

Analysis of Causes and Strategies of Teachers' Burnout in Middle Schools

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Abstract—The issue of teachers' burnout has become one of the common concerns for educational researchers all over the world. Related researches indicate that mental health among school teachers is relative low compared to other career groups. Teachers' burnout has high influences on teachers' mental health. This thesis attempts to take a systematic approach to study the issue from four different aspects, namely workload burdens, student issues, social values and living conditions. Relative coping strategies are to be found at the end of this research.

Keywords—*teachers' burnout; causes; strategies*

I. INTRODUCTION

Occupational burnout is fairly common among elementary and secondary school teachers. Such social problem has been investigated in foreign countries for long. Many of these researches suggest that more teachers grievously suffered psychological problems compared with other occupations. Among the factors significantly affecting teachers' physical and mental health, occupational burnout slows teachers' career progression, hinders their teaching, stunts students' health growth, and prevents them from forming a good character. The teacher is reputed to the "most shining profession under the sun", but why do teachers end up growing weary of the most shining profession? How to address this paradox? This problem is to be studied in the following aspects.

II. ANALYSIS OF CAUSES OF TEACHERS' BURNOUT IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

According to author's investigation, it is found that teachers' burnout is not the response for a particular event which happened at a specific time in a specific place but entirely due to the long-term pressure. The reasons of teachers' burnout are manifold. In this paper, the author wants to analyze the main factors several aspects as follows: teaching profession, workload, relationship with students and social expectations, etc.

A. *Extra Workload Burdens and Keen Competition of Career Pressure*

It is common knowledge that teachers' workload burdens are heavy. According to author's years of learning experience and related researches, there are 30% or more teachers whose

working hours is more than 10 hours a day. Especially the teachers of graduating class, it seemed that their working time is much longer than others. Taking the teacher who is in charge of a class as an example, they usually get up at 6:00 in the morning, and cannot leave school until 10:00 even 11:00 when students finish their individual study in the evening. According to present situation, the problem of large class size teaching exists among most schools in cities and towns in China, in particular in good schools. Students usually prefer better schools, and this leads to the hundred-size class in those schools, even in ordinary schools there is the class which contains 70 or more students. It virtually adds to teachers working tasks, while the sense of mission makes them have to teach well, only this can account for parents and schools. For achieving this goal, they have to work harder. With the sharper increase of competition, the pressure of students entering schools of a higher grade of education is growing heavier and heavier, especially under current system of education. This proportion is becoming an essential index for evaluating teachers, and also becoming the heavy burden of teachers. What's more, in pace with people's great attention to education and educational background, parents place high hopes on teachers. Educational department and the headmasters want to get good teaching quality and high-level grade from teachers through all kinds of ways in order to raise the proportion of students entering schools of a higher grade. As a result, a lot of classes for supplementary schooling come in a continuous stream, it is even worse to the teachers of graduating classes, and they have to give lessons after work, no matter on weekends or in summer and winter vacation, even the legal holidays. These schools completely disregard that teachers are the same person as others, and they also need to have a rest! Now the principal contradiction is that good higher educational resource is limited and everyone wants to get into it. Parents sometimes lose contact with their children's reality and place high hopes on them, thereby they bring more pressure to teachers. Certainly, it's the common thoughts that parents always hope their children will have a bright future, could it be said that teachers should take all the responsibilities? As long as they take children to schools, they hold the idea that teachers should be responsible for all. How pitiable the teachers are! Limited right, limitless liability! Parents blamed teachers for children's bad school records, headmasters blamed teachers for the low proportion of students entering higher grade, why do the teachers bear these sufferings? And who cares teachers' feelings?

Such long-term and repeated mental work makes teachers lack of enthusiasm, but most authority doesn't take it seriously at all, and teachers still be employed as machines. The authority neglects that teachers are also the vivid person who need to get fixed rest and relaxation. According to one investigation, over 70% school teachers don't have necessary recreational and sports activities and social intercourse at all. Teachers lost their original elasticity because of they are in such tough and tight situation for a long period of time. And even worse, most middle-aged teachers' health go from bad to worse due to such long-termed heavy working pressure. What is more, this kind of situation doesn't attract government's attention at all. It is common that the government officials enjoy free routine examination once a year, but there are no laws and regulations providing the same right to teachers. It is unfair to teachers! There is another undeniable fact, that is, the war of enrolling new students among schools, which caused by One Child Policy in China. This policy leads to sharp decrease of school-aged children. The schools have to scramble for school children, and then teachers are forced to enter into this chaotic enrollment system. They are asked to go the students' again and again, just for a good student. Teachers are looked down upon by parents and students when they do like this. What a shame to teachers! The demand as a teacher and the responsibility they took for society make teachers be weighed down with work. They are in a working environment which is lack of support and sense of respect, they bear the huge mental pressure, and all of these lead to occupational burnout.

B. Students Disobedience and Negative Teacher-Student Relationship

The modern education emphasizes the new democratic teacher-student relationship, but in fact this democratic and peaceful relationship is hard to be maintained in reality. The problem of controlling undisciplined students who are out of control has become a core causes for teacher's occupational burnout. This is especially being seen: First, students group mainly consists of single child of the family. Single Child has unique character They have a comfortable life, and have great focus from family, strong personal character, self-centered, low psychological quality. These kids are pampered in the family by their parents and grandparents, indirectly promoting bad habits which are against the educational purpose of the school. There has created problems which bring difficulty and inconvenience to teachers to handle this kind of students. Second, nowadays students are facing problems of homework burdens and pressures from the parents. In ignorance for a proper personal development and students' talents, students are forced to participate in different additional training classes or tuition such as Olympic Mathematics, English, Art, Dance, Piano etc. The students experience studies burden in the school and face pressure from family at home, will started develop negative study mood. When students are unable to get proper rest and relax at home, they will bring negative mood to the school and to the class room, and this will affect the teachers. Third, it is the negative social impact. The cyber cafes are not operating according to rules will provide

service to non-adults. Students will be obsessed and able to be affected the pornographies, violence content available online. Teachers and students will have conflicts with students while trying to correct this situation. As this goes on, the teacher-student relationship will be damaged. Teachers gain no respect and preference from students and will affect the working spirit. Besides this, there exist some corrupt and ugly practices, such as profligate sons of the rich and official, this kind of students have become the "hard bone" in teachers' management, teachers are always placed in dilemma as to whether to be strict with them or to do nothing with them. Fourth, it is the long-standing traditional concept. Teachers are regarded as the perfect man by people from ancient times to the present, it is even worse in modern times. The invisible media is so horrible that teachers' a little bit mistake would be exaggerated, and bring negative social impact on teachers. A real example which happened in a high school of Sanyuan county, Shaanxi Province, China will be shown in the following content. Three students disturbed class order in a biology class, the female teacher stopped them from doing so several times but failed, what's worse was they enraged teacher into crying by contemptible means. Later, another teacher, who is in charge of this class, criticized these three students but the way he did was a little improperly. Hence, this matter was wide spread and exaggerated immediately through local media. They asked this teacher to make a public apology to three students and their parents. This is the whole course of the incident. From the author's point of view, this problem was not properly handled, so the teacher should apologize to students and their parents. But, what confused people are as follows: why didn't media blame these three students for what they have done to the female teacher in class? Why did media exaggerate teacher's mistake but neglect students' disgusting conduct? Why did they treat teachers so harshly? You can imagine, if these three students didn't disturb class order badly, how could teacher punish them extremely? What's more, they did contemptibly to their female teacher, why didn't the media ask the students and their parents to apologize to this female teacher? They've been adults not the childish children any more, could it be said that parents take no responsibility for it? The author doesn't think so. Parents should also take responsibility for educating students. It is incorrect to put all the blame on teachers when conflict occurred.

C. The Meager Income and Relative Low Social Status

Teacher as an average person, they need to get money as the material base to make sure their survival and development. Teachers' wages got a little improvement through reforms of the wage system, but it is still in the lower status comparing with other trades and professions. Many teachers are not rich and they bear the economic pressure of different degrees. In particular the teachers in countryside, they are penniless like other low walks of life. Their income is nearly the same level as the local farmers. People who learned the political economics all knew that the superstructure is decided by the economic basis, so teachers' meager income makes them stay in a relative low social status. The gap between reality and ideal is so impassable that teachers' enthusiasm is dampened very much. Nowadays

the reform of personnel system in schools also break teachers' "iron rice bowl" into pieces which leads to the loss of sense of career security. Respecting teachers and their teaching are on the initiative of the government, but due to their teaching achievements are always coming behind, they are still in the low sense of identity. They do the ordinary work alone day by day, and lack of the necessary communication with external world, they will become estranged from society if things go on like this. When they faced the heavy economic burden, the insurmountable barrier between the meager income and their great contribution, their working enthusiasm is dampened, their career confidence lost, and teachers' burnout comes into being.

D. The Arduous Life Conditions and Hard Working Environment

Unlike government offices and factories in cities, schools are usually established in rural area, even the remote districts according to the actual distribution of school-age children. The transportation there is very inconvenient and it is difficult for teachers to go out. Because of the shortage of capital on elementary education several years before, most schools got the problems of insufficient built-up area, infrastructure and the poor quality. The schools' environment is barely satisfactory. Even the enclosing walls are made of soil, muddy road everywhere in schools, let alone greenbelt and gardens. Even teaching area is simple and crude, to say nothing of teachers' living conditions. The rural teachers' house problem has always been the policy "blind spot", the present housing reform policy in China doesn't bring any profit to rural teachers. The situation of two teachers live in one bedroom which area is less than 10 square meters is nothing new among rural schools. Their living conditions makes people worried, and even worse they still have to face the actual difficulty of no house to live when they are retired. Most rural schools don't have enough money to build houses for teachers, and this brings a lot of troubles to their daily life and work. Supposing they can overcome living difficulties, but how could they solve the problem of eating? According to author's investigation of schools in remote districts, most of them don't have the presentable dining halls, and the problem of eating isn't implemented. The quality of meal in some schools is poor, and what's worse, some don't have dining hall at all. Most teachers have no choice but to solve this problem themselves. Let's take the office conditions as an example once more. As the related statistical figures show, the average office area of rural teachers is not up to the national standard (3.5 square meters per person) at all, and most offices are not well equipped. All of these brought great inconvenience to teachers' daily work. What's more, there exists a problem that can not be neglected in this area — teachers' family issue. Especially the problems of couples live apart, difficulties for young teachers looking for a partner in marriage etc. It seems that these are not worth mentioning, but they decide whether teachers can work contentedly or not. How would teachers be in good mood if these trifling matters can not be solved for a long period of time? To a great extent, these problems have been brought mental pressure to teachers.

III. SOLUTIONS TO TEACHERS' BURNOUT

In response to teachers' burnout, the key solution is to practice humanistic approach in teacher management. The modern education development needs humanistic management. The school administrator should fully aware of the influences brought by teachers' burnout and identify the causes. In humanistic management, strategies like law enforcement, school policy change etc., should be focused to reduce teachers' burnout.

A. Humanistic Teachers' Evaluation

In order to reduce teachers' work burden, a humanistic approach to teachers' evaluation is an important factor. The government, education department and relevant authorities should look into this matter and adjust the current class size. Firstly, government should regulate the establishment for teachers units, work out a standard scheme which should be in accordance with the class size. Regardless of size of classes, teachers' workload is nearly the same. For each class there should have been 2.5 teachers in primary schools, and 4 in middle schools, as in full-boarding schools one more teacher should be added to each class. Secondly, the teachers' educational background should be emphasized. There must be teachers for every class. Hence, there must be additional alternates for teachers' absenteeism due to sickness, pregnancy etc. Thirdly, the government should adjust the current large class size in the cities to reasonable class size. Studies have shown that practically there should not be more than 45 students in a class. If not, it will increase teachers' workloads and affect the teaching. Fourthly, there must a reasonable, fair and humanistic system for teachers' evaluation. It must evaluate different aspects like moral, commitment, ability, results etc. There must be prohibition for evaluation based on results of school in standardized tests. Class size, student background, educational foundation should be taken into considerations. Only then the teachers can enjoy a fair and reasonable evaluation.

B. Rules and Regulations to Protect Teachers

Among the solutions to teachers' burnout, the rules and regulations which help protect teachers play an important role. It is believed that the following aspects should be addressed. Firstly, make sure The Teachers Law of the PRC, The Educational Law of the PRC and The Labor Protection Act of PRC come into being. The school administrators should learn and carry out rules and regulations conscientiously, especially ones which closely related to teachers' personal safety and profit. Secondly, to tighten up the government educational functions of different levels, comprehensively inspecting and evaluating educational administrative departments and schools; to correct the phenomenon of working overtime during vacations in middle-schools, evaluating teachers just according to test scores, etc.. Thirdly, there is a need for improvement and new innovation. According to the education development, there are new directions, new conflicts, and new problems but the amendments of laws have helped to protect the teachers. Fourthly, teachers must have self-esteem, self-consciousness and self-disciplines to carry the duties given

by the country as a teacher. They must be obligated to the laws and contribute selflessly. At the same time, follow the laws as guidelines to protect, evaluate and develop self's personalities and responsibilities.

C. Social Impacts

There should be a student education network that combines the parents, government, school and the society which helps to implement quality education and ease the students' studies burden. This will change the negative study mood of the students and brings back a lively learning environment which adjusts teachers' burnout back to normal state. It is suggested that an active approach should be taken to ban additional classes during holidays, prolonged class time, heavy homework loads etc. The education system should be restructured which avoid too many examinations which students spend their whole school life preparing for and try to focus on a liberal education system. Students need an environment to grow happily and enjoy life such as taking part in extra-curricular activities, sports, and community service. This is ensure students have a more balanced life and will face studies, life and teachers more positively. This brings back a cheerful and lively classroom to teachers and students to interact and learn. Besides that, the safety department, cultural department and education department should team up to provide a better study environment by taking legal actions on the cyber cafes that serve under-aged students. By eliminating the negative sources that would contaminate students, it provides a clean environment which promotes healthy growth and boosts the moral among students. Other than that, the government should establish a reasonable control system. There must be lawful guidelines for education involving the students, parents and societies. This is to prevent teachers taking too much responsibility as all parties play equally vital roles in educating students. From this point of view, the civil responsibilities of students and parents should be well written in the laws and regulations. Teachers can follow these guidelines while teaching students. Quality social support from the society helps reduces teachers psychological stress and promote healthier state of mind.

D. Better Salary and Benefits for Teachers

Teachers' benefits such as salary and working environment should be well taken care of. These will indirectly change to social status of teachers and reduce teachers' burnout. As the economy of the country is rising, most of the civil servants gain increases of salary but teachers' salary are still relatively low. In considerations of their working nature, work environment, working environment etc., are much burdened compared to other civil servants, they should enjoy higher benefits. In well-developed country, teachers' salary is much higher than China. Hence, it is suggested that the teachers in China should enjoy a 20% higher salary than the local civil servant and compensations and stipend to teachers working in rural areas. It is important to bring the living of teachers to a upper level. When teachers' salary increases and have better life, the social status will definitely be boosted as well. There should be a balance between the work teachers contribute

and the rewards they get. This is brings in passion in work, and make the career that everyone loves. Secondly, the government should pay high attention to improve the teachers' work environment. Teachers need a good environment where they could work happily and comfortably. As the country's economy is getting better, the government improves the projects of reconstructing dangerous and old schools and expands the project for the beneficial of more school. Other than that, the teachers' accommodation and office should also be taken care of. Budget of money should also be allocated on beautifying the school environment and improve the quality of schools in the rural areas. Meanwhile, the government should pay relatively high attention to teachers' life such as having the regular meals healthy and tasty, entertainment after work. It is necessary to ensure that teachers are healthy and have a well-balanced life. Thirdly, the teachers' health should be taken care of. There are many teachers suffer from chronic diseases at their middle ages. This brings disaster to the individuals, families and schools. Hence the government should launch the "teacher's healthy plan". It is recommended to provide annual free health screening to teachers aged 45 or older. This is to detect any health problems and provide appropriate treatment before it gets worse. Fourthly, the government should enhance the teachers' training program. Teachers are professionals who need to keep on enhancing their teaching skills and personal qualities. Hence, appropriate training is needed not only for teachers' work development, and it is also the teachers' right and responsibilities. Currently in china there is a dramatic change in the high school curriculum. As to face this dramatic change in curriculum, teachers need to learn the new education system and come out with new teaching methods. Therefore, the state government and the education department have launched different kind of trainings covering the nation, states, and counties. But actually how many of this training are effective and really beneficial. It is recommended that the relevant authorities provide thorough training to teachers every five years and the training should last half a year or a year. And the training can be implemented or conducted by the state and provinces teaching colleges. This training provides a chance for teachers to sharpen their skills, widen their knowledge, open their mind sets which will eventually bring benefits to the students.

E. Self Adjustment

Last but not least, teachers should understand the possibilities and limitations of their career. Instead of focusing on the profession's objective and responsibility of educating the future leaders, teachers should be aware that teachers are just the same as normal person who have feelings — happiness and sadness, emotions. Teachers should not be upset if the current situation is far from expectations. Teachers should try to identify the strengths and weaknesses, be a real person but not what the society expected. There must be correct attitude and positive thinking in the profession. Look positively to the career, look positively to the people around, be generous about life and work for the betterment. Teachers who love the students as

much as they love themselves are the real teachers. They will stay happy and healthy.

IV. CONCLUSION

The analysis in this paper indicates that both objective and subjective factors may cause occupational burnout among elementary and secondary school teachers. Once teachers are caught up in a vicious cycle of occupational burnout, teaching and learning will be severely jeopardized. Therefore, the governments at various levels, schools, and teachers are expected to pool efforts to take countermeasures, establish a management system facilitating the career development of teachers, arouse their enthusiasm, and reduce their fatigue, thereby jointly promote healthy educational development.

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