The study of English Teachers' Burnout During COVID-19 Pandemic
การศึกษาความเหนื่อยหน่ายของครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษในช่วงภาวะการแพร่ระบาด
ของโรคติดเชื้อไวรัสโคโรนา 2019

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บทคัดย่อ

ในช่วงสถานการณ์แพร่ระบาดของโรคโควิด 19 (COVID-19) ครูผู้สอนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษรายงานถึง
ผลกระทบที่ส่งตรงทั้งทางด้านจิตใจและสุขภาพ ซึ่งก่อให้เกิดความเครียดประกอบกับภาระงานล้นมือ จุดประสงค์
ของการศึกษา ได้แก่ 1) ศึกษาสาเหตุความเหนื่อยหน่ายของครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษในช่วงภาวะการแพร่ระบาดของ
โควิด19 และ 2) ศึกษาวิธีลดความเหนื่อยหน่ายของครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษในช่วงภาวะการแพร่ระบาดของโควิด19
การเก็บข้อมูลในการศึกษานี้ ได้เก็บข้อมูลจากครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษที่กำลังศึกษาปริญญาโทที่มหาวิทยาลัย
สุโขทัยธรรมาธิราช จำนวน 60 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัย ได้แก่ แบบสอบถามข้อมูลทั่วไปและปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อ
ความเหนื่อยหน่ายของครู แนวคำถามการสนทนากลุ่ม วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลโดยการหาค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยง
เบนมาตรฐาน และ วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลการสนทนากลุ่มโดยใช้การวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา ผลการวิจัย ได้พบถึงสาเหตุของ
ความเหนื่อยหน่ายที่ครูผู้สอนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษต้องเผชิญในช่วงสถานการณ์แพร่ระบาดของโรคโควิด 19 ได้แก่ 1)
การขาดอุปกรณ์การสอน และทักษะการสอนออนไลน์ 2) ความต้องการการสนับสนุนจากฝ่ายบริหาร 3) การ
ติดต่อสื่อสารกับผู้ปกครอง 4) ความกังวลเกี่ยวกับปัญหาทางบ้าน และเพื่อลดความเหนื่อยหน่ายของครูผู้สอน
ภาษาอังกฤษในช่วงภาวะการแพร่ระบาดของโควิด19 จากผลการวิจัยนั้น สามารถลดความเหนื่อยหน่ายของครู
ได้ดังนี้ 1) รัฐบาลควรให้คำแนะนำปรึกษาแก่ผู้บริหารโรงเรียน และให้ครูมีอุปกรณ์การสอนออนไลน์ที่เหมาะสม
2) ส่งเสริมความสัมพันธ์อันดีระหว่างครู-นักเรียน ผู้ปกครอง-ครู และ 3) ควรมีการอบรมครูเรื่องการเรียนการสอน
ออนไลน์ในหัวข้อที่เหมาะสมและน่าสนใจเพื่อให้ครูเกิดความมั่นใจในการเรียนการสอน และเพิ่มประสิทธิภาพใน
การเรียนการสอนมากยิ่งขึ้นด้วย

คำสำคัญ: *ความเหนื่อยหน่าย ครูภาษาอังกฤษ โควิด19*

Abstract

During the COVID-19 lockdown in Thailand, English teachers were reporting the impact of various stress factors associated with work overload on mental and physical health. The objectives of this study were to 1) explore the reasons behind English teachers' burnout during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and 2) investigate coping mechanisms used to reduce burnout. The data were collected from 60 English teachers earning their master's degree at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Thailand. A questionnaire on personal data and the factors affecting teachers' burnout guide the questions for focus group interview serve as the research instruments. Statistics employed for the questionnaire data analysis were the mean and standard deviation, while the focus group data were analyzed using Content analysis. The result of this study revealed the challenges that English teachers have faced and lessons that have been learned at this stage of the pandemic which were 1) lack of ICT teaching equipment and competency 2) administrative support 3) parent communication 4) anxiety about their home situations. In order to reduce stress for teachers, the study revealed the following: 1) more government consultation and communication with school leaders is recommended and basic online teaching should be provided 2) positive teacher–student relationships and parent–teacher relationships should be enhanced and, 3) last but not least, online teaching training is the main factor that English teachers need. However, the training topics should match online learning and help teachers gain confidence in online teaching and create effective online curriculum.

Keywords: teachers'burnout, English teachers, COVID-19

Introduction

Burnout is defined as state of emotional exhaustion and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. The term "burnout" was initially proposed by Freudenberger (1974) who investigated job burnout among social workers. Maslach (2003, p.190) stated that "burnout" as defined by Maslach (1982) multidimensional theory of burnout, is still predominant, with burnout's core dimensions described as 'overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment". Huebner, Gilligan & Cobb (2002) stated that burnout refers to negative consequences associated with chronic job stress. It involves components such as exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

Therefore, burnout is defined as state of emotional exhaustion and mental exhaustion caused by anxiety, excessive and prolonged stress. Burnout is a process, and previous studies portray the stages of the burnout process (Pietarinen, Pyhältö, & Salmela-Aro, 2013) including emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of inadequacy or reduced personal achievement (Leiter, 1989). In teaching, burnout is a problem within the teaching profession that has been explored in previous studies such as Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan (2014) investigation of classroom

management self-efficacy and burnout, Bermejo-Toro et al.'s (2016) study of the model of teacher well-being in terms of personal and job resources involved in teacher burnout and engagement, and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) study on teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout. Moreover, Kauppinen et al. (2010) also pointed out that in Finland, teachers experienced stress and burnout more frequently (12%) than in other professions (8%).

Normally burnout is an important factor that contributes to teachers leaving their jobs -- Byrne (1998) found that two-thirds of new teachers will leave the job within 4 years and over half of them will leave within 7 years. DePaul (2000) found that 20–30% of beginning teachers will leave the career within the first 3 years. The main reasons leading them to burnout are various. For example, McCormick and Barnett (2011) examined that in Australia, the factor that was most likely to predict burnout was related to students' misbehavior while Arvidsson, Håkansson, Karlson, Björk, and Persson (2016) reported that Swedish teachers became burned out because of low self-efficacy, poor school leadership, high job demands, and teaching higher grades. Li and Wei (2013) found that 76% of the teachers surveyed clearly expressed pressure, and about 78% of teachers had serious job burnout. Empirical evidence shows that many educations and researchers have been studying burnout issues among teachers for decades. Jiangxia (2003) believed that teacher burnout refers specifically to teachers' long-term stressors in their work, work problems, and obstacles, which keep teachers in a state of exhaustion in their emotions, attitudes ,and behaviors. In this state, there is often no personality, personal accomplishment is low, and emotions are close to exhaustion. Pfefferbaum et al. (2004) stated that teachers often feel overstrained from responding to their students' emotional needs, especially after catastrophic events. Qiu (2018) also noted that teachers with burnout often lose their enthusiasm for work because of excessive work pressure or unpleasant interpersonal relationships and have experienced mental exhaustion.

Due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease) pandemic, UNESCO (2020) reported that 194 countries closed schools to contain the pandemic, which means schools around the globe implemented alternative teaching approaches, including socially distanced classrooms, hybrid teaching, and 100% virtual instruction. According Allen, Jerrim, and Sims (2020); Hansen, Klusmann, Hanewinkel (2020); Kim, Oxley, and Asbury, (2021), the psychological impact of COVID-19 on the general population and teachers, in particular, is very serious, Vargas and Oros (2021) also stated that in regard to teaching, studies conducted in different parts of the world have found that a number of teachers are suffering from burnout syndrome, teachers had to face lots of challenges and new requirements for instruction. Thus, aside from full workloads, they also faced the possibility of new anxieties and stressors. In Thailand lots of schools can no longer run classes since school closures are part of measures to control the spread of COVID-19. Teachers needed to shift their education services to a virtual space, namely online classes. After nearly a full year of struggling to reach students remotely, handling many kinds of teaching documents, providing tech support and online materials for their students and related media, and busying

over paperwork, many of them feel overworked, fatigued, and full of stress. This current study is an empirical study that identifies factors contributing to teacher burnout due to COVID-19 and investigates coping mechanisms used to reduce burnout.

Method

The study were divided into 2 phases as follows:

First phase: the data were collected from 60 English teachers earning a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction in the English language at an open university in Thailand selected by purposive sampling. They are in-service teachers from different parts of the country. They were asked to identify burnout factors and their responses were recorded on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely high). The questionnaire was distributed online using the Google Form platform. To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the Index of Item-Objective point Congruence (IOC) was used to find the content validity. The questionnaire was checked by three experts. The Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to evaluate the items of the questionnaire based on the score range from -1 to +1. The IOC points were rated and reached the high level of value 0.8407. The IOC points in the calculations were divided into three scales of rating for consistency and congruencies of the items as follows: Congruent = + 1, Questionable = 0 and Incongruent = -1. The items that had scores lower than 0.5 were revised. On the other hand, the items that had scores higher than or equal to 0.5 were reserved. The questionnaire was tested with 15 in-service language teachers who were not in the sample group. After that, the obtained data from the questionnaire were cross examined by a focus group interview using MS teams as the interview channel. Data were analyzed using SPSS to compute the means and standard deviations. In addition, qualitative data derived from the questionnaire and the interview were analyzed using typological analysis.

The second phase: 30 teachers were randomly selected to participate in the focus group interview to collect the qualitative data. The researchers interviewed 30 teachers as a focus group to gain more detailed information about the sources of teachers' burnout. The focus groups were divided into three groups of approximately 10 participants with a minimum of 90 minutes and not exceeding 2 hours.

Moreover, for gathering data for teachers' burnout, the researchers used Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) questionnaire which includes 22 questions as the main questions. There was no consensus on the measurement of burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) is the most commonly used instrument for measuring burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory captures three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA). Maslach's team demonstrated, using data from U.S. samples, that the subscales have good psychometric properties (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Results and discussion

The results and discussion are divided into two parts: the participants' demographic data from the questionnaire and the focus group interview data.

This first section presents the participants' demographic data that provide general information on their background. The data helps illuminate the data of this study. They identified as female (85%) and male (15%) learners between the ages of 25 and 40 years old, with 5 to 10 years of experiences teaching English in schools. They were mainly from the Central (30%) and southern (30%) regions of Thailand, followed by the north east (23.33%), the east (6.67%), and the north (10%), and none of the respondents were from the west. Most of the respondents teach at the primary level (51.6%), followed by the secondary level (30%), vocational (13.3%), and tertiary level (5%).

Then, the English teachers were asked to answer the questions about burnout during the pandemic. The result in the table 1 show as follows:

Table 1: The frequency of burnout among English teachers

Questionnaire items	S.D.	Result
How often are you physically exhausted?	0.00	Always or to a very high degree
How often are you emotionally exhausted?	0.39	Always or to a very high degree
How often do you think "I can't take it anymore"?	0.74	Often or to a high degree
How often do you feel weak and susceptible to illness?	0.00	Always or to a very high degree
How often do you feel worn out (extremely tired)?	0.00	Always or to a very high degree

From the table, the frequency of burnout among teachers was always, or to a very high degree. However, they can be able to carry on as the item "How often do you think "I can't take it anymore." was indicated at often or to a high degree. Then, the following section presents the findings to emerge from the data analysis in relation to the researcher objectives.

The second section answered the research objectives as follows:

1. To explore the reason English teachers experienced burnout during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Kumawat, k. (2020) stated that teacher stress if not managed, can result in numerous negative consequences including loss of job satisfaction, reduced effectiveness in teaching

and can even result in burnout. The result of this study revealed the challenges that English teachers have faced and lessons that have been learned at this stage of the pandemic. With limited research available on the impact of COVID-19 on teaching, the current findings focused on the reasons teachers experienced burnout during COVID-19.

In the focus group, teachers stated that they were stressed due to various of reasons; however, the common reasons they stated were as follows:

1) **Lack of ICT teaching equipment and competency**

This was the most common reason mentioned in the focus group. This reason is understandable, considering that teachers had to switch to online learning overnight and they had to use their own equipment as they had at that moment. Usually smartphones were used as communication technology (ICT) tools when adapting to online teaching during COVID-19 school closures. Thus, their smartphones were used to design lesson plans, provide online lessons, introduce new learning content, deliver lessons, provide task differentiation, provide feedback, facilitate discussion, and conduct online assessments. Teachers must have effective ICT tools for online teaching as well as be competent in the effective use of ICT. Cuervo, Orviz, Arce and Fernández (2018) mentioned that some studies found the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for working at home can create feelings of tension, anxiety, exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction. This is related to Maslach (2003) who has mentioned that one of the reasons for burnout was the feelings of inefficacy. It seems to have developed due to a lack of resources: i.e., insufficient information or tools to do the job. This is also related to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) as they reported that low teacher self-efficacy might result in teacher burnout.

From the focus group, more than half of teachers reported that lacking ICT teaching is not the only problem they have to face, but students themselves have to face this problem as well. A year into the pandemic, more and more students can access technology at home, but not every student has adequate access to the devices they need for online learning, and many of them aren't adequately connected to the internet to learn from home. All of them agreed that "there are still a proportion of families who have no internet access and appropriate online learning devices." Aside from internet access and devices, it was very difficult to remotely control their classes, particularly primary level students. So, teachers expressed concerns regarding students learning on their own at their own pace. This is related to Müller and Goldenberg (2020) who explained that 'in addition to processing their own stress, they are also supporting students through theirs' especially considering that some students have little support at home.

In addition, the instructional methods in an online learning environment differ from the face-to-face classroom. Online teaching is obviously different from traditional classrooms. That means teachers must face new teaching demands. They have little control over student's participation in the online classroom, online teaching itself and homework, new instructional requirements, and how to grade students.

2) Administrative support

The primary source of their frustration and stress pertained to not feeling supported by their administration. Teachers stated that administrators should make it clear that they should be available to provide supports including teaching devices and internet access, provide training and support for new technology, listen to feedback and problems that arise during online learning, offer guidance, treat them as trusted professionals, and give teachers the time and space to practice teaching. According to Pressley (2021) and Racines (2020) teachers need different kinds of support, delivered in different ways. Besides instructional support, they need social and emotional support during this unprecedented time. Moreover, Meskhi, Ponomareva, and Ugnich (2019) and Sadeghi (2019) also stated that there are still many limitations to the online educational environment from teaching and learning perspectives, especially the support of the administrative system and the establishment of a network bandwidth and teachers' willingness to record e-Learning.

3) Teacher-Parent communication

Parents are worried about their children's education and have become increasingly demanding towards the schools and teachers. Normally, wealthy families can enhance their children's at-home education via tutoring, online learning on computers and tablets, and distance learning. On the other hand, some families are unable to access such services and tools, thereby increasing academic disparity. Many parents need to talk to teachers about their children's education, though some parents avoid talking to teachers. According to Ní Bhroin, and King (2020) the pandemic saw the rate of stress and anxiety among both teachers and parents during the COVID school closures become higher because of the lack of communication. In the interview and focus group, English teachers reported that there was a communication issue between parents and them. Concerning the time they have had during the pandemic, they had to talk to the parents through "Online platforms" such as Messaging apps, emails, school websites, and social media. Nevertheless, it seemed to be impossible to contact all parents through those online platforms.

4) Anxiety about their home situations

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased stress levels in the lives of many people including teachers facing a new normal of life, along with personal health and family issues. Their stress is associated with increased levels of depression in managing a family in a time of crisis such as the current financial situation, and a general fear that they or someone in their family would contract COVID-19.

2. To investigate coping mechanisms activated to reduce burnout.

As burnout is damaging the teacher profession, it may lead teachers to retire early, leave the profession and change their workplaces (school). Then, schools will lose competent teachers and it may affect their other colleagues. To reduce negative emotions associated with

stress, it is important to investigate coping mechanisms that reduce burnout. However, according to Gil-Monte and Peiró (1997) burnout syndrome should be understood as a response to work stress that arises when coping strategies that the subject initially uses are not successful. There was also uncertainty about the consequences of the pandemic, work overload, and an inadequate working environment for each person. From the interview and focus group, there are a number of ways teachers discussed and considered this issue.

1)   To limit teacher burnout, school administrators need to monitor teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide support ranging from instructional devices (physical) to emotional understanding (mental) throughout the pandemic situation. Furthermore, to reduce stress for teachers, much more government consultation and communication with school leaders is recommended. Basic needs for online teaching should be provided and positive teacher–student relationships and parent–teacher relationships should be enhanced. In addition, as Ilić Petković and Nikolić (2020) stated, institutions should provide education and training for teachers to be able to manage the stress created by this pandemic.

2)   Creating a collaboration between school and home can be beneficial to teachers, students, and parents. According to Pianta (1999); Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort (2011) Positive teacher–student relationships are generally characterized by relatedness, respect, warmth, support, trust, and low levels of interpersonal conflict. Positive relationships are facilitated by structures which give teachers the possibility of developing standing relationships with each student, such as in primary school where teachers have less students than in upper levels. This is also related to Lazarus and Folkman (1986) who have stated that to reduce teachers' discomfort, it is especially recommended to strengthen teachers' engagement, social support networks, existential beliefs and locus of control, social skills, and functional coping strategies. Moreover, during the pandemic Pressley (2021) also stated that districts and schools need to support teachers' communication with parents by providing clear communication and support to parents at the district and school levels.

3)   Teachers need some training for online teaching as online teaching training is the main factor that English teachers needed which were how to communicate with students in a quiet learning space. As Suksawas and Yiemkuntitavorn (2022) mentioned that Thai teachers need access to basic 'technologies' to support online teaching during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, they require additional training in multiple areas to support students to achieve the desired learning outcomes. The training would be help enhance teachers' confidence in teaching online and it can move the online classroom forward successfully.

However, there might not be an exact solution to reduce burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic since it depends on each individual, their responsibilities at their workplace, and their families. There were teachers in the focus group that said, it would be better if the workloads were reduced and the schools could be able to hire new teachers to help. This is related to Rajendran et al. (2019) who concluded that secondary teachers could benefit from a reduced

workload and that primary teachers could be helped by navigating the balance between family and work life.

Conclusion

Results from the qualitative analysis suggest that teachers have faced many demands during the pandemic and it can be seen from the analysis that teachers experience job burnout for many reasons. This article also explored ways to reduce teacher burnout from the perspective of teachers during the COVID-19 lockdowns, and puts forward targeted suggestions from the teacher level. However, school administrators need to provide supportive environments and guidance to teachers to ease anxiety. Support should range from instructional, to technological, to emotional support.

Last but not least, this study is just one of the empirical studies that identified factors contributing to teacher burnout due to COVID-19, along with coping mechanisms. Providing more support for teachers may also influence teacher efficacy during this challenging time. We hope this longitudinal data will highlight the essential components of English teaching and how English teachers can be supported in the current situation and beyond.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study represents only a snapshot of participants' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic after partial school closures. The participants in this study were teachers studying for a master's degree at an open university in Thailand. The sample included a cross-section of teachers that taught as different grade levels, subject areas, experiences, and age level. Moreover, we only gathered data on teachers' experiences and focused on teachers in mainstream primary and secondary schools, so the experiences in each school are likely to be different.

Future research needs to continue to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the new demands on teachers during the 2020-2022 school year. Furthermore, continued research may lead to more generalizable findings on the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' satisfaction, efficacy, and burnout.

Acknowledgement

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