



## Teachers' Burnout, Causes and Coping Strategies in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

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### Abstract

*This paper investigated teachers' burnout, causes and coping strategies in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. It adopted a correlational research design. The population comprised the 5,769 teachers in the 31 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 teachers as the sample for the study. The instrument titled Teachers Burnout, Causes and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (TBCCSQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two experts in Educational Psychology and one professor in Measurement and Evaluation. The internal consistency of the instrument was established through a test-retest procedure. Means and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions, while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.*

**Keywords:** Burnout, Coping Strategy, Occupational Factors, Psychological Factors, Teachers, Teachers' Burnout

### Introduction

Both students and teachers suffer when teachers experience burnout, which is a widespread problem in the field of education. Teacher burnout, which is characterised by emotional, physical, and mental tiredness due to long-term exposure to workplace stresses, is a growing problem that impacts both the quality of education and the well-being of teachers. Teachers, being the first and most direct link in the chain of command for children's educational development, have tremendous influence over their students' classroom experiences and final grades. But teachers might experience increased degrees of burnout due to the demanding nature of the job and other interpersonal and organisational stresses. Researchers, politicians, and educational practitioners have paid a lot of attention to the problem of teacher burnout in the last few decades.

Teaching burnout is a serious problem, and many research have tried to figure out what causes it and how to stop it or at least lessen its impact. In order to reduce the negative effects of burnout on teachers' health and productivity on the work, it is essential to understand what causes it. The emotional nature of teaching is a major contributor to teacher burnout. Over time, teachers' mental health might suffer from the vast variety of emotions they are asked to manage in their interactions with pupils, coworkers, and administrators. One typical symptom of burnout among educators is emotional exhaustion, which is marked by feelings of tiredness and depletion.

Emotional discomfort and burnout can be worsened by variables including role ambiguity, excessive workload, and lack of autonomy. In addition, teachers' experiences of burnout are greatly influenced by the organisational framework in which they work. Inadequate resources, bad leadership, and excessive job demands are all ingredients for a toxic work environment, which can lead to burnout. The risk of burnout among teachers can be exacerbated by interpersonal dynamics inside schools, such as disagreements with colleagues, feelings of isolation, and a perceived lack of support from administration. The literature on teacher burnout is rising, but there is still a lack of information on how to effectively avoid and mitigate it. Although research has shown resilience elements and coping mechanisms at the individual level, we still don't know enough about proactive methods that organisations and individuals may use to stop burnout in its tracks before it becomes catastrophic.

Early career teachers may be more susceptible to burnout owing to their lack of experience and support networks, but there is no data on the efficacy of treatments designed expressly for them. To fill these knowledge gaps, this study investigates the causes of teacher burnout and looks for ways to stop it or at least lessen its impact using approaches supported by evidence. The purpose of this study is to shed light on the multi-faceted problem of teacher burnout and to provide concrete suggestions for improving educators' health and resilience by addressing both personal and institutional elements.

In the teaching profession today, there is a global concern with the growth and prevalence of stress and burnout among teachers. The teaching profession has become increasingly challenging and complex. Enough evidence exist to show that teaching is one of the most complicated and stressful occupations (Gillian, 2007; Ingersoll, 2012; Mooney, 2018). Researchers indicate that teachers continually face increasing workloads, larger class sizes, unmotivated and undisciplined pupils, minimal parental or administrative support, and decreasing resources to highlight a few (Espin & Weissenburger, 2001; Hastings & Bham,

2003). This inevitably leads to the development of burnout which is a phenomenon that is suffered by teachers (Cherniss, 1980a; Hughes, 2001).

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### **Statement of the Problem**

No doubt Nigeria, as well as Rivers State have been through a process of education reform for the purpose of ensuring quality education. In this regard, several educational reforms have been undertaking, but little or no attention has been given to teacher, who are carrying out those reforms. It is true that teachers quality is the most critical factor for achieving quality education. In other to achieve teachers quality, the government at different levels have undertaking different initiatives, such as budgetary allocation, reforms policies, launching of several development programs to improve teachers quality.

Regrettably, poor quality of education has continued and remains still one of the major concerns of our education sector and the quality of teachers is one of the major reasons, we still have not gotten it right till today. It appears that the existing efforts towards improving the quality of teachers hardly could translate into effective classroom instructions and alleviate the overall quality of education. A weak teachers development programs is one of the major concerns that secondary education in Rivers State is suffering from. Most of the efforts towards preparing quality teachers are mostly centered either upon teacher' professional developmen, such as, teacher' training programs or on an increase in salary. Subsequently, psychological issues related to professional development, such as burnout often remains neglected as a focus of teachers' quality development programs. The present study is set to investigate teachers' burnout, causes and coping strategies in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

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### **Purpose of the Study**

1. To examine the impact of psychological factors on teachers' burnout.
2. To examine the impact of occupational factors on teachers' burnout.

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### **Hypotheses**

H1: Psychological factors have a significant impact on teachers' burnout.

H2: Occupational factors have a significant impact on teacher burnout.

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### **Literature Review**

#### **Burnout**

For the purpose of this study, burnout is used to refer to a situation in which what was formerly a 'calling' becomes merely a 'job'. One no longer lives to work but works only to live. In other

words, the term refers to loss of enthusiasm, excitement and a sense of mission in one's work. Given this situation, the teacher experiences physical, mental and emotional exhaustion characterized by the negation of oneself, one's environment, one's work and one's life. It results from prolonged experience of stress.

Burnout is not a new phenomenon in the job industry, however, it's increasing rate in the teaching profession is alarming. Extensive research shows that the teaching profession has the highest burnout rate compared to any other public sector and teachers are consistently reported to be at the highest risk of burnout across the world (Gabriel, 2013; Jacobson, 2016). In this era of ever-changing education reforms, teaching is increasingly becoming a challenging profession due to various reasons that range from carrying out legislative mandates to managing the classroom to parental cooperation, which might culminate burnout among the teachers of different abilities (Ramberg et al., 2019).

Additionally, burned-out teachers, in many cases, tend to switch to other professions because they are dissatisfied with the current one. It has been found that every year, about 7-8% of teachers change their professions due to burnout with their occupation (Shen et al., 2017). Excluding turnover, teacher absenteeism, and early retirement due to burnout status are significant outcomes that may not only put the burden of extra work on other teachers but also a waste of financial resources by hiring substitute teachers (Fisher, 2011) and leaving students to private coaching for overcoming learning the deficiency. These consequences have after effects on quality education. One of them is employing substitute teachers time and again who are not highly qualified. This not only degrades the quality of teaching but also makes students demotivated and apathetic (Shen et al., 2017). Another is the frequent transition of teachers hinders the way of policy implication along with a development plan for schools (Jacobson, 2016).

Not only professional life but also the quality of the personal life of teachers are significantly deteriorated by burnout (Shen et al., 2017). Burnout of teachers takes a heavy toll on their physical, emotional, and psychosocial health (Jackobson, 2016). Regarding mental health, burnout can cause low confidence, low self-esteem, and clinical depression. Burnout is also detrimental to physical health, as in insomnia, headache, frequent cold, and flu, even in severe cases, show cardiovascular syndrome (Shen et al., 2017). Burnout does not affect the teachers only but also their students and the educational system. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to address the issue of teacher burnout for the sake of its appropriate management.

## **Psychological and Occupational Factors**

Many different psychological and occupational aspects contribute to the complicated and demanding work environment that teachers face on a daily basis, making it more likely that they may experience burnout. Teacher burnout can be attributed to a number of important psychological issues, including:

- a) **Emotional Exhaustion:** Managing student behaviour, resolving disagreements, and offering emotional support to kids in need are all emotionally demanding tasks that can leave teachers feeling emotionally drained. They may eventually become weary, cynical, and emotionally distant from their job as a result of this.
- b) **A depersonalised teacher** is one who is cynical and emotionally distant from their pupils, coworkers, and the field of education as a whole. Feeling emotionally tired and stressed can lead instructors to lose interest in their profession and even have unpleasant attitudes towards their pupils.
- c) **Decreased Feeling of Personal achievement:** One of the symptoms of teacher burnout is a diminished sense of personal achievement. Educators who are experiencing this condition sometimes feel helpless to have a positive impact on their students' lives. As a result, they may start to doubt themselves, feel inadequate, and lose interest in doing a good job.
- d) **Role Ambiguity:** When educators are not clear on their specific duties within the educational system, it can lead to burnout. As they attempt to satisfy competing needs and expectations, educators may experience emotions of frustration, stress, and disengagement due to role ambiguity.
- e) **Overwork and lack of time management skills:** These are two of the most prevalent occupational stresses that lead to burnout among educators. Lesson preparation, grading, meetings, and extracurricular activities are just a few of the many things that teachers have to deal with on a daily basis. This can make them feel overwhelmed and exhausted.
- f) **Inadequate Support:** Teachers are more likely to experience burnout if they do not receive sufficient support from their peers, administrators, and the larger school community. Teachers could feel alone and unsupported if they don't have access to tools, guidance, and chances to work together.
- g) **Work Insecurity:** Worries about job security, contract renewals, or layoffs are all forms of work insecurity that can lead to burnout among teachers. Teachers who worry about their futures in the classroom may be more likely to suffer from anxiety, stress, and discontent with their work.

- h) **An Unbalanced Work-Life:** It can be difficult to juggle the demands of teaching with those of one's personal and family life, which can lead to an imbalance between the two and an increased risk of burnout. Teachers may feel more stress, exhaustion, and burnout if they are unable to strike a good work-life balance.

Psychological and occupational variables both have a role in the complex problem known as teacher burnout. Taking into account both the specific requirements of educators and the larger structural and organisational elements that impact their workplace is essential for finding effective solutions to these problems.

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### **Common Causes of Teachers' Burnout**

1. **Prolonged work-related stress-** these are high work loads, challenging students' behaviour, and lack of resources.
2. **Lack of institutional support-** these include, insufficient support from administration, a negative school culture, and lack of professional development opportunities.

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### **Coping Strategies**

Albee (2000), one of the pioneers of prevention research points out that, it is acceptable public health doctrine that no disease or disorder has ever been treated out of existence. To this end therefore it is imperative that the roots of burnout are identified and where possible be eliminated before the syndrome develops than to treat it after it has already occurred. Wanjiru (2006) compared people who cope with stress mechanisms by minimizing or avoiding it to those who use more confrontational or vigilant strategies, such as gathering information and taking action. Individuals who directly deal with a problem may not only solve the problem but are also better prepared to handle stress in future. The seriousness of burnout is seen in terms of maiming the individual and making them acquire intrapersonal conflicts, inadequacies and internal disabilities in terms of effective coping. It is clear that burnout threatens the ethical principles of respect for the dignity of persons, responsible caring, concern for other's welfare, and responsibility to society. Burnout affects all aspects of a teacher's functioning. Its effects are pervasive and ethically dangerous. Its symptoms can lead to incompetent care, boundary violations, disrupted relationships, increased conflict and various health problems for teachers. It is against this background that a systematic study was needed to address this gap and shed light on the coping strategies employed by public senior secondary school teachers in Rivers State to mitigate experienced burnout.

Other coping strategies are:

1. Self-care practices- this involve engaging in activities like, mindfulness, meditation, yoga and deep breathing exercises can improve personal wellbeing.
2. Setting boundaries- this involve establishing clear separation between work and personal life. This significantly helps manage stress.
3. Effective time management- this include, organizing work and responsibilities. This can reduce feelings of being overwhelmed.
4. Positive school culture- this involve fostering a supportive and collaborative environment. This can improve teachers moral and job satisfaction.
5. Administrative support- this involve school leadership implementation of policies to promote a healthy work environment, balance workloads and offer mentorship.
6. Professional development- this include, providing opportunities for professional growth. This can enhance teachers resilience wellbeing.

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## **Methodology**

The correlational research design was adopted for this investigation. The population comprised of the 5,769 teachers in the 31 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 teachers as the sample for the study. The instrument titled Teachers Burnout, Causes and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (TBCCSQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two experts in Educational Psychology and one professor in Measurement and Evaluation. The internal consistency of the instrument was established through a test–retest procedure. However, Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient was employed to determine the reliability index of the TBCCSQ. Cronbach’s Alpha was chosen because it provides a more robust estimate of the internal consistency of multi-item scales and is widely recommended for psychological and educational measurements. Means and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions, while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

**Result****Psychological Factors and Teacher Burnout****TABLE 1:** Descriptive Statistics for Psychological Factors Items (n = 200)

| A                 | Psychological Factors                                                          | SA | A  | D  | SD | $\bar{X}$   | Std           | Decision     |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1                 | I often feel emotionally exhausted due to challenges associated with teaching. | 80 | 70 | 30 | 20 | 3.050       | 0.976         | Agree        |
| 2                 | Stress from school activities frequently affects my mental wellbeing.          | 70 | 80 | 35 | 15 | 3.025       | 0.910         | Agree        |
| 3                 | I find it difficult to manage the emotional demands of my students.            | 60 | 80 | 40 | 20 | 2.900       | 0.946         | Agree        |
| 4                 | I sometimes lose motivation to perform my teaching duties.                     | 50 | 70 | 50 | 30 | 2.700       | 1.008         | Agree        |
| 5                 | I feel mentally drained even before completing my daily tasks.                 | 65 | 75 | 40 | 20 | 2.925       | 0.961         | Agree        |
| <b>Grand mean</b> |                                                                                |    |    |    |    | <b>2.92</b> | <b>0.9602</b> | <b>Agree</b> |

**Source: An Extract from SPSS Version 27.0**

The results in the table 1 indicate that teachers generally agree that psychological factors significantly contribute to burnout. All items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, with a grand mean of 2.92, suggesting a strong overall influence of psychological stressors on teachers' wellbeing. Emotional exhaustion, stress from school activities, difficulty managing students' emotional needs, loss of motivation, and mental fatigue were all identified as prevalent issues. The standard deviations, which range around 0.96, show moderate variability in responses, indicating that while teachers share similar experiences, individual perceptions still differ slightly. This highlights the substantial role psychological factors play in teacher burnout.

**Occupational Factors and Teacher Burnout****TABLE 2:** Descriptive Statistics for Occupational Factors Items (n = 200)

| B | Occupational Factors                                                     | SA | A  | D  | SD | $\bar{X}$ | Std   | Decision |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|-----------|-------|----------|
| 6 | My workload in school is excessively demanding.                          | 90 | 60 | 30 | 20 | 3.100     | 0.997 | Agree    |
| 7 | Limited teaching resources in my school increase my work-related stress. | 70 | 80 | 30 | 20 | 3.000     | 0.951 | Agree    |

|                   |                                                                          |    |    |    |    |             |               |              |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| 8                 | The administrative tasks assigned to me add significantly to my burnout. | 55 | 75 | 40 | 30 | 2.775       | 1.015         | Agree        |
| 9                 | The large number of students I teach makes my job overwhelming.          | 85 | 65 | 30 | 20 | 3.075       | 0.987         | agree        |
| 10                | Pressure from school management contributes to my feelings of burnout.   | 60 | 80 | 40 | 20 | 2.900       | 0.946         | Agree        |
| <b>Grand-Mean</b> |                                                                          |    |    |    |    | <b>2.97</b> | <b>0.9792</b> | <b>Agree</b> |

**Source: An Extract from SPSS Version 27.0**

The results in Table 2 indicate that teachers agree that occupational factors significantly contribute to burnout. All items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, with a grand mean of 2.97, suggesting that workload, limited teaching resources, administrative tasks, large class sizes, and management pressure are prominent stressors. The standard deviations, averaging around 0.98, show moderate variability in responses, indicating that while most teachers experience these occupational challenges similarly, there are slight differences in individual perceptions. This demonstrate that occupational demands play a substantial role in influencing teacher burnout in public senior secondary schools.

**TABLE 3:** PPMC analysis for Psychological Factors and Teacher Burnout

| Variable                                | N   | r    | p-value      | Decision              |
|-----------------------------------------|-----|------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Psychological Factors & Teacher Burnout | 200 | 0.61 | 0.000 < 0.05 | Reject H <sub>0</sub> |

**Source: An Extract from SPSS Version 27.0**

The result in Table 3 shows a strong positive relationship ( $r = 0.61$ ) between psychological factors and teacher burnout among the 200 teachers studied. The p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 significance level, indicating that the correlation is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), which states that psychological factors have no significant relationship with teacher burnout, is rejected. This means that increases in negative psychological conditions such as stress, anxiety, low motivation, or emotional exhaustion are significantly associated with higher levels of teacher burnout in the sampled schools.

**TABLE 4:** PPMC analysis for Occupational Factors and Teacher Burnout

| Variable                               | N   | r    | p-value      | Decision              |
|----------------------------------------|-----|------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Occupational Factors & Teacher Burnout | 200 | 0.63 | 0.000 < 0.05 | Reject H <sub>0</sub> |

**Source: An Extract from SPSS Version 27.0**

The correlation result ( $r = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) indicates a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between occupational factors and teacher burnout. This means increases in workload, administrative pressure, large class size, and limited resources significantly intensify burnout among teachers. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that occupational factors are strong predictors of teacher burnout.

Findings from Research Question One revealed that psychological factors significantly influence teacher burnout among public senior secondary school teachers in Rivers State. The descriptive results showed that all psychological items had mean scores above the criterion value of 2.50, with a grand mean of 2.92 and a standard deviation of 0.96, indicating a strong consensus among teachers that emotional exhaustion, stress from school activities, difficulty managing students' emotional needs, loss of motivation, and mental fatigue contribute substantially to burnout. This descriptive outcome was further supported by the inferential statistics, which indicated a strong positive and significant correlation between psychological factors and teacher burnout ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that as teachers' psychological stressors increase, their levels of burnout also rise correspondingly.

These findings are consistent with existing scholarly positions. As highlighted in the literature, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment are among the dominant psychological symptoms of burnout experienced by teachers when faced with overwhelming emotional demands in their daily interactions with students, colleagues, and school administrators. Cherniss (1980) and Hughes (2001) earlier argued that emotional depletion is one of the earliest indicators of burnout in teaching, especially when teachers constantly manage behavioural challenges and academic pressures. Similarly, Hastings and Bham (2003) noted that persistent emotional strain reduces teachers' enthusiasm, weakens their motivation, and gradually diminishes their professional commitment.

Furthermore, the findings align with the broader conceptual framework that burnout emerges when teachers' psychological needs are persistently neglected within the school environment. The demanding nature of teaching, coupled with minimal support systems, has been shown to intensify stress, anxiety, and feelings of ineffectiveness (Espin & Weissenburger, 2001). Thus, the present study reinforces the understanding that psychological strain is not merely incidental but represents a major determinant of teacher burnout in Rivers State.

The implication of this finding is that teacher development programs must begin to prioritize psychological wellbeing rather than focusing solely on technical or instructional skills.

Practices such as emotional support programs, stress-management workshops, mentorship systems, and early burnout detection frameworks are crucial for strengthening teachers' mental resilience. By addressing psychological stressors proactively, schools can significantly mitigate burnout and promote healthier professional engagement. Therefore, the study provides clear evidence that psychological factors are among the strongest predictors of teacher burnout and must be treated as a core dimension of teacher welfare policies.

Findings from Research Question Two demonstrated that occupational factors also play a significant role in influencing teacher burnout. All occupational items recorded mean scores above 2.50, resulting in a grand mean of 2.97 and a standard deviation of 0.98, indicating general agreement among teachers that workload, limited teaching resources, administrative duties, large class sizes, and pressure from school management contribute heavily to burnout. This was supported by the correlation analysis, which revealed a strong and statistically significant relationship between occupational factors and teacher burnout ( $r = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that increases in occupational stressors significantly intensify teachers' experiences of burnout.

The result is supported by several empirical findings and theoretical perspectives. Ingersoll (2012) and Mooney (2018), for example, reported that increasing workloads, larger class sizes, and escalating administrative demands have made teaching one of the most stressful public-sector professions globally. These occupational pressures often leave teachers overwhelmed, reducing their capacity to maintain high levels of effectiveness and job satisfaction. Similarly, Ramberg et al. (2019) emphasized that organizational conditions—such as insufficient resources, poor leadership practices, and limited support—are powerful contributors to teacher burnout, as they make the working environment highly demanding and psychologically draining.

The scarcity of teaching resources and persistent administrative demands, as identified in this study, align with Fisher's (2011) assertion that inadequate workplace support creates a toxic professional environment that increases teacher absenteeism, discouragement, and eventual attrition. Such occupational challenges not only elevate stress levels but also reduce teachers' sense of control and professional efficacy, thereby accelerating burnout.

The findings imply that addressing occupational stressors is essential for promoting teacher wellbeing. Schools must begin to implement structural reforms that reduce excessive workload, improve availability of teaching materials, streamline administrative responsibilities, and

promote more supportive leadership practices. By improving the occupational climate, teachers will be better equipped to manage their roles and maintain professional enthusiasm. The study therefore confirms that occupational factors are potent predictors of burnout and must be targeted in any strategic intervention aimed at improving teacher welfare and productivity in Rivers State.

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## **Conclusions**

This study examined the influence of psychological and occupational factors on teacher burnout in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings revealed that both psychological and occupational stressors significantly contribute to burnout, with strong positive correlations indicating that increases in emotional exhaustion, mental fatigue, excessive workload, limited resources, and administrative pressures lead to higher levels of burnout among teachers. These results highlight that burnout is a multidimensional issue rooted not only in teachers' internal experiences but also in the structural and environmental conditions of their workplace. Therefore, improving teacher wellbeing requires holistic interventions that address both psychological resilience and the broader occupational demands placed on teachers.

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## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made:

1. The Ministry of Education and school administrators should incorporate regular mental health workshops, stress-management training, and counseling services into teacher development programs to help teachers build emotional resilience and cope better with psychological stressors that contribute to burnout.
2. Schools should review and moderate teacher workload, provide adequate instructional resources, streamline administrative duties, and ensure supportive leadership practices. Creating a more enabling work environment will reduce occupational pressures and significantly lower the risk of teacher burnout across public senior secondary schools.

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