

The Job Burnout of College English Teachers in China: *The Current Situation, Problems and Countermeasures*

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ABSTRACT

Job burnout is a common concern in the current psychology field. The phenomenon of job burnout among college English teachers in China should arouse sufficient attention from teachers, colleges and universities and society. This research focuses on three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. It aims to comprehensively sort out the current research status of college English teachers' job burnout, by analyzing personal factors, external factors and its adverse effects of job burnout, and then puts forward some corresponding countermeasures from three perspectives of teachers, universities and society. This research is helpful for college English teachers to objectively view their own job burnout problems and to effectively solve a series of problems correspondingly. It has important enlightenment for the improvement of college teachers' professional well-being, the management of college authorities and the reform of national education policies.

Keywords: *college English teacher, job burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment*

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of job burnout was first proposed by the American clinical psychologist Freudenberg in 1974 [1]. It is a psychological symptom that occurs in the occupational field where people are the service object, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low/reduced personal accomplishment [2]. Among them, emotional exhaustion is the core part of job burnout, which refers to the emotional state of extreme fatigue. If this fatigued emotional state continues, the individual will show negative and indifferent behaviours toward the service object, which is referred to as dehumanization. Low accomplishment refers to the decrease in the sense of efficacy at work and the increase in negative evaluation of oneself.

Job burnout will cause teachers to fail to realize their potential and to perform their duties effectively. After experiencing job burnout, teachers tend to lose patience and love for students, reduce their sufficiency in course preparation, and reduce their sense of control and accomplishment in their work. There are a huge number of college English teachers in China, and their English teaching targets involve almost all college students. Their job burnout has a notable negative impact on teachers themselves, their work, schools and society.

In recent years, the internationalization of China's higher education has been accelerating. College English teachers are under greater pressure in teaching and research than before. The phenomenon of job burnout is urgently to be explored. This article intends to conduct an overall research from the three levels of 'teacher-university-society', systematically sorting out the main causes, influencing factors and coping strategies of college English teachers' job burnout, which will help teachers, researchers and management departments effectively deal with their job burnout.

2. JOB BURNOUT OF COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHERS IN CHINA

Studies at home and abroad have found that both organizational factors and individual factors can lead to teacher burnout. However, simply focusing on organizational factors cannot explain why the degree of teacher burnout in similar external work environments is very different. Therefore, researchers are gradually turning their attention to demographic variables and individual factors. Personality characteristics are one of the important factors affecting job burnout. Foreign researchers believe that neuroticism among the five personality characteristics of neuroticism, extroversion,

openness, homosexuality, and rigorousness will directly lead to job burnout [3], while the remaining 4 personality characteristics have a negative predictive effect on teacher's job burnout [4].

The empirical research on job burnout of college English teachers mostly focuses on the investigation of some limited situation of college English teachers' job burnout, the analysis of influencing factors and coping strategies. Domestic scholars agree that college English teachers are generally at a moderate or mild burnout level, and the proportion of teachers at a high burnout level is relatively low.

2.1. Emotional Exhaustion

There is a significant difference in the exhaustion dimension of academic qualifications. The exhaustion of teachers with a bachelor's degree is significantly higher than that of teachers with a master's degree, because they are generally inferior to master's teachers in terms of basic language skills and teaching and research experience, so they may need to invest in their work more, and thus are prone to be in a more fatigued state. In addition, there is a significant difference in the exhaustion dimension of teaching age. The exhaustion of teachers with a teaching age of 15-20 years is significantly higher than that of teachers of other teaching ages, because teachers with longer teaching years or higher professional titles are faced with higher tests and challenges to update their educational concepts and improve teaching methods and information technology capabilities [5].

2.2. Depersonalization

The overall level of the depersonalization factor is the lowest. This is certainly related to the self-defence psychology of teachers' unwillingness to expose their own shortcomings too much, but more importantly, teachers can be aware of the importance of respecting and make adjustments. Therefore, the depersonalization of most college English teachers is manifested as an unconditional adaptation to working environment and students.

2.3. Reduced Personal Accomplishment

It has been found in previous studies that gender and marital status have significant differences in the reduction of sense of accomplishment. Female teachers are notably higher than male teachers in the reduction of their personal sense of accomplishment, and married teachers are significantly higher than unmarried teachers.

3. CAUSE RESEARCH

As a marginalized group of college English teachers, their emotional exhaustion and low sense of

accomplishment are more serious, but the phenomenon of depersonalization shows a relatively slight tendency.

3.1. Individual Internal Factors

From the perspective of college English teachers themselves, the weakening of their professional development is the main cause of job burnout. The shortcomings of some policies concerning their professional titles and academic qualifications have caused many teachers to doubt their own professional ability, which increases their negative feelings and decreases their sense of accomplishment. Their personal cognition of the external environment is also a key factor leading to job burnout, which is manifested in three aspects: the contradiction of the teacher's self-cognition, that is, the contrast between the spiritual self and the social self, and the difference between the ideal self and the actual self; the teacher's negative self-experience, that is, the lack of self-worth and the lack of self-fulfilment; the failure of the teacher's self-regulation.

In addition, there are obvious burnout differences in gender, educational background and teaching experience. The level of emotional exhaustion of female teachers is more severe than those of male teachers. Female teachers are psychologically more sensitive than men to others' evaluation, therefore the professional value misalignment standards have become an important source of psychological pressure for them. Female teachers also have to take on more family responsibilities, the scope of communication is generally narrower than that of male teachers, and they have fewer outlets for catharsis. When faced with such pressures, female teachers are less able to bear them than male teachers.

The current research shows that college English teachers in the '30-50' age group have significantly higher levels of burnout than those in the '20-30' age group. The decrease in personal accomplishment of teachers over the age of 50 is more pronounced; on the whole, college English teachers with a master's degree and below show a high degree of emotional exhaustion; the degree of reduction in the personal achievement of lecturers is the most serious; the personal accomplishment of teachers with a teaching age of '1-20 years' is significantly higher than that of teachers with a teaching age of more than 20 years [6].

3.2 External Factors

First of all, the nature of the school and the profession will have an impact on teacher's job burnout. College English teachers in private higher vocational colleges have higher levels of job burnout than those in public universities. According to the current social security mechanism, teachers in many private colleges and universities have been treated unfairly in terms of staffing, length of service, and professional title

evaluation. It is difficult for private universities to establish an alternative talent pool, because the job hopping of teachers in private schools is relatively serious, and the public also lacks trust in private schools, which has become a stumbling block hindering the development of private education. In general, college English teachers in private higher vocational colleges often lack a sense of belonging and work under great pressure.

Secondly, the disconnect between scientific research and teaching is one of the main reasons leading to the decline of teachers' personal sense of accomplishment. Research pressure, award status, workload, and school policies all affect the level of teacher burnout. The higher the level of a teacher's award, the lower the degree of emotional exhaustion, and the probability of emotional exhaustion for teachers who receive higher-level awards is much lower than that of other teachers.

Thirdly, from the perspective of the job characteristics of college English teachers, the main causes of job burnout include heavy teaching workload, conflicts in the difficulty of teaching innovation, fewer opportunities for training and continuing education.

Finally, the society's expectations and pressure on college English teachers are also one of the reasons for job burnout, which is mainly manifested in the improvement of teaching requirements, the difficulty in professional promotion, and differences in students' English proficiency.

4. THREE DIMENSIONS OF STRATEGIES

Concerning the job burnout of college English teachers, this paper discusses coping strategies from three levels: teacher, school and country.

4.1 Teacher Level

Researchers generally agree that the professional development is the key to alleviating teacher's job burnout. College English teachers should not only pay attention to developing interpersonal skills and self-management skills, but also persisting in lifelong learning to enhance self-concept and teaching efficacy, and reduce their professional burnout. Their sense of teaching efficacy is significantly correlated with job burnout, that is, the higher the sense of teaching efficacy, the lower the degree of job burnout. There is a significant positive correlation between teaching efficacy and self-concept, indicating that the higher the level of teachers' self-concept, the stronger their personal teaching efficacy. The relationship between the two promotes each other and develops together. Teachers with positive self-concepts tend to believe that they have the ability to influence students; teachers with negative self-concepts will perceive and evaluate events in a way that is not

satisfied with their work. They are more susceptible to the surrounding environment. Teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy will take more effective measures to deal with the problems they encounter [7], and the proper solution to the problems will further enhance their self-concept.

Teacher's professional development is also reflected in their subjective consciousness and inner psychological development. It is necessary for them to enhance self-critical reflection and active attribution, and to be an internally controlled individual, because the attribution to others and external factors is more prone to job burnout. They need to mobilize the positive factors in their personality characteristics to actively resist the invasion of job burnout, cultivate the ability to resist stress, and enhance professional well-being [8].

Moreover, college English teachers' development of professional knowledge (content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge) and education skills are equally important too. On the one hand, college English teachers can explore their professional potential in new courses. For example, they can open up new teaching subjects in the fields of academic English and professional English through interdisciplinary academic education or on-the-job training. Some teachers who cannot transform themselves can adopt the humanistic development model and resort to the development field of Chinese and foreign social culture or humanistic quality course modules, which is another orientation of college English teaching reform in China. On the other hand, they had better apply digital education technology into multimedia teaching modes, by improving multi-modal teaching ability, corpus application ability, etc. They can also construct a network of research community, such as 'peer-coaching', in which teachers form partnerships and learn from each other to promote their own professional development.

4.2 Organization Level

Organizational intervention strategies also play a very important role in preventing and coping with the professional burnout of college English teachers and promoting their professional development. Schools need to take effective measures to help teachers develop a positive self-concept. In terms of teaching content and assessment methods, English teachers should be given more autonomy. Intervention programs to enhance teachers' self-concept (and teaching effectiveness) should be combined with their relaxation training, cognitive restructuring, and the improvement of their ability to solve social problems [9]. At the same time, teachers at different stages of their careers should also adopt different self-concepts, strategies for improving teaching efficacy, and coping strategies for job burnout.

In addition, schools should also establish a teacher management and evaluation system that returns to the value of life to build a teacher's professional development platform for them to reduce both physical and mental less exhaustion. More vocational trainings are needed to develop more teachers' positive expectation through cognitive restructuring confidence and have a sense of professional happiness.

4.3 Government Department Level

Government departments should pay full attention to and effectively deal with the job burnout of college English teachers, and take this issue as an important consideration in the formulation of relevant national education policies. Specific guidance is required to coordinate colleges and universities to actively cope with the problem of job burnout of college teachers, seek practical solutions to effectively reduce the level of their job burnout, and ensure their efficient career development.

5. CONCLUSION

Solving the job burnout problem of college English teachers is a systematic project, which requires the joint efforts of society, organizational levels, and individual college English teachers. At the social and school level, it is necessary to focus on improving the social status of teachers' occupation and improving their economic benefits, so as to provide them with a relaxed working environment to effectively promote their professional development.

However, there are still some unsolved problems in the research on college English teacher job burnout in terms of theoretical guidance, content focus, and method types. In domestic empirical research on the attribution of teacher burnout, researchers almost collect data by interviews or questionnaire surveys, and then conduct data processing and analysis. In general, there is a lack of theoretical guidance and new speculative research. Particularly, theoretical construction is urgently needed now to explain the deep-seated reasons behind the job burnout phenomenon of college English teachers. Theory reconstruction might become the main direction of speculative research on job burnout of college English teachers in the future.

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