

Adaptation and Empirical Evaluation of the Questionnaire on Mentor Teacher Burnout

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to determine the characteristics of the questionnaire for teacher burnout. In this study, Teacher Burnout questionnaire developed by Wrench et al. was used. The survey was conducted in May 2022. The sample consisted of 103 teachers. Cronbach alpha was 0.974. The results showed that the surveyed teachers experience low burnout ($M = 31.53$, $SD = 17.89$). Although being a mentor or the years of experience did not prove to be a statistically significant parameter, it is noticed that teachers who are not involved in mentoring activities express a higher feeling of burnout than mentors. Teachers who have between 11 and 30 years of experience show the signs of burnout; even young teachers (up to 5 years of service) report feeling burnout to some degree. The obtained results should be seen as indicators for next changes in the Serbian education system in terms of reducing the demands placed on teachers, especially administrative tasks. Therefore, the main recommendation is aimed at the education policy makers to take into account as many parameters as possible when introducing new changes, especially an underlying risk for teachers' burnout.

Keywords: teachers, burnout, professional development, Serbia.

Адаптация и эмпирическая оценка опросника по выгоранию учителей-наставников

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Аннотация

Цель данного исследования – определить характеристики опросника для выявления выгорания учителей. В данном исследовании использовался опросник «Выгорание учителей», разработанный Вренчем и др. Опрос проводился в мае 2022 года. Выборка состояла из 103 учителей. Альфа Кронбаха составила 0,974. Результаты показали, что опрошенные учителя испытывают низкий уровень выгорания ($M = 31,53$, $SD = 17,89$). Хотя статус наставника и стаж работы не оказались статистически значимыми параметрами, замечено, что учителя, не участвующие в наставнической деятельности, испытывают более сильное выгорание, чем наставники. Учителя, имеющие стаж работы от 11 до 30 лет, демонстрируют признаки выгорания; даже молодые учителя (до 5 лет стажа) в той или иной степени отмечают чувство выгорания. Полученные результаты следует рассматривать как индикаторы для последующих изменений в системе образования Сербии в плане снижения требований, предъявляемых к учителям, особенно административных. Таким образом, основная рекомендация направлена на то, чтобы разработчики образовательной политики учитывали как можно больше параметров при внедрении новых изменений, особенно риски, лежащие в основе выгорания учителей.

Ключевые слова: учителя, выгорание, профессиональное развитие, Сербия.

Introduction

School is a complex environment where job demands include several individual- and school-level aspects (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). This complexity is reflected through a number of social interactions of different teacher functions, such as “providing content expertise, providing learning management, providing evaluative feedback, providing socialization, and providing personal models” (Galvin, 1990, as cited in Wrench et al., 2009, p. 204). Highly frequent social interactions include interactions with students, colleagues, parents and other stakeholders. Taking into account that all of these interactions and functions are manifested on an everyday basis, it can be said that the teaching profession

is multifaceted (Wrench et al., 2009) and represents one of the stressful jobs (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). According to Pietarinen et al. (2013), the central source of teacher stress and exhaustion is the lack of social support, perceived inequity and a poor sense of community. Exhaustion is one of the symptoms of burnout and represents the “lack of emotional energy and feeling strained and tired at work” (Maslach et al., 2001, as cited in Pietarinen et al., 2013, p. 63). Burnout is “an enduring state of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion induced by chronic stress leading to negative sentiments toward one’s professional self-efficacy” (Mahmoodi-Shahrehabaki, 2019, p. 1). Therefore, burnout is caused by multiple factors, “ranging from qualities inherent in the social environment and the school setting and the nature of the work itself, to the personal characteristics of teachers and students” (Maslach & Leiter, 1999, p. 296). Some of these factors are related to “work overload, role conflict, school climate, conflicts with colleagues, and students’ behavioural problems” (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021, p. 2). Teacher burnout can have negative impact on teachers, students, and the school climate and culture. The burned-out teacher changes his/her physical and emotional state and starts behaving differently at workplace (El Helou et al., 2016). The physical state changes may be reflected through permanent tiredness, while one of the main characteristics of the emotional state is being cynical. Permanent tiredness and exhaustion cause behavioral changes such as decreased productivity, while the feeling of being incapable to fulfil teaching duties may have a negative effect on the teacher’s self-efficacy, self-confidence, motivation, self-esteem, and professional engagement (Mahmoodi-Shahrehabaki, 2019). The loss of self-appreciation is tightly connected to scepticism in one own’s knowledge, which in turn leads to non-identification with the teaching profession, decreased job satisfaction and leaving the profession.

The issue of teacher burnout is particularly important from the perspective of mentor teachers, as they are expected to transfer enthusiasm, professional engagement, solutions for avoiding conflict situations, ways for improving students’ motivation and involvement in classroom to their mentees. In other words, mentors should recognise potential burnout indicators in their mentees and through an open dialogue offer possible solutions, e.g. how to apply more efficient approaches and improve time management in class. However, mentors themselves also need assistance, particularly in managing private and professional duties or dealing with a heavy workload, such as keeping the record of mentee’s activities, issues related to their own professional development. The support for mentor teachers can be provided through various research projects, including Mentor Training (2020-1-SK01-KA201-078250) and Mentor’s Vademecum (SK-SRB-21-0025). However, it is also necessary to validate questionnaires for monitoring changes in mentor teachers’ behaviour. With this in mind, the current study addresses the issues of adaptation and empirical evaluation of a questionnaire on mentor teacher’s burnout.

Methodology

Instrument

The questionnaire developed by Wrench et al. (2009) was used in the study. The instrument included 20 items that were translated into Serbian by two university teachers whose native language is Serbian. Relying on the five-point Likert scale, the respondents expressed their (dis)agreement with the items. The value 1 marked strong disagreement, while the value 5 was used for strong agreement. According to the questionnaire designers, the survey results are interpreted in the following way: a score between 20-35 means that the teacher has few burnout feelings; a score between 36-55 indicates some strong feelings of burnout; 56-70 indicates substantial burnout feelings; a score of 71-80 means that the teacher is experiencing burnout.

Participants

The survey included 103 primary and secondary school teachers in Serbia, 24 of them being males and 79 females. Considering the years of teaching experience, the sample included 17.5% of teachers with 0-5 years of experience; 17.5% with the experience between 6-10 years; 48.5% with the experience between 11 and 30 years; 16.5% with 31 and more years of experience. Also, the sample consisted of 41.7% of mentor teachers, 34.0% of those without experience in mentoring, and 24.3% of them who were not mentors formally but were engaged in evaluating the mentee's work and provided certain feedback and recommendations, i.e., they were in some way included in mentoring.

The survey was conducted in April and May 2022. IBM SPSS (version 20) software package was used for the applied statistical analysis.

Results*Psychometric properties of the questionnaire*

Cronbach's Alpha is 0.972, while Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items is 0.974. Both values indicate that applied questionnaire has satisfied values. The results of item-total analysis for applied questionnaire are shown in Table 1. Taking .30 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) as the lower limit of acceptability for the correlation of items with the total score on the scale (corrected item-total correlations), it can be seen that this criterion is fully satisfied. Average item-total correlations is 0.649, while average item means is 1.58.

Table 1. *Item-Total statistics*

Question	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
1	29.96	286.55	.84	.97
2	29.71	287.19	.75	.97
3	29.36	295.98	.54	.97
4	29.55	283.23	.79	.97
5	29.94	285.58	.88	.97
6	29.97	285.17	.89	.97
7	29.84	283.25	.88	.97
8	30.19	293.69	.77	.97
9	29.97	293.99	.64	.97
10	30.23	297.32	.75	.97
11	29.91	282.67	.89	.97
12	30.28	298.18	.74	.97
13	30.28	298.18	.74	.97
14	29.98	285.08	.87	.97
15	29.89	287.31	.79	.97
16	30.24	294.58	.82	.97
17	30.24	294.58	.82	.97
18	29.96	282.86	.87	.97
19	29.65	284.48	.76	.97
20	29.96	287.37	.83	.97

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistical indicators of summary scores of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the burnout questionnaire

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	K-S Z
Sum of perceived burnout	103	20.00	99.00	31.53	17.89	1.997	3.411	2.635**

** p < .001

Although, according to Finney and DiStefano (2006), skewness and kurtosis should not exceed the standardized values of 2 and 7, respectively, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z indicator shows that the distribution is not normal. The deviation from normal distribution can be explained by the mean value that points to a low burnout feeling. The highest scores are observed in items 3, 4, 19 and 2.

If the results are analysed in relation to the given categories, the highest percentage of respondents experience the lowest level of burnout (78.6%); 9.7% respondents report strong burnout feelings, 4.9% substantial, while 6.8% of them are experiencing burnout feelings. The following were considered as potential predictors: experience in mentoring, the years of work experience and gender. Chi-square test shows that none of these significantly affects the burnout feeling. Table 3 presents the distribution of the perceived burnout feelings in relation to experience in mentoring.

Table 3. Distribution of the perceived burnout feelings in relation to experience in mentoring

Experience in mentoring	Few	Strong	Substantial	Experiencing
With experience	81.4%	14.0%	0.0%	4.7%
Without experience	74.3%	8.6%	8.6%	8.6%
With informal experience	80.0%	4.0%	8.0%	8.0%

The results indicate that teachers without mentoring experience and those who act as mentors informally express higher burnout than their colleagues who are mentors. This finding suggests that teachers who are directly involved in training young colleagues do not feel tired of their work and thus may be assumed that they will transfer this positive attitude to young teachers. Table 4 shows distribution of the perceived burnout feeling in relation to the years of teaching experience.

Table 4. Distribution of the perceived burnout feelings in relation to experience in teaching

Years of experience in teaching	Few	Strong	Substantial	Experiencing
0-5	77.8%	5.6%	11.1%	5.6%
6-10	94.4%	5.6%	0.0%	0.0%
11-30	72.0%	12.0%	6.0%	10.0%
31 and more	82.4%	11.8%	0.0%	5.9%

It is interesting to notice that the respondents with shortest teaching experience report burnout in all of the given categories. The same refers to the teachers with 11-30 years of experience. The results can be interpreted in terms of the phases in teacher professional

development – at the beginning of their career, teachers are faced with transition from university environment to real classroom; after 10 years of experience, teachers are faced with internal stress related to their new professional roles, such as developing their professional identity and finding balance between private and professional duties (Gadušova et al., 2021; Orgoványi-Gajdos, 2020).

Table 5 shows the distribution of the perceived burnout feelings in relation to the gender of the participants.

Table 5. *Distribution of the perceived burnout feelings in relation to the gender of the respondents*

	<i>Few</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Substantial</i>	<i>Experiencing</i>
<i>Males</i>	75.0%	8.3%	8.3%	8.3%
<i>Females</i>	79.7%	10.1%	3.8%	6.3%

Although some studies report that females are more susceptible to burnout, the above results suggest that the values are comparable. However, any generalization or conclusion on this issue is currently impossible, considering the discrepancy in the numbers of male and female participants.

Discussion

The current findings suggest that this questionnaire can be applied in Serbia as it offers reliable values for monitoring changes in teacher burnout feelings. The overall results point to a low level of burnout syndrome among the participants. The results are in line with those reported by Perkiö-Mäkelä (2009, as cited in Pyhältö et al., 2021) and Länsikallio et al. (2018, as cited in Pyhältö et al., 2021). However, there are also reports of teachers expressing very high levels of burnout (Gallup, 2014, as cited in Bottaiani et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2018, as cited in Bottaiani et al., 2019; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). According to some researchers, “teachers who suffer from burnout are more likely to experience the symptoms of depression and sleep disturbances, undergo job turnover, and retire earlier” (Pyhältö et al., 2021, p. 220). Teachers may feel isolated and unsupported in their work, particularly if they cannot rely on their mentors or colleagues who can provide guidance and assistance. Additionally, teachers may feel undervalued or underappreciated, which can lead to feelings of frustration and disengagement. Therefore, “burnout develops gradually when work becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling, and unrewarding” (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021, p. 1). Failure in coping with stress and burnout feelings results in failure to implement innovative and effective classroom practices and provide high quality learning environments, which then results in negative student social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Bottiani et al., 2019). “Because burnout has considerable implications for teachers' performance in relation to students and colleagues, it is an issue with potentially serious consequences for both teachers' career and the learning outcomes of their students” (Maslach & Leiter, 1999, p. 296). Therefore, it is necessary to monitor and examine the level of stress to which teachers are exposed, as prolonged stress and general dissatisfaction with work may result in leaving the teaching profession. The building of career identity is not a state but a process that constantly develops and dynamically transforms over time (Beijaard et al., 2004; Gracia et al., 2021). Since based on similar value judgements and emotional experiences (Zhang et al., 2016), career identity is a notion that includes the modes of setting and achieving professional goals, needs, roles and activities of teachers (Vranješević & Vujisić-Živković, 2013). According to Orgoványi-Gajdos (2020), changes in career identity can be summarized

in five stages, with the initial stage highly characterized by positive expectations and encountering challenges as a result to imbalance between pre-service perceptions and real life practices (Gadušova et al., 2021). The current findings support this view and the reported burnout feelings of teachers with up to 5 years of experience can be interpreted as their search for balancing between university education and real classroom practices, often accompanied by large amount of paperwork. Later stages in career identity development imply its enrichment and establishment of the balance between private and professional life, as well as the maintenance of professional motivation. The findings that teachers between 11 and 30 years of experience show all levels of burnout feeling intensity can be interpreted in light of this view.

It is interesting to note that mentors report lower levels of burnout than their colleagues without mentoring engagement. Although mentoring requires additional efforts in terms of investing more time in guiding and evaluating mentees, mentors still express low burnout levels. The finding seems particularly important as mentees might gain the same enthusiasm for teaching and applying approaches that will ultimately enhance their students' performance and lower their negative feelings. In spite of this positive sign of mentors' commitment to teaching, future educational reforms should consider burnout as an important indicator of teacher self-efficacy and teacher development and monitor its trajectory (Gillet et al., 2022; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). The main recommendation, therefore, is addressed at the creators of educational policies to take into account as many parameters as possible, especially the teacher's feeling of burnout, when creating and introducing new changes.

Conclusion

The paper presents the results of a study aimed at empirical evaluation of the psychometric properties of Serbian translation of the Teacher Burnout questionnaire developed by Wrench et al. (2009). The results of the research showed satisfactory values of Cronbach Alpha. Each item had corrected item-total correlation much higher than .30. Therefore, the translated Serbian version of the Teacher Burnout questionnaire developed by Wrench et al. (2009) represents a valid and reliable instrument that can provide valuable information to researchers in Serbia about the level of teacher burnout. The importance of examining teacher burnout is represented through damaging effects on teacher's mental and physical health and work productivity. Overall, the current study points to the necessity of testing other available questionnaires in order to identify possible culture- and context-specific differences and thus determine which of the available instruments proves most effective for assessing teacher burnout in a specific context.

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