

Teaching on the Edge: How Workload Drives Burnout among Malaysian Educators

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Abstract

This action research investigates the pressing issue of educator burnout in Malaysia, focusing on the complex relationship between teacher workload and burnout. Adopting a quantitative methodology, the study utilizes a questionnaire survey administered to 100 teachers from diverse schools across Malaysia. The research aims to assess the current workload levels, evaluate the prevalence of burnout, identify contributing factors such as administrative support and workload management, and propose strategies for mitigating burnout. The findings reveal a significant correlation between high workload and educator burnout. Notably, administrative tasks and excessive paperwork are identified as primary sources of teacher exhaustion, emphasizing the need for streamlined administrative processes to reduce these burdens. Additionally, the study highlights a perceived lack of effective administrative support in managing workload and addressing burnout, suggesting a critical area for improvement. Based on these insights, the study proposes several targeted recommendations, including the simplification of administrative procedures, reevaluation of extracurricular commitments, provision of professional development on student behavior management, and the introduction of accessible mental health support services for educators. These strategies aim to reduce workload and promote work-life balance, fostering a more sustainable and supportive work environment for teachers. This research contributes valuable knowledge to the field by offering a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to educator burnout in Malaysia. The proposed recommendations provide practical, evidence-based solutions to alleviate burnout, ultimately enhancing teacher well-being, job satisfaction, and, by extension, improving student learning outcomes. This study offers significant implications for educational policy and practice, underscoring the importance of addressing burnout to ensure the long-term success and effectiveness of the Malaysian education system.

Keywords: Educator Burnout, Workload, Administrative Support, Teacher Well-Being

Introduction

The National Health and Morbidity Survey 2023, conducted by the Non-Communicable Diseases and Healthcare Demand (NHMS), revealed that 4.6% of adults in Malaysia, approximately one million individuals, suffer from depression. A survey by the RAND Corporation explored educator well-being, the availability of mental health resources, and educators' intentions to leave their positions. Twenty-three percent of educators reported a likelihood of resigning by the end of the 2022-2023 academic year, with inadequate well-being as a primary factor contributing to this decision. Major reasons for their intent to leave included occupational stress, insufficient compensation, and long working hours (Doan et al., 2023). Educator burnout is a global concern, affecting teachers in various countries and educational settings.

Ferguson et al. (2022) noted that educators experience some of the highest levels of occupational stress and burnout among professionals. This stress is often a result of high job demands and the emotional labor inherent in teaching. Both occupational factors, such as workload and the educational environment, and personal factors, such as familial obligations, play significant roles in contributing to teacher stress and mental health challenges.

Background of Study

In recent years, the issue of educator burnout has emerged as a pressing concern within the field of education, capturing the attention of people from different educational mainstream. This has been a pressing issue to be handled in the future as it affects the well-being and effectiveness of the teaching profession. However it may seem to be, the teaching profession is critical to the development of society. As the demand for educators continues to rise, driven by factors such as increasing workload, insufficient resources, and lack of financial support, the risk of burnout among the educators has become a critical challenge facing the field of education (Kotowski et al, 2022).

In the context of Malaysia, the teaching profession is often associated with high levels of stress and burnout, where educational demands are continually evolving. Educators face a unique set of challenges that contribute to their professional stress, including large class sizes, curriculum changes, time management and increased administrative responsibilities. This research aims to investigate the relationship between educators' workloads and their levels of burnout, exploring how factors such as administrative support, classroom management, and work-life balance influence educators' mental health. Understanding these is crucial for developing effective interventions to support educators, thereby enhancing educational outcomes for students.

Problem Statements

This study aims to explore the intricate relationship between the quantity of work (workload) and the phenomenon of educator burnout within the Malaysian educational context. Educator burnout is a significant issue that affects educators' mental health, job satisfaction, and overall effectiveness in the classroom. By examining how varying levels of workload contribute to burnout, this research seeks to identify key factors that exacerbate stress and fatigue among educators. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies to mitigate burnout and enhance the well-being and performance of educators.

Research Objectives

This study was conducted to investigate the relationship between educators' workloads and their levels of burnout in Malaysia. To achieve the goals of this study, several objectives have been identified as follows:

- To assess the current levels of workload among educators in Malaysia.
- To evaluate the prevalence of burnout among educators and its symptoms.
- To identify factors contributing to burnout, including administrative support and workload management.
- To propose strategies for reducing workload and mitigating burnout.

Research Questions

- What are the current levels of workload among educators in Malaysia?
- How does this contribute to the prevalence of burnout?
- What factors may cause burnout including administrative support and workload management?
- What strategies can be proposed to reduce workload and mitigate burnout?

Literature Review

In this chapter, we will be exploring the existing research studies on educator's workload, burn out and well-being. Highlighted below are the review of literature on definition, impact, factors, work life balance and consequences of educator's workload and burnout.

Workload and Burnout among Teachers

According to Aminuddin Awang, President of the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP), the nation is lacking more than 20,000 teachers. He claimed that since no new educators have been employed to replace the retiring ones, the issue now affects practically all of the schools in the country. There was increasing concern that the educator shortage could disrupt the teaching and learning process as a result of educators' increasing workloads. Several definitions of "workload" have been proposed in an attempt to conceptualize work overload in the educational setting. When workers feel they are being pushed to perform more work than their availability or capabilities will allow, it is referred to as work overload. They went on to state that working under pressure can be unpleasant because people become anxious when they have a lot of work to do before a deadline (Ab. Wahab et al. 2024).

Burnout is a psychological condition brought on by ongoing stress that impacts people's feelings, mental health, and physical behavior (The World Health Organization, 2019). Burnout is frequently found in individuals whose work involves interacting with clients or third persons. This work involves educators, who are required to dedicate their time to teaching activities such as lesson planning, teaching in the classroom, grading students' school work, and participating in extracurricular activities such as attending or leading professional development activities and involving parents and the community. Other than that, educators are also required to complete administrative duties related to education, such as writing student progress reports and monitoring student attendance.

In Malaysia, teaching is a high demand profession after being doctors, nurses, etc. Being an educator requires a lot of time and effort. Some private school educators have their own side work including teaching subjects that are not in their academic qualification, administrative,

handling co-curricular, etc. Ab. Wahab et al. (2024), state that even if it has benefits, an excessive workload can have detrimental effects on an educator's health, including stress, poor physical and mental health, burnout, and uncertainty. Time constraints on assigned tasks, together with unforeseen circumstances, work stability, melancholy, and high job demands, can all lead to stress. The amount of time educators spend teaching, marking assignments, and administering tests is stressing them out. When educators are unable to manage a range of stressors, such as challenging coworkers, an undervalued role, time restraints, work overload, a lack of control over the procedure, a conflict between work and personal life, inadequate pay, and a lack of benefits, they suffer stress related to their jobs.

A heavy workload has a positive and strong impact on burnout among secondary school educators in Malaysia. Increased workloads are significantly correlated with higher rates of burnout. On the contrary, Saraih et al. (2024) stated self-efficacy shows a negative correlation with burnout, indicating that higher self-efficacy might lower burnout levels. Doll & John (1990) revealed the factors influencing burnout among educators in school are discipline, homework support, absence of effective cooperation, inadequate educator preparation and class size. Due to much side work such as administration may lead to unprepared educators for their class. Most educators burn out because they cannot focus more on their preparation and teaching situations they encounter. Cassel (1984), sometimes educators are asked to teach in other subjects that they were not trained to may lead to stress and burnout.

Shah et al. (2024) revealed a positive correlation between work-life balance and burnout, indicating that merely enhancing work-life balance may be insufficient to alleviate burnout. The study also highlighted that excessive demands and massive workloads markedly influence burnout levels among educators.

The relationship between job stress and turnover intention has been a significant focus of research in the context of educators. A study conducted by Saad et al. (2022) found that job stress, especially related to administrative tasks and the nature of the work, significantly influenced turnover intention among teachers in Selangor. In addition to administrative stress, workload issues were found to play a major role in teachers' job satisfaction and their decision to remain in the profession.

Amzat et al. (2021) stated that educator burnout results in significant health problems that involve both physical and mental exhaustion. Educators suffering from burnout exhibit elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. This negatively impacts educators' job performance. It diminishes their enthusiasm and commitment, resulting in decreased teaching quality and effectiveness. Students taught by burned-out teachers may have lower scores in school and reduced engagement in learning. A lot of educators are considering quitting and leaving the profession due to overwhelming stress and lack of support from all aspects.

Burnout or its consequences include the following traits with a neurological reaction to stress that results in a range of physical illnesses, a stressful occupation that disrupts a person's personal or professional life. Damaging emotional stress brought on by inadequate coping mechanisms. A diminished sense of concern and attachment to those around one and a cynical, dehumanized view of students that coincides with a decline in the quality of

instruction (Block, 1977 and Maslach, 1978). According to Fielding and Gall (1982), educator burnout is the final, tragic reaction of an educator who is unable to manage stress and is battling recurrent bodily and/or mental disease. Burnout educators may produce inequality students because of lack of preparation before starting class due too much side work.

Methodology

The research design and overall methodology of our study, along with the traits and requirements of our study participants, are covered in this chapter. The techniques for gathering data, which will be classified into qualitative and quantitative approaches, are also explained by this study. This topic will also include a discussion of the intervention. There will be a description of the intervention that will be used as well as its methods. For this topic, the outline of the methodical procedure that will be employed to carry out this investigation will be emphasized.

Research Design

Doll & John (1990) stated that literature indicated that a questionnaire is a very vital instrument in collecting data to determine if educator burnout exists in a given area or within a target area. The review of the literature and statistical data indicated that the chi-square and t-test are both valid and reliable instruments for testing the hypotheses. The methodology and design utilized a random technique of selecting schools and quasi-experimental design in which two groups of teachers within the schools were compared.

Participants

Targeted participants are educators who work in primary and lower secondary schools in our country. Sample size for this study is about 100 teachers from various schools across Malaysia. The selection criteria that are requested in this survey is teaching with a minimum of two years of teaching experience.

Data Collection Procedure

The methods that will be used in this study are quantitative methods. Participants will answer a questionnaire designed to measure workload and burnout. A set of questionnaires consists of about 20 questions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analyzed by using the percentage of workloads that lead to burnout.

Instrumentation

A researcher-made questionnaire was developed keeping in view local context. Different studies and instruments were referred to for item development. The developed 20 questionnaire addressed two areas in two sections: (i) Most frequently occurring discipline problems (ii) Classroom management strategies. The first section of the questionnaire focused on the most frequently occurring discipline problems (10 items). The second section asked for classroom management strategies employed in the schools by educators and comprised 11 items.

These items were based on two questions, i.e. (a) What are the most frequently occurring student discipline problems in the classroom? (b) What strategies are adopted by you to cope

with student discipline problems? The respondents were requested to reply on a five-point scale.

Measurement of Variables

Only one variable was used throughout the investigation, which was a quantitative factor. Questionnaire was used to evaluate the findings and based on respondents' questionnaire responses regarding the study's goals, which are to assess educator's burnout and workload.

Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter outlines the data analysis and the results of the study. An analytical survey was conducted to explore the relationship between workload and burnout in Malaysian educators. The findings from the data analysis reveal that there are various factors affecting burnout among Malaysian educators including workload.

Qualitative Analysis Analytical Survey

The questionnaire included both open and close-ended questions that involved demographics, workload, support from administration and colleagues and burnout indicators such as classroom management and stress level.

Personal Life

Question: Which if the following self-care practices do you engage in regularly.

Table 1

Respond	Percentage (%)
Exercise	51
Reading	40
Recreational activity	58
Spend time with family	80
Spend time engaged in hobby	63

Based on Table 1, it shows that most educators responded that they choose to spend time with family in order to reduce stress or fatigue which is 80%. According to Taormina and Law (2000), self-management involves the people's ability to learn how to relax or engage in scheduled exercise, resting and free time both inside and outside of the working environment. Such activities have been found to be therapeutic in handling and reducing stress. By utilizing self-management in everyday lives, educators were able to learn how to manage themselves effectively and re-organize their lives based on their own pace. By having a control environment, this is able to help in strengthening their mentality against stress, having better control over how they can spend their time and energy and also reduce the effects of stress on their job itself.

High percentage of the respondents (63%) also choose to engage in hobbies as this can be considered as leisure activities. Leisure activities are broadly known as pleasurable activities that individuals engage voluntarily when they are free from the demands of work and also

other responsibilities. These may include exercising, reading, and doing recreational activities. Pressman et al (2009) find that by doing these enjoyable activities it may serve as breathers that give them the chance to take a break thus inducing positive emotions and reducing mental fatigue.

Question: How often do you feel the need to take a break from teaching due to stress or burnout?

Table 2

Respond	Percentage (%)
Never	16
Rarely	13
Sometimes	49
Often	16
Always	6

Table 2 shows the majority of the respondents (49%) sometimes feel the need to take a break from teaching due to stress and only a few (6%) chose always. Taking a break from teaching can significantly reduce stress and burnout by providing educators with a chance to recharge and regain emotional balance. Taking time off allows educators to relax, which helps reset their cognitive functioning, improve focus and problem-solving when they return to work.

Table 1 and table 2 can be said to be related to each other. As teaching often requires long hours and extensive preparation outside of the classroom, which can blur the boundaries between work and personal life. By taking much needed breaks during the day or longer during the school holiday, this helps the educators to return to their work with renewed stamina. Taking breaks allows educators to reconnect with their personal lives, reducing feelings of being overwhelmed. Thus, by doing leisure activities, pursuing interests outside of school or spending time with family, educators can have a better work-life balance.

Educator's Workload

Question: You feel that administrative tasks outside of teaching add to your exhaustion.

Table 3

Respond	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	42
Agree	30
Neutral	21
Disagree	4
Strongly Disagree	3

Table 3 indicates that seventy-two percent (72%) of respondents believe that administrative duties beyond teaching significantly contribute to their fatigue. This signifies an overall

agreement among the participants. A minority of respondents are neutral (21%), neither concurring or dissenting that administrative tasks influence their fatigue. This indicates that certain educators might not perceive the impact as strongly or are uncertain regarding its effects. This shows that administrative tasks are a major cause of exhaustion for the majority of educators. Resolving this issue might considerably decrease stress and burnout among educators.

Question: You use your own personal time to complete the tasks related to school work.

Table 4

Respond	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	42
Agree	43
Neutral	10
Disagree	3
Strongly Disagree	2

Table 4 shows a majority of educators (85%) use their own personal time to complete school-related tasks. This represents an enormous amount, indicating that many educators dedicate a significant amount of their personal time to work-related tasks. This significant percentage highlights the widespread concern regarding work-life balance among educators. Ten percent (10%) of respondents neither concur nor disagree, indicating that for a minor group of educators, the use of personal time for school-related tasks is not an issue. They may encounter diverse experiences or find it occasionally manageable. This indicates a significant gap between professional obligations and personal time, potentially leading to stress and burnout. The minimal percentage of disagreement indicates that only a small percentage of educators consider they can manage their school duties within designated work hours.

Health of Mental and Physical

How frequently do you experience feelings of emotional exhaustion related to your teaching?

Table 5

Respond	Percentage (%)
Sometimes	52
Rarely	29
Often	11
Never	7
Always	2

Based on Table 5, it shows that people vote sometimes with the highest percentage, which is 52%. It comes rarely with the second highest at 29%. The percentage shows that half percent of teachers feel emotional exhaustion when they are in the field sometimes. Some educators

might feel exhausted because of their additional or side workload such as extracurricular activities, paperwork and documentation, etc. This might lead them to feel burnt out and stress during their duty. Teachers may feel burnout due to workload. Burnout can be defined as the loss of power and energy because of failure, attrition, and overload, or the depletion of an individual's internal resources because of irretrievable demands (Freudenberger, 1974). Though it appears as a result of work stress (Şeşen, Çetin, & Basım, 2011), burnout is not an indicator but the result of unmanaged work stress (Altun, 2002).

Over the past month, how often have you felt overwhelmed by your teaching responsibilities?

Table 6

Respond	Percentage (%)
Sometimes	41
Rarely	23
Often	15
Never	15
Always	6

Based on Table 6, it shows that people vote for sometimes with the highest percentage which is 41%. It is rarely the second highest at 23%. The percentage shows that half percent of educators feel overwhelmed by their teaching responsibilities sometimes. Some educators might feel overwhelmed because of their own unfinished workload. Some educators feel that they do not have enough time to finish their work during school time, so they need to sacrifice their leisure time and rest time (Lin et. al, 2024).

Table 5 and Table 6 related to each other, which educators burn out typically shows themselves as emotional tiredness and starts when teachers feel overburdened by their daily job, which includes grading, lesson planning, and classroom management. Burnout can have an impact on physical and mental well-being, so it's critical to recognize the warning symptoms.

Management Implications

What are the main sources of stress in your teaching job?

Table 7

Respond	Percentage (%)
Additional workload (extracurricular activities or clubs' activities)	61
Lack of support from management and co- workers	32
Discipline issue caused by students	50
Parental pressure	30
Paperwork and documentation	70
Lack in work-life balance	27

The data presented in Table 7 clearly illustrates the primary stressors affecting Malaysian educators. A significant majority (70%) of teachers report that paperwork and documentation are major sources of stress. This is closely followed by the pressures of additional workload from extracurricular activities (61%) and the difficulties associated with managing student discipline issues (50%). These findings are consistent with the previously discussed concerns related to emotional exhaustion and feelings of being overwhelmed, which were highlighted in the context of educator health (Table 5 and Table 6). The cumulative impact of these stressors is clearly detrimental to the well-being of educators and can potentially lead to burnout (Maslach et al., 1996).

These findings collectively emphasize the urgent need for a proactive and comprehensive approach to managing workload, preventing burnout, and promoting well-being within the Malaysian education system. School administrations must prioritize the development and could explore specific interventions and investigate the impact of teacher well-being on student achievement.

How effective do you find the support from your school administration in addressing workload and burnout issues?

Table 8

Respond	Percentage (%)
Very effective	8
Effective	46
Not effective	41
Not applicable	5

Additionally, Table 8 reveals a concerning inadequacy in administrative support. A substantial proportion of educators (41%) perceive the support provided by school administration in addressing workload and burnout issues as ineffective. This perceived lack of support is, in itself, identified as a stressor in Table 7, indicating a self-perpetuating cycle that exacerbates the problem. This suggests a misalignment between the needs of educators and the current support structures within school administrations, which can hinder effective stress management and burnout prevention strategies (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the relationship between educator workload and burnout in Malaysia, underscoring the critical role that excessive workload, administrative tasks, and lack of institutional support play in exacerbating burnout among educators. The findings highlight that most teachers face significant emotional and physical exhaustion, which is strongly correlated with the overwhelming demands of their professional responsibilities. Administrative duties, additional workload from extracurricular activities, and a perceived lack of support from school management are identified as major sources of stress, contributing to burnout and deteriorating teacher well-being.

The study's results emphasize the urgent need for systemic changes within the Malaysian education system, specifically in terms of workload management and administrative support. Schools must implement measures to streamline administrative tasks, reduce the burden of paperwork, and provide more effective support for teachers. Moreover, policies should aim to create a healthier work-life balance for educators, offering sufficient time for personal activities, professional development, and mental health care.

This research contributes valuable insights to the growing body of literature on educator burnout, providing practical recommendations for educational leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders to address the issue more effectively. The study's implications extend beyond Malaysia, offering lessons that can be applied in other educational systems grappling with similar challenges. Addressing the root causes of burnout, particularly workload-related stress, is crucial not only for improving teacher well-being but also for ensuring sustained teaching quality and positive student outcomes.

Ultimately, this research advocates for a more balanced and supportive work environment for educators, one that recognizes their mental and physical health as essential to the success of the education system. By prioritizing teacher well-being, the long-term effectiveness of education can be safeguarded, benefiting both educators and students alike. Further research should focus on the development of interventions to reduce burnout and explore how improved teacher support systems can enhance the overall educational experience for all involved.

Theoretical and Contextual Contribution

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on educator burnout by highlighting the critical relationship between teacher workload and burnout, particularly within the Malaysian context. From a theoretical perspective, the study builds on established models of burnout, such as Maslach's Burnout Inventory, by examining how specific factors like administrative workload, extracurricular duties, and work-life balance exacerbate burnout. This theoretical contribution deepens our understanding of how workload stressors influence educators' mental health and job satisfaction, a crucial area for educational research.

Contextually, the findings are particularly significant for the Malaysian education system, where educators face unique challenges such as large class sizes, frequent changes in the curriculum, and a perceived lack of institutional support. By identifying the specific sources of stress in the Malaysian context—particularly administrative duties and extracurricular demands—this research offers valuable insights for policymakers and school administrators. These findings can inform the development of targeted interventions to reduce teacher workload and improve job satisfaction, ensuring that educators are supported in their professional roles and are better equipped to manage the demands of teaching.

Moreover, this study provides a broader contribution to global discussions on teacher well-being, offering insights into how systemic issues, such as inadequate administrative support, contribute to educator burnout. This research advocates for a more holistic approach to teacher support, one that considers not only the emotional and physical well-being of educators but also the broader institutional practices that shape their work experience. By

improving the work environment for educators, this study indirectly enhances the learning experience for students, as more supported teachers are more likely to provide high-quality, engaged instruction.

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