two months of teaching in the classrooms. The results indicated that teachers' levels of burnout significantly affected on the learners' general English achievement. Therefore, low burnout teachers had more effective teaching than high and medium burnout teachers.

Keywords Teachers' burnout level, Burnout Inventory, GEA, General English

1. Introduction

The recent years seem to be known as the years of stress and intension. Studies showed these two features as the most challenging and influential factors in humans' life, for all context and work places. It is supposed that if people feel stressed for a few days or weeks, they suffer from stress condition that causes a feel of frustration and fatigue. They come across not only with emotional but also with physical problems. This condition has been called burnout by psychologists (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Burnout is defined as a result of long-term occupational stress, especially in human service workers such as teachers (Jennet, Harris & Mesibov, 2003). Many teachers may experience stress in their work around the world (Jennet et al., 2003). Although most teachers successfully cope with such stress, burnout may unsuccessfully cope with stress (Aksu & Temeloglu, 2015).

As countries move out of industrial age into the information-conceptual age, there is a progressing concern

about how to best plan youngsters and youth for adulthood achievement in the twenty-first century (Huitt, 2007). This is true for Iran in particular with regard to English language which is the universal language and the students are expected to properly master it and make the best use of it in global areas. Undoubtedly, there is widespread agreement on the major role of school organization in the academic preparation of students. Hattie (2009) proposed a framework of effective criteria on learners' achievement. He pointed out that teacher characteristics and teacher behavior, in particular, have a major impact on achievement. On the other hand, the hallmark of accomplished teaching is the learning of learners. In other words, when a deficiency in students' achievement is found, it is thought that there is a deficiency in teaching (Fatemi, Alimirzaee, Ghaffari & Izadi, 2014).

The teacher with depressive symptoms is one of the important problems of Iranian senior high schools. In addition, there have been widespread criticisms in recent years on inefficacy of English instruction at the senior level. Teachers who suffer from burnout cannot adequately attend at schools and give of themselves to students. These teachers feel emotionally drained and far from their learners. As a consequence, their negative feelings impede creation of positive student-teacher relationships which unavoidably impair the students' achievement and detach them mentally

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and emotionally from school and classroom (Hosseini Fatemi & Raufi, 2014).

Therefore, this study will attempt to show that whether or not different levels of teachers' burnout, as independent variable in this research, will affect the learners' GEA. Senior high school learners will be used as dependent variable because they are teenagers that are going to go to university and reach complete physical, mental and social conditions (Shudaifat, 2015). These conditions must be facilitated in school, home and community settings. Thus the school, as professional organization, needs to develop healthy school communities by focusing on relevant social issues such as stress management and burnout. We need to become aware that effective school is not just one that has high pupil achievement but one that promotes and provides a supportive environment ensuring healthy balanced teaching staff and one that actively works on ways at reducing stress and burnout in the workplace. Furthermore, the problem of burnout is mostly studied in United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Finland, but it has not been addressed much in Iran, especially at senior high school level. In addition, the relationship between teachers' burnout and learners' GEA has not been studied so far. Therefore, this study aims at addressing the issue of burnout to identify the level of English teachers' burnout and its effect on the achievement of the learners.

2. Literature Review

There is general consensus that teaching is one of the most stressful occupations throughout the world which have harmful consequences on both teachers and students (Jonson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor, & Millet, 2005). A precise study of the teachers' stress demands a clear understanding of the stress itself. Many authors have provided different definitions for the nature of stress. They are most suitable for their own setting. Kyriacou (2001) defined stress as the feeling negative and unpleasant which reflects itself as anger, tension, disappointment, depression, etc. Stress can undermine an individual's performance, both in what is produced and what is delivered as a service (McShane & Von Glinow, 2005). However, three general perspectives have been identified: internal, external, and transactional. The internal perspective states that stress is inside the individual such as personality or professional commitment which is a reaction to or interpretation of what is happening around them (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). According to external view point, stress comes from the outside of individual like work overload, time pressure, relationships with colleagues (Chan, 2002; Jepson & Forrest, 2006). The third major perspective is transactional and focuses on cognitive processes and emotional reactions of individuals to stress in their environment (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). These perspectives cover common ground, but they are mainly different in the definitions and the methodology to investigate stress.

The third transactional or interactional definition of stress tries to focus on it as an interaction between individuals and their environments. It is considered as a psychological model as the cognitive processes and emotional reactions are taken into account. It takes into attention the importance of the way individuals perceive and react to the situations that they confront (Fisher, 2011). Stress is considered as the degree of fit between the person and the environment. Therefore, it is not the environment that is stressful but it is the relationship between and the individual that leads to the experience of stress (Whitehead, 2001).

People often try to use coping strategies to create a balance between themselves and their environment. In fact, the concepts of cognitive appraisal and coping processes are the essence of the transactional model. Each of the discussed perspectives has its own advantages and benefits to conceptualize and operationalize the nature of stress (Whitehead, 2001). American physiologist Walter Cannon used the term stress to refer to the patterns of physiological response of organisms to emotional stimuli (Beehr & Franz, 1987) and thereby for the first time established stress as a subject for academic study. Cannon just referred to stress and it was not central to his theorizing. However, Cannon's primary concern was to develop a physiological theory of emotions and of instincts but not to deal with physiological stress (Cannon, 1922). Cannon's work is still being used to illustrate stress as a struggle between our primitive biological nature and the complexity of a modern and rapidly changing society (Newton, 1995).

In the last few decades, research on stress has broadened and taken influence mainly from behavioral science, moving away from focus on physical stimuli and their physiological consequences (Travers & Cooper, 1996). In addition, the focus has moved away from physical stressors towards psychological stressors such as role ambiguity and the effect of psychological and social factors on the person. Clearly, all individuals do not respond in the same way and equally to the stressful situation and they do not regard all situations stressful similarly. Age, sex, coping style, experience, etc. can lead to various viewpoints about the stressful experience (Travers & Cooper, 1996). Therefore, the complexity of the interacting or intervening factors which determine the behavioral and physiological responses to stress has led to the adoption of a broad, many-sided perspective definition.

2.1. Burnout

Burnout is a very prevalent syndrome in human service occupation. Most of the employees may experience it at some point in their life. This disorder is the result of prolonged stress and harms the individual's work, family, and social life (Fives, 2007). In fact, it is the endpoint of unsuccessfully coping with stress. Burnout can occur at any time at teaching profession but most often it occurs three to five years after initiation of teaching (Fives, 2007). It is considered as the last point of chronic stress. Swider and Zimmerman (2010) defined burnout as a psychological

syndrome arising from intrapersonal stress which influences the individual's work, duties, customers, family, friends and themselves.

2.2. Models of Burnout

There are three major theoretical approaches to the study of burnout which are presented below. The first model focuses on an interpersonal approach, the second on an organization approach, and the third on Conservation of Resources. Cherniss interviewed human service professionals like teachers and nurses who had widespread experiences of disappointment and could not get what they originally sought and proposed one of the earliest theories of the development of burnout in the late 1970s (Whitehead, 2001). His model is presented in the Golembiewski and colleagues believe that burnout is the result of job stressors. Afterwards, these stressors produce physical symptoms, decrease performance, and impair productivity. Although they utilized Maslach three dimensional nature of burnout, they believe that the order is different. In his model, depersonalization is the first phase of burnout which decreases performance. The result of impaired performance is the low personal accomplishment in which the individual thinks his personal accomplishments on the job are reducing. Increased depersonalization and impaired sense of accomplishment lead to the development of emotional exhaustion. He proposed eight stages for the progressive burnout which classify individuals according to the virulence of their burnout symptoms (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

2.3. Sources of Burnout

Studies that focus on organizational and social factors of burnout (e.g. Mazur & Lunch, 1989) aim to find out "what" make teachers develop burnout or what kind of work environment is more prone to develop burnout in teachers. Examples of organizational factors include lack of social support, lower economic social status, low salary, lack of teacher participation in school decision-making, and so on. Several studies have been previously conducted to examine burnout and compare it with different variables. For example, Shunging (2015) observed that many college English teachers in China complain about work stress. To learn the actual burnout and seek intervention, a questionnaire survey and written interviews were conducted in a medical university in China. 29.73% of the participants were experiencing burnout. At last no significant differences were found in the aspects of gender and educational background. The result of the interviews indicated four causes for burnout: factors related to job, students, management, and teacher development. For intervention, teachers and organization should work together to reduce the burnout syndrome (Tabatabaei & Farzadmehr, 2015).

Yaghoubi and Habibinejad (2015) in a descriptive correlational study examined whether this relationship is the same between male and female, and also novice and

experienced teachers. To achieve this goal, one hundred twenty Iranian EFL teachers, sixty male and sixty female, aged 23 to 57 were randomly selected based on random sampling design from four institutes located in the city of Tehran. The participants had between six months to 13 years of teaching experience. They were employed and active as classroom teachers. The Cornell Critical Thinking Test (CCTT) level X was chosen to measure the level of quality thinking of the participants. The CCTT is a standardized test developed by Ennis (1985). It is based on the developers' conceptual definition of critical thinking as the process of reasonably deciding what to believe and do. It consists of 78 items. Each correct answer provides one positive point for the test-taker. Higher scores indicate a higher level of critical thinking. The reliability coefficient of the CCTT level X was ranging from .67 to .90 (Ennis, 1985).

2.4. Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

QR1. Does the high level of the teachers' burnout affect EFL learners' general English achievement among senior high school learners?

QR2. Does the medium level of the teachers' burnout affect EFL learners' general English achievement among senior high school learners?

QR3. Does the low level of the teachers' burnout affect EFL learners' general English achievement among senior high school learners?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were selected from all available professional experienced teachers having university education according non-random sampling. Participation in the study was voluntary and the anonymity of individual response was assured. 30 English teachers from Izeh, Khuzestan were phoned and the nature of study was described to them. Among these, 9 teachers were selected according to their level of burnout by Maslach and Jackson (1981) Burnout Inventory. They were all female and their age ranging between 25 and 40 years old. They hold 5 to 28 years of teaching experiences. It was supposed that their field of study is teaching English as foreign language (TEFL), English translation and English literature. All of them were supposed to pass teaching training courses whether in universities or institutes.

To find out the effect of teacher stress on learners' GEA, another group of participants of this research were third grade high school learners at the senior level that were selected non-randomly. The students are female with the age ranging from 14 to 16 years old. In fact, they were learners of 9 teachers mentioned above. So, the participants of this study were both teachers and learners.

3.2. Instrumentation

Demographic variables can influence the occurrence of burnout. In addition, the relationship between teachers' burnout and learners' achievements needs to be explored more fully within teaching occupation in order to provide clues as to what causes burnout and what are its outcomes. The questions of this study required multiple methods to examine the full complexity of teacher burnout. Investigating teacher stress and burnout and examining high, medium and low burnout school teachers made it possible to gain insight into the conditions that caused it. Burnout has been defined as a three-dimensional syndrome which comprises of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lowered sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion, a core component of burnout, is the feeling of being emotionally overextended and depleted of emotional resources. As these feelings become chronic, teachers find they can no longer give of themselves to learners. As a result, they become to develop a feeling of indifference toward their students and display depersonalization for example they exhibit cold or distant attitudes. Reduced personal and emotional accomplishment is the last phase of this syndrome which may have critical impacts on teacher behaviors. The following instruments were employed to collect the data for the present study.

Maslach Burnout Inventory: The Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) which is one of the most reliable and standardized instruments was used for assessing EFL teachers' burnout in this research. In fact, MBI assesses these three aspects. The application of MBI for educational setting and evaluation of programs allows information to be obtained on personal, social and institutional variables that can either promote or reduce the occurrence of burnout. The MBI consisted of two sections. Section one comprised background information items including name of school, position in school, gender, ethnicity, age, and number of years teaching. The questionnaire consists of 22 items and three sub-dimensions: emotional exhaustion (It is made up of 9 items which will assess feeling emotionally exhausted from their work), depersonalization (It is made up of 5 items which assess the degree of distancing and indifference admitted by the subject), personal accomplishment (It is made up of 8 items which assess feelings of self-efficacy and personal accomplishment). The participants with high scores on the emotional exhaustion (score > 27) and depersonalization (score > 10) subscales or low scores on the personal accomplishment subscale (score < 33) were considered to have symptoms of burnout.

Pre-test: Cambridge English Preliminary test was used for proficiency test (homogeneity test). It was taken from Cambridge English Language Assessment. It is a well-known standardized test worldwide to test school learners' English language proficiency. It helps define language proficiency levels and to interpret language qualifications. It has become accepted as a way of

benchmarking language ability, not only within Europe but worldwide, and plays a central role in language and education policy. The test consists of four skills including: (1) Reading: a reading comprehension test with 5 multiple-choice questions and a cloze passage with 12 blank spaces, (2) Writing: at first five sentences were given to the students and then they completed five second sentences so that it means the same as the first, in the second phase, a text should be written by the students, (3) Speaking: three topics were chosen from their book and the students spoke about two minutes for each topic, and (4) Listening: it consists of seven questions and there are three pictures and a short recording for each topic. Then the students chose the correct picture. 40 marks were allocated to the test. The pass score in this exam shows that the student can read texts, write letters understand factual information, and show awareness of opinions and mood in spoken and written English. It was used to determine the homogeneous students in terms of level of proficiency and language knowledge. The reliability of the test was calculated through Cronbach Alpha. The reliability of pre-test was ($\alpha = .761$). The test was given to two experts. They confirmed the construct and content validity of the test. In other words, the homogeneous students of burnout teachers were selected to analyze the effect of their teachers' burnout on learners' GEA.

Post-test: The pre-test was also administered as the post-test after two months. Therefore, the pre and post-test are same in content but different in format. The objective of the post-test was to determine whether or not teachers' level of burnout had any effect on the students' GEA. The reliability of the test was calculated through Cronbach Alpha. The reliability of the post-test was ($\alpha = .699$). The test was given to two experts, they confirmed and content validity of the test.

3.3. Procedure

In order to answer the questions of this study, 30 secondary English teachers from Izeh city were phoned and requested for the researcher to recruit volunteers for the research. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) that consists of an Inventory with 22 items was used to measure perceived burnout among 30 English teachers. MBI was sent to these teachers and their anonymity was assured. Finally, the researcher interpreted and scored the questionnaires according to manual of MBI. In the next phase of study, 9 teachers were selected and divided into 3 groups according to their level of burnout; 3 teachers with high level of burnout, 3 with medium level and 3 with low level. In the third phase, the researcher attended the school of selected teachers. The proficiency test was given to the students. They were all allotted the same conditions and time to answer the test. Afterwards, the researcher scored the tests and selected 10 homogeneous learners with regard to their level of proficiency and language knowledge. So, 90 senior high school students participated in the study. In the fourth phase of the study, the post-test was administered after two

months training by their teachers. The questions of post-test were similar to those of pre-test. The objective of this phase was to determine whether teacher's levels of burnout had any effect on the learners' achievement or not. The tests were collected and scored by the researcher similarly. At last, the obtained data from MBI questionnaire, pre- test and post-test were entered to SPSS software to carry out the required analyses. Frequency analysis, Paired Samples *t*-test and One-way ANOVA were utilized which will be discussed in the next section.

3.4. Data Analysis

In order to find out the answers of research questions and also to test the hypotheses of the study the following steps were taken for data analysis. First, the obtained data from background information were entered the SPSS software to calculate the frequency and means. Then, MBI was analyzed by SPSS software to identify the level of burnout among teachers; One-way ANOVA and Post-hoc Scheffe test were used to compare the means among three groups of teachers to determine whether any those of means are significantly different from each other. Then, Paired Samples *t*-test was used to compare learners' achievement to conclude whether teachers' levels of burnout would affect the learners' GEA.

4. Results

Data were obtained from MBI that consists of three factors as were mentioned in the previous section and they were analyzed by means of Chi-Square table which is used for non-parametric scores, the scores gathered by the inventory. The results are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' Burn out at different Moods

Moods	High	Medium	Low	X2
EE	47.6	40.66	30.33	17.1
DP	27.66	18.33	15	
PA	10.33	14.6	28	

Note: EE= Emotional Exhaustion DP= Depersonalization
PA= personal Accomplishment

Table 1 shows EE in high burnout teachers is 47.6, in medium burnout teachers is 40.66 and in low burnout teachers is 30.33 and the scores of DP in high burnout teachers is 27.66, in medium burnout teachers is 18.336 and in low burnout teachers is 15 and PA scores in high burnout is 10.33, medium burnout is 14.6 and low burnout is 28. The result shows that Observed X^2 with $df=4$ is 17.1 which is greater than the Critical X^2 (9.487). Thus the difference between the teachers burn out is significant at ($p<.05$). It means there is a significant difference between teachers with different levels of burnout. To reveal significant difference between and within three groups in the pre and post-test, One-way ANOVA has been used. One-way ANOVA was used to compare means of three groups. The results are

presented in Table 2.

Table 2. One-way ANOVA (Pre-test Scores with Teachers' Burn Out)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.489	2	2.744	.206	.814
Within Groups	1157.900	87	13.309		
Total	1163.389	89			

Table 2 shows the result of One-way ANOVA for pre-test scores between and within three groups. Since observed F (.206) is less than critical F (3.090) with $df=2/87$, the difference between groups is not significant. It can be inferred that three groups performed significantly similar on the pre-test. One-way ANOVA was used to compare means of three groups' post-test. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. One-way ANOVA (Post-test Scores with Teachers' Burn Out)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	52.743	2	26.372	3.900	.024
Within Groups	588.338	87	6.763		
Total	641.081	89			

Table 3 shows the result of One-way ANOVA for post-test scores between and within three groups. Since observed F (3.900) is greater than critical F (3.090) with $df=2/87$, the difference between groups is significant. It can be inferred that three groups performed significantly different on the post-test. Post-hoc Scheffe Test is used to show the difference between which groups is significant. To do this, the mean of three groups compare to each other. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Post-hoc Scheffe Test (Post-test)

(I) VAR00002	(J) VAR00002	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Post-test High	Post-test Medium	-.29	.67	.910
	Post-test Low	-1.75*	.67	.038
Post-test Medium	Post-test High	.29	.67	.910
	Post-test Low	-1.45	.67	.101
Post-test Low	Post-test High	1.750*	.67	.038
	Post-test Medium	1.45	.67	.101

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4 shows the difference between post-test high burnout teachers and post-test low burnout teachers (-1.75) and also between post-test low and post-test high (1.75) is significant. It can be inferred that high and medium burnout teachers are almost equal but low burnout teachers have effective teaching.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Discussion

In this section, the main research question concerned with the effect of teachers' burn out on learners' GEA are discussed and the related studies will be compared and contrasted as follows:

RQ. Does the teachers' burnout (i.e., high, medium and low level) affect EFL learners' general English achievement among senior high school learners?

In order to study the effect of teachers' burnout on learners' GEA, a pre-test and a post-test were conducted. The mean scores of three groups on both tests revealed that test distribution was normal and there was not any statistically significant difference among the groups. Therefore, parametric statistics include One-Way ANOVA and Post-Scheffe test were used to compare the groups. To reveal the existence of any significant difference between and within three groups in the pre and post-test, One-way ANOVA was used. The results indicate that the difference between groups is not significant. In other words, three groups performed significantly similar on the pre-test.

The results showed that there was a significant difference among teachers with regard to the subscales of burnout. It means that high burnout teachers are more emotionally exhausted; they are lack empathy with their students and feel lack of accomplishment more than other groups. On the other hand, the difference between groups was significant. It can be inferred that three groups performed significantly different on the post-test. The first and second null hypothesis, that are, high and medium levels of teachers' burnout do not affect EFL learners' GEA, were rejected because the data obtained from pre and post-test showed that high and medium burnout teachers affected EFL learners' General English achievement. It was found that high and medium burnout teachers were almost equal but high burnout teachers are more emotionally exhausted, they are lack empathy with their students and feel lack of accomplishment more than other groups. It seems that high and medium burnout teachers always have stress and they may be unstable, hasty in teaching, quarrelsome to their students and it is possible that they do not attention to their learners' personality and may insult to them. It was assume that if high and medium burnout teachers have non-motivated and disinterested students, they may ignore to create motivation in their students because of their psychological and physical tiredness.

The findings of this study are in line with Addison and Yankyera (2015) who investigated how female teachers in West Akim Municipality of Ghana Education Service manage stress and teacher burnout, and explored the causes, effects and ways of improving work-related stress for better standards of education. The researchers found that the female teachers' stress level was high and their interpersonal relationship was the main cause of their stress. It is important to note that they found that the majority of teachers agreed

that stress made them perform below standard. The results indicate that teachers are in a positive emotional state as they compare themselves with others.

5.2. Conclusions

The results showed that there was a significant difference among teachers with regard to the subscales of burnout. It means that high burnout teachers are more emotionally exhausted; they are lack empathy with their learners and feel lack of accomplishment more than other groups. In addition it was revealed that learners performed significantly similar on pre-test and three groups performed significantly different on the post-test. It was found that high and medium burnout teachers were almost equal but low burnout teachers had more effective teaching. It implies that as low burnout teachers feels less stressful, less constrained and less emotionally drained, they can more focus on their teaching task and maintain efficient relations with their students and work environment. Teachers must understand that emotions are an integral part of teaching. The teaching profession is usually considered a caring job. However, as it was mentioned in the literature, teaching involves complex student-teacher relationships. Therefore, teachers should be trained to carefully deal with all domains in the student-teacher relationships. Teachers need to adopt coping strategies to ease stress and burnout. High burnout teachers need to be proactive in classroom management. One who foresees potential risk in the classroom will be more prepared to face problems and not feel threat or loss from discipline issues. Prevention of teachers' burnout may come from organizational practices that allow teachers some control over their daily challenges.

Due to the rarity of research on the effect of teacher burnout on learners' achievement in Iran, it is recommended that this study be replied with larger population to confirm or reject the findings. The small population of this study does not allow generalization and the results should be interpreted with caution. It is recommended that future research focus on larger populations. Further study on stressors and level of stress among female teachers in comparison with other professions needs to be carried out. This study focused on female teachers and female learners. It is recommended that another study be carried out on male teachers and male learners and the results of the former be compared with that of late.

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