Teachers’ views on causes leading to their burnout

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Teachers’ views on causes leading to their burnout

Maya El Helou, Mona Nabhani and Rima Bahous

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is a challenging profession sometimes leading to teachers’ burnout: a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. Burnout effects range from psychological, physical, and behavioural symptoms to increased turnover, which affects students and schools. This study identifies levels of and factors causing Lebanese teachers’ burnout by eliciting their perspectives about the matter. A multiple-case studies design is used; instruments include interviews, researcher’s reflective journal, and questionnaires adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey. Nine teachers who left the profession during the first five years of teaching were interviewed and 92 teachers in service responded to the questionnaire. A cross-case synthesis helped to compare the data between cases in order to discover whether similarities can be found. Triangulation of data is performed through comparing results from each instrument and identifying common categories that are used to address the research questions. Findings show that workload, school environment, coordination/mentoring, classroom environment, and emotional factors are major causes of burnout. This study provided insight on how to identify causes and symptoms of teacher burnout to help prevent the occurrence of the syndrome.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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KEYWORDS

Teacher burnout; causes; levels; Lebanon

Introduction

Teaching is educating every student in the classroom, regardless of academic, emotional, and social diversity, which can be exhausting and stressful to teachers (Papastylianou, Kaila, and Polychronopoulos 2009) and may lead to a devastating experience of burnout (Cephe 2010). Burnout is a psychological syndrome (Zhongying 2008) that was first introduced in the early 1970s (Gavish and Friedman 2010) by Freudenerger (Cephe 2010) who initially defined it as the collective effects of overwork, physical exhaustion, and professional frustration (Payne McLain 2005). It is a lasting physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion (Goddard, O’Brien, and Goddard 2006) due to the inability to control work stress over long periods of time (Young and Yue 2007) culminating in teachers detaching themselves from the profession and abandoning teaching altogether (McCarthey et al. 2010).

Burnout is a syndrome of three dimensions: ‘emotional exhaustion’ (EE), ‘depersonalisation’ (DP), and ‘reduced personal accomplishment’ (PA) (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter...
1996). EE is the key aspect of burnout (Papastylianou, Kaila, and Polychronopoulos 2009), characterised by overwhelming fatigue due to depletion of emotional energy (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter 1996). DP is manifested by negative feelings and attitude and detachment from students (Erkutlu 2012; Zhouchun 2011). Reduced PA refers to negative self-evaluation (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter 1996) because one’s efforts are not attaining the anticipated outcomes (Zhouchun 2011). One may feel incompetent (Erkutlu 2012), disappointed, and dissatisfied with job accomplishments (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter 1996).

Studies show that teachers in schools in 42 US states (Payne McLain 2005), Queensland (Goddard and Goddard 2006), Western China (Zhouchun 2011), Macau (Luk et al. 2010), Shangqiu (Zhongying 2008), England (Brackett et al. 2010), and Greece (Tsigilis, Zournatzi, and Koustelios 2011) suffer from burnout to a certain extent. Learners and schools are affected when teachers suffer from this syndrome (Cephe 2010; Gavish and Friedman 2010) whether they leave or stay in the profession.

The study was inspired by one of the researchers experiencing burnout and consequently quitting teaching; she documented her experience in a reflective journal, which became the springboard for this study that aims to explore Lebanese teachers’ perceptions of causes and levels of burnout in terms of personal and context-related factors. Many researchers studied factors related to teachers’ burnout, but no studies were conducted in Lebanese settings, making this study an addition to the literature on the topic and an eye-opener for teachers, administrators, mentors, and university curriculum designers to factors leading to burnout in Lebanese schools. The study uses a unique sample of teachers who reached burnout and left the profession and other teachers who are at various stages of their careers. A questionnaire, a researcher’s journal, and semi-structured interviews were used to enhance the reliability of findings.

The study will help teachers find ways to manage or prevent burnout, principals to devise plans to detect and remedy burnout problems, and mentors to guide teachers in avoiding burnout through managing its causes. It will also provide university curriculum designers with insight for reform that provides beginning teachers with strategies to avoid burnout by tackling its causes.

**Conceptual and theoretical framework**

Burnout is a symptom that appears mainly among individuals in human services and educational institutions whose jobs require continuous interactions with people. Self-esteem, respect, and recognition of one’s effort and achievement are human desires and so is belongingness to a community (Maslow 1943), which according to Adlerian psychology reduces feelings of isolation and promotes development. Moreover, ‘a belief in internal control’ (Rotter 1966, 1) impacts one’s behaviour positively contrary to being controlled by others.

Certain psychological concepts and theories could explain the occurrence of burnout for some rather than others in the same career. Some would perceive a situation as stressful while others would consider it as a welcome challenge (McCarthey et al. 2010), and some may experience different burnout levels than others in comparable situations as evident in studies from Australia (Goddard and Goddard 2006), Macau (Luk et al. 2010), Western China (Zhouchun 2011), Shangqiu (Zhongying 2008), and Greece (Tsigilis,
Zournatzi, and Koustelios 2011). The above implies that more research is needed to understand burnout in various contexts.

**Gender, age, experience, and burnout**

Some background factors are related to burnout while others are not. There is in fact a general belief that female teachers are more prone to burnout especially if they are married and have small children to care for and tend to at home. However, some studies do not support that. Purvanova and Muros (2010), for example, found that females exhibit slightly higher EE than males who exhibit higher DP burnout level, than females. McCarthy et al. (2010) found no significant relationship between burnout and gender, whereas Bümen (2010), Bataineh (2009), Luk et al. (2010), and Zhouchun (2011) found no significant difference in burnout levels between male and female teachers. Sezer (2012) and Çağlar (2011) found that female teachers have higher burnout levels than male teachers, while Koruklu et al. (2012) found that males exhibit more reduced PA than females. This implies that gender findings may be culture-specific.

Furthermore, some studies show that older teachers tend to have less burnout levels than younger ones (Chenevey, Ewing, and Whittington 2008; Koruklu et al. 2012; Sezer 2012), whereas Bataineh (2009) found no significant difference among teachers of various age groups in EE, DP, and reduced PA subscales. Bataineh (2009), Ozan (2009), and Papastylianou, Kaila, and Polychronopoulos (2009) found no link between teachers’ marital and family status and their burnout level, whereas Sezer (2012) found that teachers who have children show higher levels of burnout; Çağlar (2011) and Luk et al. (2010) found that single teachers experience higher burnout levels than their married counterparts.

Studies on relationships between years of teaching experience and burnout are also not conclusive. Some reveal that the longer the experience, the less the burnout syndrome ( Çağlar 2011; Sezer 2012; Vaezi and Fallah 2011; Zhouchun 2011); another shows the contrary (McCarthey et al. 2010), and another shows no significant relationship between both variables (Bataineh 2009). Other researchers found that teachers with better education exhibit higher levels of burnout than those with lesser educational levels (Bümen 2010; Sezer 2012).

**School-related factors leading to burnout**

School culture, politics, and rules can also lead to burnout. Erkutlu (2012) examined teachers’ perceptions in Turkey regarding burnout and organisational politics including back-stabbing, alliance building, and promotion and pay based on favouritism and found both correlate positively. Unfair policy adds to teachers’ nervousness (Zhouchun 2011). Moreover, teachers’ level of trust in the positive intentions and attitudes of colleagues and administrative staff correlate with burnout levels; as confidence increases, burnout level decreases ( Çağlar 2011). Teachers’ relationship with colleagues and administration also affect burnout levels; teachers who report problematic relationships with colleagues seem to display higher EE and DP than those who do not (Kukla-Acevedo 2009; Payne McLain 2005). Teachers who have problems with administration display higher EE than those who do not (Koruklu et al. 2012); schools’ unfriendly atmosphere where staff
members watch teachers closely checking how the job is done also causes high burnout levels (Zhouchun 2011).

Support for teachers

Other factors leading to teacher burnout are related to lack of support for teachers through induction, coordination, or professional development. Cephe (2010) identified lack of in-service training as one major burnout factor. Another was the need for a supervisor, a true mentor who cares (Schlichte, Yssl, and Merbler 2005). Also, when teachers perceive no adequate opportunities for professional development, they seem to display EE, which also increases upon receiving negative evaluation (Payne McLain 2005). In a study on principals’ coaching skills, Yirci et al. (2014) found that teachers want principals to motivate them to exert effort at work, give them feedback, and praise their work occasionally, but their principals do not. Lack of emotional support by administrators who care, listen to teachers, and provide feedback on actions predicted all the dimensions of burnout (Zhongying 2008).

Support by others could also affect teachers’ burnout. Lack of appreciation by students and the public (Gavish and Friedman 2010), lack of support by family (Zhouchun 2011), and by parents and community (Payne McLain 2005) can lead to burnout, while family support positively correlated with teachers’ PA (Bataineh 2009).

Grade levels taught and burnout

Teaching certain grade levels might impact burnout levels; for example, secondary school teachers have more burnout occurrences than primary teachers (Sezer 2012), teachers of grades 1–5 have more EE and reduced PA than teachers of grades 6–9 (Bümen 2010). Other studies found no significant difference between burnout levels among teachers of different grades (Luk et al. 2010; Zhouchun 2011). Class size also seems to be significantly related to burnout level; teachers of large classrooms display more burnout symptoms than those with smaller classrooms (Bümen 2010).

Workload and burnout

Other factors leading to teachers’ burnout include workload reflected in their perceptions of effort versus reward and in the actual duties inside and outside the classroom. Teachers who perceive a balance between the effort they put into their teaching profession and rewards they get out of it seem to show lower burnout scores than those who feel that the effort is higher than the reward; those who perceive effort-reward balance show more involvement in the job, innovation, and lower work pressure (Goddard, O’Brien, and Goddard 2006). Financial and moral rewards seem to be important for teachers. In some cases, financial pressure causes burnout (Zhouchun 2011) and so do low salaries (Cephe 2010). Moral rewards are received through students’ respect and interest in the lessons (Papastylianou, Kaila, and Polychronopoulos 2009), parents’ gratitude, and students’ success due to teachers’ time (Schlichte, Yssl, and Merbler 2005).

Teachers’ duties inside and outside the classroom such as time required for lesson preparation can increase EE, and so do reduced free time and increased feeling of tiredness.
caused by checking many exercise books (Zhouchun 2011). Heavy workload also includes providing feedback on assignments, preparations of quizzes, and evaluations; work pressure predicts burnout in all its aspects (Dorman 2003); and work demands contribute to developing the syndrome more rapidly (Goddard, O’Brien, and Goddard 2006).

**Classroom-related issues and burnout**

Classroom environment also impacts burnout. For example, higher DP levels are observed when classroom management is ineffective and when teachers teach large numbers of students (Payne McLain 2005). Teachers’ positive interactions with students, evident in caring for their social growth and personal welfare, positively impact teachers’ feeling of PA (Dorman 2003), whereas being disrespected by students and having one’s authority overlooked produce feelings of worthlessness and failure (Gavish and Friedman 2010).

Student management, including student engagement and co-operation, classroom organisation, order, and discipline, correlates significantly with EE (Bümen 2010). Problems in making students pay attention to the lesson can be a major cause of teachers’ burnout (Zhouchun 2011). Students’ polite behaviour is negatively related to EE (Dorman 2003). Moreover, the extent to which teachers believe in their ability to maintain classroom management affects burnout; teachers’ sense of efficacy to engage students decreases burnout (Bümen 2010), those unsure about their ability to manage discipline showed higher EE, and those who believed they were effective in classroom management showed lower DP (Payne McLain 2005).

**Curriculum, teaching, and burnout**

Other work environment variables that relate to burnout include teaching skills. Teachers perceiving themselves as incapable of consistent innovative teaching exhibited increasing burnout levels over time (Goddard, O’Brien, and Goddard 2006). Pressure of exams, not knowing how to use the textbook in the best manner, and how to apply designed activities in class led to teachers’ burnout (Zhouchun 2011). Teachers who did not believe in the effectiveness of their school curricula displayed higher burnout levels than others who described the programme as appropriate with certain deficiencies (Koruklu et al. 2012).

**Teachers’ expectations**

Psychological factors such as teachers’ expectations as compared to school reality and reasons behind their career choice also influence burnout. Many teachers enter the profession with high expectations of being able to help students academically, emotionally, and morally in a well-organised classroom but discover that regardless of all efforts, their expectations are not met (Young and Yue 2007), which may cause guilt feelings and depression (Zhouchun 2011); so, the lower the expectations, the lower the burnout levels (Çağlar 2011). Moreover, those who chose teaching wilfully display a higher sense of PA; those who chose it by chance display higher EE and DP levels with time (Ozan 2009).

The above literature is presented in a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that describes the burnout syndrome with all its subscales and causes. This framework helped us formulate our instruments and analyse our study findings.
The international literature demonstrates differences in relationships between burnout and factors such as gender, age, years of experience, level of education, and grade levels taught at school. These may be culturally specific; so, measuring and accounting for these factors shall constitute the impact of this study.

Method

We collected quantitative data from accessible schools, a convenience sample of all the available teachers of eight schools, four public, and four private, in three different areas in North Lebanon. We wanted to explore whether those teachers may be experiencing symptoms of burnout and whether they are aware of the phenomenon. Purposive sampling was also used for choosing participants with specific features or characteristics; teachers who have left the profession during the first five years of experience not due to travel, change of residence, or end of contract were found through snowball sampling. Each helped us find other teachers who have reached burnout and left teaching. Nine female teachers, experience ranging from 2 months to 5 years, who have left their teaching profession at least once during the first five years of being teachers, were interviewed face-to-face and were asked to respond to the same questionnaire as the one given to the school teachers (Table 1).

Thus, multiple-case studies were conducted which allowed the exploration of differences within and between cases from different contexts. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews provided a more comprehensive understanding of the problem of teachers’ burnout than either approach alone (Creswell 2014). One provided numerical data and the other provided rich descriptions by participants who experienced burnout. A convergent parallel design helped us elicit perspectives of teachers who left the profession and those who are still teaching (Merriam 2014; Yin 2014).

The first instrument is a reflective journal that was kept by one of the researchers who had experienced burnout and documented the phenomenon. Her involvement in the field of study is beneficial since she became more knowledgeable of the context of the study (Axinn and Pearce 2006). Concepts in her journal were used in forming the categories to be studied.

The teachers’ questionnaire was prepared in English, translated to Arabic, and then back translated to English to make sure the meaning has not changed. The first 10
items collect respondents’ personal and school background information. The second part includes a copy of the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI–ES) used to assess the three dimensions of the burnout syndrome, EE, DP, and lack of PA (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter 1996).

The MBI–ES questionnaire was purchased from the publisher Mindgarden.com; some statements were modified to become clearer to Lebanese teachers such as simplifying some vocabulary (Ozan 2009). It consists of 22 statements rated on a Likert-scale with 0 meaning never to 6 meaning every day (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter 1996). Nine items assess teachers’ feelings and perceptions associated with EE subscale of burnout, five are associated with the DP aspect, and eight with lack of PA aspect of burnout. We constructed the third part of the questionnaire using Likert-scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree, and not sure) based on the variables tackled in the interview questions: school and classroom environment, support, workload, and psychological factors. We added one subjective question to elicit participants’ opinions on main factors causing teachers’ exhaustion to enhance alignment between the questionnaire and interviews.

After piloting the questionnaire, necessary amendments related to language and item clarity were performed to enhance instrument validity. Copies in both languages were sent to the schools.

The questionnaire was distributed to 92 teachers in the 8 schools (68 were returned) in the absence of the principal and coordinators as recommended by Maslach et al.’s (1996) Burnout Inventory Manual to remove pressure and influence on them while they respond. Answers were anonymous; the term burnout was not mentioned.

The semi-structured interviews allowed us to ask a series of questions to elicit specific answers and add questions based on the respondents’ answers to clarify and probe (Fraenkel and Wallen 2010). Teachers were asked to describe their different duties inside and outside the classroom and how they felt about those and coped. The interviewees were encouraged to describe feelings, thoughts, intentions, and previous behaviours which provided an understanding of burnout causes and levels. Each interview was conducted in English, lasted 60–70 min, recorded, and then transcribed into an average of 10 pages each.

Qualitative and quantitative data were analysed separately and then findings were compared. Using the software SPSS and Microsoft Excel, scores on the MBI–ES questionnaire were added and the mean for each subscale was calculated, then the averages were categorised into three burnout level indicators ranging from high to low as described in the scoring key of the purchased instrument. In general, having high scores on EE and DP subscales and low scores on PA subscale reflect a high degree of burnout, while low scores on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Demographic data of respondents to questionnaire.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the EE and DP subscales and high scores on the PA subscale reflect a low degree of burnout, and average scores on all subscales reflect an average degree of burnout (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter 1996). Moreover, scores for each respondent were categorised according to the three burnout levels; then frequencies and percentages for each subscale were calculated.

Questionnaire data contributed to our understanding of burnout levels, which helped us in identifying examples of the burnout levels in interview data. Responses to the subjective item of the questionnaire were coded into 16 categories; then frequencies and percentages of all the respondents’ answers were calculated for each of the 16 categories and sample responses were reported as evidence. These were compared later on to interview data results for similarities and differences.

The interview transcripts were analysed inductively, then deductively by each researcher, and then results were compared to ensure trustworthiness. We read each transcript, colour-coded concepts that are relevant to causes and symptoms, and then categorised the concepts in themes that were later traced in the other interview transcripts. Then through cross-case synthesis, the major burnout causes for all interviewees were arranged into five emergent categories: workload, school environment, coordination/mentoring, discipline, and emotional factors with subcategories for each. Compatibility between data results from all instruments was examined and coherence was noted.

**Results**

**Levels of burnout**

Questionnaire results show that, on average, teachers who were still teaching displayed low levels of burnout on each subscale, whereas the nine who left their profession at least once during the first five years of experience showed high levels of burnout on each subscale (Tables 2 and 3).

To condense findings from questionnaires (see table below), teachers with moderate to high EE, DP, or reduced PA state five causes for burnout: upbringing of students, discipline, low achievement, academic role of parents, and students’ disinterest. Three causes for burnout are stated by teachers with high or moderate levels of burnout on the EE and reduced PA subscales: lesson preparation, large number of students, curriculum, and textbooks.

Questionnaire results, on average, indicate that current teachers in our sample exhibit burnout but at lower levels on each subscale than those expressed by the interviewed teachers (Table 4).

Results from analysing interviews show causes of teacher burnout similar to those derived from questionnaire data results (Table 5).

**Table 2.** Mean scores on the MBI–ES for all respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean scores on the MBI–ES</th>
<th>Teachers who were still teaching</th>
<th>Teachers who left the profession at least once</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean EE</td>
<td>16.78 (Low)</td>
<td>38.22 (High)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean DP</td>
<td>2.62 (Low)</td>
<td>10.44 (High)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean PA</td>
<td>42.18 (Low)</td>
<td>29.33 (High)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The five categories of burnout causes derived from interviewees are in decreasing order of occurrence: workload (80%), school environment (70%), coordination/mentoring (60%), discipline (30%), and emotional factors (20%).

Several reasons rendered teachers’ workload at home and school compared to salaries a major cause of burnout. Six out of eight teachers considered their salaries low compared to the effort and stress of the job although salary is not a major reason for quitting teaching compared to other reasons.

In conclusion, results can be grouped under three titles.

**School-related factors**

School environment factors are perceived as causing burnout by most participants: the relationship with the administration, power of parents/students, policies and rules of the school, and relationship with other teachers (Tables 6 and 7).

Coordinators, mentors, and teacher evaluation are perceived by most teachers as leading to burnout. For example, absence of coordinators and mentors means lack of induction. Over-demanding, interfering, and unsupportive coordinators in academic and classroom management matters is equally hard. Some may have negative communication with teachers and misinterpret causes hampering a teacher’s success in ways demeaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers who were still teaching after several years</th>
<th>Teachers who left the profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subscales</strong></td>
<td><strong>High burnout</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE subscale</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 out of 86 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP subscale</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 out of 85 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA subscale</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 out of 84 teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Percentages of teachers with different burnout levels on the different subscales.

Table 4. Causes of burnout stated by teachers with high or moderate burnout levels on the different subscales.
to the teacher’s expertise. One quote explains it further, ‘coordinator enters my classroom anytime she wants and ends up explaining to the students. This was one of the biggest reasons for me to quit … it is an insult’.

Many teachers found teacher evaluation a cause for burnout such as unfair, frequent, too detailed, subjective, and judgmental evaluations that emphasise negative points and disregard teachers’ positive efforts. However, lack of evaluations may also lead to a feeling of loss and confusion. Moreover, some coordinators are never satisfied with teachers’ work, always asking for more and imposing higher expectations than what teachers can give.

**Classroom-related factors**

Discipline-related matters are perceived by some teachers as causing burnout: lack of firm, clear, or practical rules, unwritten changeable rules, ineffective implementation, and reinforcement of rules due to parents’ interference, principal and teachers’ lack of authority, the type and number of students, and lack of guidance in dealing with classroom management and students with special needs.

**Personal factors**

Moreover, teachers who come to the profession without prior preparation for reality felt disillusioned. For few teachers, choice of the teaching career was based on the interesting theoretical courses taken in the university but could not be applied in practice.

Also, gender, age, marital status, educational level, years of experience, subject, and number of grade levels being taught, teaching load, support, among others, seem to

**Table 5. Some causes of burnout from interviews.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Reason for Burnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘This was the main reason why I left this profession. I entered the school, immediately I held the responsibility of a class on my own, was overwhelmed’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘The principal started yelling how come you discuss such a sensitive topic … How am I supposed to know what I should or shouldn’t cover?’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I never received any appreciation from the administration … and this made me so tired … they always ask for more … one word of appreciation would have been enough …’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘They say a teacher’s job is half day. But this is not true, you take the kids’ problems home with you and the corrections, and preparations … that’s why I decided to leave … it’s tiring not only to prepare but to also be creative …’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I don’t like taking anything home with me. The pressure of the exams and the number of hours at school are too much.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘There were rules, but they were not implemented 100%. I felt that no one could control the students, they say their opinion … that affected the school’s attitude toward the teachers … the administration does what the parents want most of the time’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘There were a lot of gossiping, talking, and problems among teachers … I wanted to pull out of this atmosphere’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘There were several duties thrown on us. And we have to prepare for instance to the end of year party, we have to teach dances, even though we are math or science teachers …’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6. Reasons that make the relationship with the administration a major cause of burnout.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Incompetent, unprofessional, uncaring, or disrespectful principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Coordinators less competent and yet want to tell teachers what to do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Administrators that are unresponsive and not flexible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Principal negatively and illogically interfering with teachers’ lessons and plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Administration that does not treat all the teachers fairly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Administration that does not appreciate teachers’ efforts, demanding, and picky</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
impact teachers’ burnout levels. For example, teachers younger than 50 years, married teachers, as well as those with less than 20 years of experience display high depersonalised burnout levels than their counterparts (Table 8).

Discussion of findings

New findings

Burnout levels related to the number of grade levels taught were not tackled in the reviewed literature, but our findings showed that teachers who prepare for and teach more than or equal to four different grade levels experience higher DP levels than those who teach fewer grade levels. We also found that the nature of the subject taught influences burnout levels; math teachers display higher burnout levels on the EE and DP subscales than science, art, languages, or social studies teachers.

Other new findings are related to work environment factors causing burnout; negative and illogical interference of the administration through disrupting lesson delivery and asking the teacher to stop a lesson and come up with new method on the spot. Coordinators demanding extra chores rather than helping and guiding teachers; uncertainty caused by the absence of teacher evaluations; unfair, subjective, judgmental, frequent, and detailed evaluations were also causes for burnout. Dealing with discipline problems, especially in boys’ classes, and physical tiredness resulting from non-instructional duties leaving no time for rest led to burnout.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7. Reasons that make the policies and rules a major cause of burnout.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Unfair class distribution, teaching a large number of different grade levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Having to attend workshops that have nothing to do with teacher’s needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) School duty on days off to correct exams and do activities for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Shorter summer vacations than the regular range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Biweekly afternoon coordination meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Extracurricular and playground duties besides regular teaching duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Correcting many exams in a short period of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Unclear and unfixed rules that could be altered at random occasions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) No sense of control, everything is imposed on teachers and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Having to follow a standardised teaching method</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8. Elements of Burnout/DP levels.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching grades 4–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching grades 10–12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Teaching languages</td>
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New findings pertaining to classroom environment factors of burnout include lack of firm, clear, written discipline rules and administrators contradicting teachers’ decisions on discipline in front of the students. Teachers’ perceptions that teaching was a wrong choice also led to burnout.

Our findings were aligned with or comparable to those in the reviewed literature. For example, contrary to findings by Sezer (2012) and Çağlar (2011) that female teachers have higher burnout levels than male teachers, our findings show higher DP levels for males than females: Mean of male DP (4.25) is higher than female levels (mean = 2.49) which is similar to the findings of Purvanova and Muros (2010).

Teachers younger than 50 years of age show higher levels of burnout on the DP subscale than those who are older. Chenevey, Ewing, and Whittington (2008), Koruklu et al. (2012), and Sezer (2012) had also found that younger teachers have higher burnout levels than older teachers.

Married teachers also display higher burnout levels than single teachers on all subscales which is aligned with Sezer’s (2012) finding that teachers who have children show higher levels of burnout but contradicts Çağlar’s (2011) and Luk et al.’s (2010) that single teachers experience higher burnout than married ones.

Grades 4–6 teachers displayed higher EE and DP levels than all the other grade levels, which is similar to Bümen’s (2010) finding and contrary to Sezer’s (2012) finding that more secondary teachers experience burnout than their primary counterparts.

In addition, teachers with less than 20 years of experience display higher burnout levels than those with more than 20 years of experience, as was also found by Luk et al. (2010), Çağlar (2011), Sezer (2012), Vaezi and Fallah (2011), and Zhouchun (2011). This, however, disagrees with McCarthey et al.’s (2010) finding that the more the work experience, the more the burnout syndrome.

Emotional support by family and friends is also related to teacher burnout; Schlichte, Yssl, and Merbler (2005) found that lack of emotional support causes burnout; and when support increases, burnout level decreases (Payne McLain 2005). However, our findings show that lack of emotional support from family, society, or colleagues is not a cause for burnout; whether there is support or not, teachers believe that facing the same issues of teaching every day is the main cause of burnout. This is parallel to Gavish and Friedman’s (2010) finding that there is no link between collegial support and novice teachers’ burnout and to Bataineh’s (2009) of no significant association between colleague, supervisor, friends, or spouse support and burnout.

Another finding was that teachers who chose the profession not for the sake of teaching but for other purposes experienced burnout, which is similar to Ozan’s (2009) finding. Moreover, teachers with high levels of EE, DP, and reduced PA had found discrepancy between their job expectations and the reality of their work; the lower the expectations, the lower the burnout levels (Çağlar 2011).

**Classroom-related factors**

Moreover, math teachers and those who teach more than 25 hours per week display higher levels of burnout on the EE and the DP subscales than their counterparts; teachers who teach more than three grade levels show higher DP than their counterparts. Most of the respondents with high EE seem to suffer due to time needed to correct students’ work.
and prepare lessons at home for many grade levels. This is in line with Dorman’s (2003) findings that work pressure is one of the factors that predict burnout on all its subscales, Cephe’s (2010) finding that heavy workload in terms of preparation and providing evaluation of and feedback on assignments cause burnout, and Payne McLain’s (2005) finding that as the weekly preparation time increases, the EE increases. Our findings indicate that teachers’ workload at home is a cause of burnout because it leaves no time for social life, which is parallel to Zhouchun’s (2011) findings.

Teachers suffering high burnout levels on the EE and reduced PA subscales perceived their students as impolite and responsible for discipline problems in class, which is similar to Gavish and Friedman’s (2010), and Payne McLain’s (2005) findings that teachers who did not have a good relationship with their students and whose students challenged their authority and were disrespected had deep feelings of worthlessness and failure. Teachers who were unsure about their ability to manage discipline showed higher EE levels than other teachers (Payne McLain 2005).

Lack of support and guidance by coordinators and administration in classroom management, lesson planning, and teaching content can lead to burnout. Zhouchun (2011) found that one cause of burnout for a teacher is not knowing how to use the textbook properly and apply activities in the classroom. Cephe (2010) had argued that support staff such as supervisors are needed, provided they are effective, positive, and helpful in academic and classroom management matters.

Several student-related factors were found to be causes for teachers’ exhaustion and burnout such as the type and number of students in class, their disinterest, and low achievement. Teaching large classes caused teacher EE and reduced PA (Bümen 2010; Payne McLain 2005). Gavish and Friedman’s (2010) major predictor of EE was lack of appreciation by students, while Zhouchun (2011) and Bümen (2010) found that teachers’ inability to engage students in class and having unmet expectations for students’ achievement caused burnout.

**School-related factors**

Our findings show that teachers’ problems with the administration display higher burnout levels on the EE subscale than teachers who do not have such problems (Koruklu et al. 2012). For instance, having an incompetent principal is a cause for burnout (Cephe 2010), and so was unfair preferential treatment of teachers (Erkutlu 2012). Having school principals who do not appreciate teachers’ efforts and overburden them with duties all day long was parallel to Schlichte et al.’s (2005) finding. Similar to Cephe (2010), our findings show that negative communication by the administration, and having uncaring, disrespectful, judgemental principals led to teachers’ burnout. Findings are also aligned with Erkutlu’s (2012) that perceptions of backstabbing and alliance building in the school are related to burnout, and with Payne McLain’s (2005) that teachers who did not feel part of a team showed higher burnout levels than others.

Unfair rewards, control by the administration, and diminished belongingness also lead to burnout. Teachers with high levels of burnout on all subscales agreed that they receive unfair rewards, that is, their effort is higher than the reward (Goddard, O’Brien, and Goddard 2006). Zhouchun (2011) and Cephe (2010) also found that the financial pressure and low salaries are among the main causes of teachers’ burnout.
One problematic aspect of policies and rules was teachers’ lack of authority to suggest new ideas or introduce changes in the curriculum, both factors leading to the DP subscale of burnout as was also found by Goddard, O’Brien, and Goddard (2006).

Gossip, negative relationships with some teachers, and feeling isolated led to burnout (Kukla-Acevedo 2009; Zhouchun 2011). Poor physical facilities can also cause high burnout levels on all the subscales (Young and Yue 2007; Zhouchun 2011).

Another source of burnout is teacher evaluations that emphasize negative points and ignore positive aspects of teachers’ performances, a practice by hard to please coordinators with expectations much higher than what the teachers can do in current situations. Receiving negative evaluations increased teacher burnout (Payne McLain 2005).

A conceptual framework that compares our findings to those in the reviewed literature sheds light on our new findings (Figure 2).

Limitations

One limitation may be caused by the small number of the interviewed teachers, most of whom were females. The small convenience sample of interviewees and questionnaire respondents will not allow generalisations of our study findings within Lebanon and beyond, but this was not our purpose. This study aimed at shedding light on a

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**Figure 2.** Conceptual framework including new findings on burnout causes.
phenomenon that needs addressing so teacher educators can devise strategies to support teachers and retain them.

Another limitation could be the reliance on one researcher’s experience documented in a reflective journal; however, experiences and views of those closest to a problem render them valid as resource.

**Suggestions**

Suggestions for school principals and directors include hiring novice teachers as teacher assistants for one term before assuming full responsibility for classrooms in order to allow them time and exposure to the realities of actual teaching. We also suggest policy change to decrease the number of teaching hours and remove duties that are not directly related to teaching, which gives teachers more time for preparing lessons and grading students’ work during the school day and not at home. Providing teachers with the required books and resources weeks before the start of the academic year will allow them time to read, research, and prepare their courses at a relaxed pace. Based on our findings, we also recommend that principals avoid assigning to one teacher many grade levels that require several different preparations. Longitudinal studies will also help measure the levels and causes of burnout and the impact over time in schools.

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