

# From Stress to Burnout: A Systematic Review of Teacher Occupational Burnout

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Received: 30 April 2025 | Accepted: 2 June 2025 | Published: 30 June 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ijares.2025.7.3.38>

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**Abstract:** *Teacher occupational burnout remains a pressing global issue with profound implications for educational systems. This review synthesizes existing literature to examine its prevalence, consequences, determinants, and theoretical underpinnings. Findings indicate alarmingly high burnout rates globally, driven by the interplay of personal factors (e.g., emotional regulation deficits), occupational stressors (e.g., excessive workloads), and socio-environmental pressures (e.g., societal expectations). Framed by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Maslach's tripartite theory, burnout manifests through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment, undermining teacher well-being, teaching quality, and school stability. Consequences extend beyond individual distress to systemic issues like attrition, compromised student outcomes, and institutional dysfunction. By integrating multidisciplinary evidence, this review contributes to burnout scholarship in three ways: (1) mapping the dynamic interplay of burnout drivers across individual-institutional levels, (2) validating its cross-cultural persistence, and (3) reinforcing the urgency of theoretical-practical alignment in education research. Future studies should prioritize longitudinal designs, cross-cultural comparisons, and mechanistic analyses of burnout pathways. Addressing teacher burnout remains critical for sustaining educational ecosystems and safeguarding pedagogical quality globally.*

**Keywords:** Teacher occupational burnout, Job Demands-Resources model, Maslach's theory, influencing factors

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## 1. Introduction

The teaching profession requires individuals to navigate a multitude of stressors spanning personal and organizational domains. These challenges include excessive workloads, role ambiguity, conflicting administrative expectations, strained collegial relationships, and disruptive student behaviors, all of which collectively shape the school's psychosocial climate (Granziera et al., 2021). Recognized as one of the most psychologically taxing occupations across diverse educational contexts, teachers exhibit significantly elevated burnout levels compared to professionals in other human-service sectors (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2020). The theoretical construct of occupational burnout originated in 1974 through Freudenberger's seminal observations of healthcare workers. He characterized it as a state of chronic emotional and physical depletion resulting from prolonged exposure to occupational stressors, particularly in professions demanding high ideals and self-sacrifice (Gargula et al., 2024). Subsequent scholarship has expanded this concept, with Du (2023) redefining burnout as a

psychological syndrome stemming from sustained intensive labor, particularly prevalent in service-oriented professions where emotional regulation and interpersonal demands are paramount.

Occupational burnout, conceptualized as a multidimensional syndrome, arises from the interplay of chronic workplace stressors including excessive workloads, prolonged psychological strain, and unmitigated emotional depletion. Clinically manifested through the erosion of physical vitality, affective resilience, and cognitive resources, this condition frequently stems from systemic occupational hazards such as unsustainable work intensity, role overload, and dissonance between professional ideals and organizational realities (Onurlu & Pilli, 2024). The teaching profession exemplifies a high-risk occupational cohort for burnout development. Educators must persistently navigate multifaceted demands encompassing pedagogical responsibilities, parental expectations, and societal pressures, all while operating within resource-constrained environments (Madigan & Curran, 2021). Empirical evidence underscores the global prevalence of teacher burnout, with cross-cultural studies consistently identifying educators as experiencing disproportionately elevated stress levels compared to other professions—a phenomenon attributable to the unique socio-emotional demands inherent in knowledge transmission and character formation (Hu & Shi, 2023).

Teacher occupational burnout constitutes a pervasive threat to educational ecosystems, manifesting through dual pathways of individual impairment and systemic dysfunction. At the micro-level, chronic burnout undermines educators' psychological well-being, professional commitment, and job satisfaction (Freire et al., 2020), with empirical studies demonstrating its detrimental effects on mental health outcomes such as anxiety disorders and emotional dysregulation (Liao et al., 2023). The repercussions extend beyond individual distress to disrupt organizational dynamics within educational institutions, fostering environments marked by diminished job satisfaction, attenuated motivation, and impaired professional efficacy (Turunc & Altay, 2020). Macro-level analyses reveal cascading consequences for pedagogical quality. Burnout-induced emotional detachment compromises students' psychosocial development by eroding the quality of teacher-student interactions (Çelik & Kahraman, 2019), while cognitive exhaustion hinders instructional innovation and adaptive teaching practices (Ansari et al., 2022). This systemic deterioration of educational ecosystems ultimately sabotages institutional goals of academic excellence and holistic student development (Herman et al., 2018). The dual erosion of human capital and pedagogical infrastructure underscores the imperative for interdisciplinary research to elucidate burnout pathways and develop targeted interventions.

## 2. Research Objectives

- 1) Synthesize cross-cultural empirical evidence: to integrate domestic and international research on the prevalence and manifestations of teacher burnout.
- 2) Map multilevel determinants and pedagogical consequences: to systematically categorize individual traits, occupational stressors, and socio-environmental factors driving burnout, alongside their detrimental impacts on instructional quality and student engagement.
- 3) Critically appraise theoretical frameworks and knowledge gaps: to evaluate conceptual models (e.g., JD-R) and prioritize unresolved questions for future scholarly inquiry.

## 3. Overview of Occupational Burnout

While occupational burnout manifests as a global phenomenon, its conceptual boundaries and sociocultural interpretations exhibit significant cross-national variations (Gargula et al., 2024).

Originally conceptualized within clinical psychology contexts during the 1970s, the construct emerged through Freudenberger's (1974) seminal observations of mental health professionals. He defined burnout as a psychological syndrome characterized by progressive emotional exhaustion, depersonalization tendencies, and diminished self-efficacy, precipitated by chronic exposure to occupational demands that exceed personal coping resources. Subsequent decades witnessed the construct's diffusion across human service professions, extending beyond its clinical origins to encompass education, law enforcement, and social welfare sectors. This paradigmatic expansion reflects two critical shifts: (1) the recognition of burnout as a systemic workplace hazard rather than individual pathology, and (2) the identification of sector-specific triggers, with Freudenberger (1975) highlighting prolonged work hours, unrelenting performance pressures, and resource inadequacies as primary etiological factors. The operationalization of burnout thus evolved from a context-bound clinical descriptor to a transdisciplinary framework for analyzing work-related distress in emotionally demanding professions.

The conceptualization of occupational burnout has undergone substantial diversification since its inception, with contemporary scholars reconceptualizing the construct through disciplinary-specific theoretical lenses. Three primary conceptual orientations have emerged in recent literature: Competitive Stress Paradigm: Kalandatzis and Hyz (2021) operationalize burnout as an exhaustion syndrome precipitated by chronic exposure to workplace competition, where unrelenting performance demands progressively deplete employees' psychological reserves. Chronic Multidimensional Depletion Model: Abubakar et al. (2022) emphasize the cumulative interplay of prolonged occupational stressors, defining burnout as a tripartite deterioration encompassing cognitive fatigue (mental), affective blunting (emotional), and physiological dysregulation (physical). Occupational Stress Continuum Perspective: Trinkenreich et al. (2023) position burnout as the terminal phase of work-related stress progression, characterized by exhaustive depletion of adaptive resources that renders individuals incapable of sustaining baseline professional functioning.

This definitional plurality reflects both the construct's inherent multidimensionality and its contextual sensitivity across professional domains. While some frameworks prioritize environmental triggers (e.g., competitive organizational climates), others emphasize temporal dimensions (chronic strain accumulation) or syndromic manifestations (functional impairment). Such theoretical diversification has catalyzed cross-disciplinary dialogues, enabling nuanced investigations into burnout's etiology while complicating measurement standardization—a tension underscoring the need for context-sensitive conceptual models in occupational health research.

#### **4. Prevalence and Consequences of Teacher Occupational Burnout**

Despite growing scholarly attention to educator well-being, occupational burnout persists as an endemic challenge across educational systems worldwide, transcending national development disparities (Omondi et al., 2023). Recent epidemiological studies reveal alarming prevalence rates: Early Childhood Education: 50% of Czech kindergarten teachers exhibited clinical burnout symptoms (Čech et al., 2020). Secondary Education: 54.2% burnout incidence among Ethiopian secondary educators (Wulolign et al., 2020), contrasting with 40% in Botswana's high schools (Mogapi & Moorad, 2020). Specialized Teaching Roles: 73% of Turkish visual arts instructors (Kara, 2020) and 73.3% of Indonesian special education teachers reported burnout (Ramdan et al., 2020). A meta-analytic synthesis of 67 multinational studies (Agyapong et al., 2023) quantifies this crisis globally, with 60.9% of educators experiencing

moderate to severe burnout. Such consistently elevated rates across diverse cultural contexts—ranging from Central European to Sub-Saharan African educational systems—suggest systemic rather than region-specific etiological factors. The persistent prevalence despite increased institutional awareness underscores the urgent need to re-examine conventional intervention paradigms in teacher occupational health research.

The psychological well-being and occupational vitality of educators serve as pivotal determinants of pedagogical efficacy, positioning burnout mitigation as an imperative within global education policy agendas (Ge, 2024). Accelerated by 21st-century digital transformation and neoliberal accountability regimes, teacher burnout has evolved from an individual health concern to a systemic workforce crisis, profoundly exacerbating international teacher shortages (Mead, 2024). Contemporary scholarship conceptualizes this phenomenon through complementary lenses: Psychosocial Hazard Framework: Saloviita and Pakarinen (2020) delineate burnout as a maladaptive response to chronic workplace disillusionment, emerging when professional engagement ceases to provide meaning or psychological reward. Triadic Exhaustion Syndrome: Mahmoodi-Shahreabaki (2019) operationalizes burnout as the convergent depletion of emotional reserves (affective drain), physiological resilience (somatic fatigue), and cognitive bandwidth (mental overload) under sustained occupational stress. Behavioral manifestations range from pedagogical disengagement (diminished instructional creativity) to relational deterioration (impaired classroom climate management), fundamentally undermining educators' capacity to fulfill core professional obligations (Faraci, 2018). This symptom constellation not only compromises individual well-being but disrupts educational ecosystems through attrition cascades and intergenerational knowledge transfer failures—a dual crisis demanding urgent reconceptualization of teacher support infrastructures. Teacher occupational burnout engenders profound and far-reaching consequences across educational ecosystems. At the individual level, it undermines both educators' psychological well-being and physical health, manifesting as chronic emotional exhaustion, professional disengagement, and diminished career prospects (Capone et al., 2019; Fathi et al., 2021). This syndrome further corrodes instructional quality through reduced pedagogical innovation and attenuated enthusiasm for skill development, directly compromising classroom effectiveness (Bottiani et al., 2019; Sajjadi & Rostami, 2023). Organizationally, burnout contagion destabilizes school systems by eroding staff cohesion, increasing turnover rates, and diminishing institutional capacity to sustain educational standards (Herman et al., 2018; Li & Lu, 2024). Students bear the ultimate repercussions, with empirical studies consistently linking teacher burnout to impaired academic performance and deteriorated teacher-student relationships (Abapo, 2024; Anton & Van, 2024; Amzat et al., 2021).

The cascading nature of these consequences—from individual impairment to systemic educational deterioration—positions teacher burnout as a self-perpetuating crisis. Its pervasive influence across micro (individual), meso (organizational), and macro (student achievement) levels underscores the urgent need for holistic intervention frameworks within educational policy and practice.

## **5. Factors Influencing Teacher Occupational Burnout**

This analysis examines why teachers experience burnout by looking at three interconnected areas: personal traits (such as individual stress management styles or perfectionist tendencies), job demands (including heavy workloads, limited resources, or conflicting roles in schools), and social/environmental pressures (like school leadership styles, parent-teacher dynamics, or societal expectations about education). Each area contributes uniquely to burnout—while some

teachers might struggle with balancing personal life and work deadlines, others face challenges from overcrowded classrooms or lack of administrative support. Together, these factors create a complex web that drains teachers' energy and passion over time, making it crucial to address all three aspects to develop effective solutions.

### **5.1 Personal Factors**

Personal vulnerability to occupational burnout manifests through interrelated psychological and emotional pathways. Chronic cognitive fatigue arises from sustained physical exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and emotional depletion, creating a self-reinforcing cycle that amplifies detachment and perceived inefficacy (Dai & Wang, 2023; Kemanshahi & Pishghadam, 2022; Li et al., 2024). Emotional regulation capacity plays a pivotal moderating role, with surface acting in emotional labor exacerbating exhaustion, while deep acting mitigates depersonalization (Zhang et al., 2020; Fathi et al., 2021). Compounding these effects, negative emotional states and low emotional intelligence accelerate burnout progression by impairing adaptive coping mechanisms (Amzat et al., 2021; Afridi et al., 2024; Genoud & Waroux, 2021).

Non-professional factors equally potentiate burnout risk. Physical health deterioration and sleep disturbances interact bidirectionally with occupational stress, undermining physiological resilience (Bhatti & Alnehabi, 2023; Sánchez-Narváez et al., 2023). Life domain imbalances—including inadequate leisure, familial pressures, and residential dissatisfaction—deplete personal resources available for work engagement (Bianchi et al., 2021; Taylor, 2019). Furthermore, maladaptive cognitive patterns, such as irrational beliefs and role conflict from attempting to balance multiple social identities, predict heightened burnout susceptibility (Huk et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019).

### **5.2 Work-Related Factors**

Teacher occupational burnout is closely linked to high work demands, leading to emotional exhaustion and diminished self-efficacy among public school educators (Villarejo et al., 2022). Excessive workloads create significant stress, which plays a crucial role in occupational burnout (Mulyani et al., 2021). Beyond workload pressures, the overall work environment is another critical factor contributing to teacher burnout (Cumming et al., 2021). Several studies have identified key contributors to this issue. Amzat et al. (2021) emphasized occupational stress as a primary factor, while Arvidsson et al. (2019) pointed to a combination of high work demands and ineffective leadership. Similarly, Räsänen et al. (2022) highlighted multiple causes, including heavy workloads, conflicting job expectations, an imbalance between effort and reward, poor organizational relationships, role uncertainty, and challenging student behavior. Work overload, stressors, and time constraints also exacerbate burnout (García-Carmona et al., 2019). Additionally, Belay et al. (2023) identified job dissatisfaction, unclear role expectations, high job demands, and declining student motivation as aggravating factors. Research by Vargas-Rubilar and Oros (2021) further confirmed that teachers facing heavier workloads experience increased stress, which in turn heightens burnout levels. Meanwhile, Chen and Liu (2021) suggested that workplace satisfaction, particularly regarding career advancement, organizational management, leadership quality, institutional regulations, and employee benefits, serves as a predictive factor in determining burnout intensity.

Role conflict and ambiguity are also major contributors to teacher occupational burnout, as educators often struggle with competing demands and unclear responsibilities (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2023; Pretorius et al., 2022). The challenges inherent in the educational environment, such as managing curricula, addressing student discipline, and handling daily work-related stress, further increase burnout risks (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Liu

et al., 2021; Tsang et al., 2022). In addition, factors such as job security concerns, student well-being, dissatisfaction with school administration, and extended working hours contribute to emotional strain (Klusmann et al., 2023; Robinson et al., 2022; Shavers et al., 2022). Teachers also face growing burdens outside their primary teaching duties, including the preparation of complex subject materials and administrative tasks, which further intensify burnout (Agyapong et al., 2022). Among secondary school educators, workload pressure, student behavior challenges, administrative responsibilities, and limited autonomy have been identified as key stressors (Ortiz et al., 2023). Research by Meredith et al. (2020) and Carroll et al. (2022) underscores the role of environmental factors such as inadequate professional support, work-related stress, and unclear job expectations in driving teacher burnout. More broadly, burnout is often associated with high-stress environments, excessive workloads, a lack of control, ambiguous job roles, and insufficient institutional support (Mijakoski et al., 2022).

### 5.3 Social and Environmental Factors

Teacher burnout is significantly exacerbated by systemic organizational failures, particularly insufficient administrative support (Akbari & Eghtesadi, 2020; Lu et al., 2022) and resource deficiencies. Inadequate professional guidance (Ortiz et al., 2023), poor infrastructure (Jamaludin & You, 2019), and suboptimal working environments (Zhou et al., 2020) create chronic stressors across educational institutions. Dysfunctional leadership practices—including excessive bureaucratic demands (Tsang et al., 2021) and ineffective managerial support (Schilling et al., 2018)—compound these issues. Collegial relationships and interactions with senior management further mediate burnout levels, particularly in secondary education settings (Sastre-Morcillo et al., 2018). Additionally, the absence of parental collaboration (Amzat et al., 2021) and prolonged exposure to high-pressure interpersonal conflicts (Wang et al., 2023) erode educators' psychological resilience.

External societal expectations and personal life imbalances critically influence burnout trajectories. Heightened social demands (Li, 2021) coupled with income disparities (Bottiani et al., 2019; García-Carmona et al., 2019) generate psychological strain through perceived effort-reward mismatches. Structural inequities, such as workplace gender bias (Lu et al., 2020) and hierarchical organizational cultures (Tsang et al., 2021), disproportionately burden marginalized educators. Life domain conflicts—including work-family role incompatibility (Yan & Min, 2020; Chakravorty & Singh, 2020; Rajendran et al., 2020)—deplete coping resources, while rigid bureaucratic systems constrain professional autonomy (Tsang et al., 2021). These intersecting pressures transform teaching into a high-risk profession where systemic neglect perpetuates chronic occupational distress.

## 6. Relevant Theories

### 6.1 Job Demands-Resources Model (Demerouti et al., 2001)

The Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-RM) evolved from the Job Demands-Control Model, a widely recognized theoretical framework for analyzing occupational stress and burnout. Originally proposed by Karasek in 1979, the Job Demands-Control Model has provided a strong explanatory foundation for understanding occupational burnout (Salanova et al., 2002). Building on this foundation, Demerouti et al. (2001) introduced the JD-RM to offer a clearer perspective on the relationship between job characteristics and related variables. Due to its flexibility and broad applicability, the JD-RM has become one of the most influential models in occupational burnout research. Numerous empirical studies have been conducted based on this framework, further validating its significance in understanding and addressing burnout in various professional settings.

The JD-R model conceptualizes occupational burnout as an imbalance between job demands and job resources within organizational ecosystems. *Job demands* encompass the sustained physical, cognitive, or emotional efforts required to fulfill role expectations, entailing measurable physiological/psychological costs (e.g., prolonged attention regulation, emotional labor). *Job resources*, conversely, represent organizational assets that serve tripartite functions: (1) buffering demand-related strain, (2) facilitating goal attainment, and (3) enabling personal development (Schaufeli et al., 2004). Chronic exposure to elevated demands without compensatory resources initiates a depletion cycle—physiological exhaustion and cognitive overload progressively impair adaptive capacity, precipitating burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Conversely, robust resource availability fosters motivational engagement through need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, relatedness), thereby mitigating burnout risks. This dynamic interaction positions burnout not as static outcome but as processual deterioration shaped by demand-resource equilibrium.

## 6.2 Maslach Burnout Theory (Maslach, 1981)

The tripartite model of occupational burnout, proposed by social psychologists Maslach and Jackson (1981), remains the most widely validated conceptual framework in burnout research. This theory delineates three interrelated dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion (EE), the core stress dimension, manifests as profound depletion of emotional resources due to chronic work overload and interpersonal conflicts, leaving individuals unable to meet daily professional demands. Depersonalization (DP), the interpersonal dimension, emerges as a defensive response to EE, characterized by cynical detachment and dehumanizing attitudes toward others—a maladaptive coping mechanism that risks eroding professional ethics. Reduced personal accomplishment (PA), the self-evaluative dimension, reflects declining self-efficacy and negative appraisals of one's competence, often exacerbated by insufficient organizational support and stunted professional growth. This triadic structure elucidates burnout as a progressive syndrome originating from chronic workplace strain (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Maslach's framework provides critical insights into burnout's multidimensional nature, enabling researchers to operationalize its measurement and contextualize interventions. By distinguishing between stress etiology (EE), relational deterioration (DP), and identity erosion (PA), the model informs targeted strategies—from workload management to mentorship programs. Its universal applicability is evidenced by extensive adoption across sectors, particularly in education where societal expectations and emotional labor intensity amplify burnout risks (Zhang, 2021). For educators, whose roles demand sustained emotional investment, the interplay of high demands (e.g., student behavioral challenges) and scarce resources (e.g., inadequate administrative support) accelerates burnout progression. The theory's enduring relevance lies in its capacity to diagnose systemic workplace dysfunctions while guiding restorative practices that realign job demands with human sustainability needs.

## 7. Significance of Research on Teacher Occupational Burnout

The study of teacher occupational burnout has emerged as a critical domain in educational psychology, with sustained scholarly inquiry spanning over four decades (Khan et al., 2020). This enduring focus stems from its profound implications for teacher education systems, where burnout prevention strategies inform the development of resilience-focused training programs and institutional support mechanisms (Brasfield et al., 2019; Kamboj & Garg, 2021). Empirical analyses of burnout symptomatology not only enhance educators' self-awareness of well-being determinants but also provide actionable insights for improving job satisfaction and

pedagogical effectiveness (Malquisto et al., 2023). Crucially, emotionally balanced teachers serve as the cornerstone of quality education, their psychological health directly mediating classroom climate optimization and student engagement outcomes (Giri & Paria, 2023). The interdependence between educator well-being and learning ecosystem vitality underscores the non-negotiable imperative to address burnout in contemporary educational reform agendas.

From a multilevel perspective, burnout research catalyzes transformative changes across educational ecosystems. School administrators leverage empirical evidence to redesign workplace environments, implementing targeted interventions that enhance teacher retention and institutional performance (Mortiz, 2023). Concurrently, policymakers utilize findings to formulate post-pandemic recovery strategies, prioritizing resource allocation and workload equity (Mijakoski et al., 2022; Dilekçi et al., 2023). For educators, this knowledge empowers professional self-advocacy through informed negotiations for improved working conditions (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2020). Students reap indirect benefits via stabilized teacher-student relationships and enriched instructional practices, while parents gain frameworks for constructive school-community collaborations (Mortiz, 2023). Ultimately, systemic burnout mitigation fosters self-reinforcing cycles of educational excellence—where institutional support enhances teacher dedication, which in turn elevates pedagogical quality and learner outcomes, creating sustainable foundations for 21st-century education.

## **8. Conclusion**

This systematic review examines teacher occupational burnout as a complex, multifaceted syndrome influenced by personal vulnerabilities, workplace demands, and broader societal pressures. The findings highlight the widespread prevalence of burnout among educators across different educational settings, with serious consequences for teachers' mental well-being, teaching effectiveness, and student learning outcomes. Key contributing factors include the emotional intensity of teaching, excessive workloads, and systemic inequalities. These issues are analyzed using the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Maslach's burnout framework, which identifies three core dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of accomplishment. This study makes a meaningful contribution by (1) integrating insights from various disciplines into a cohesive analytical framework, (2) emphasizing the persistence of teacher burnout across cultures and its broader societal impact, and (3) mapping out the interconnected pathways through which individual, professional, and environmental stressors fuel burnout cycles.

Addressing this growing crisis requires urgent systemic reforms. Policymakers must focus on balancing teacher workloads, ensuring fair distribution of resources, and strengthening mental health support systems within schools. Future research should prioritize long-term studies to track the progression of burnout, develop culturally responsive interventions, and explore technology-driven solutions such as AI-powered tools to reduce administrative burdens. Tackling teacher burnout is not just an institutional responsibility—it is an ethical necessity. Supporting educators' well-being is essential for maintaining educational quality, promoting equity, and fostering resilient learning environments. Only through collaborative, research-informed efforts can societies effectively combat burnout and uphold the integrity of the teaching profession.

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