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Research on the Causes and Countermeasures of Teacher Burnout

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Abstract. In the field of education, teachers are the core driving force, and their working state directly affects educational quality and student growth. In recent years, teacher burnout has become increasingly common—a phenomenon that not only impairs teachers' physical and mental health, reduces their job satisfaction and sense of professional accomplishment, but also exerts adverse effects on teaching quality and student growth, attracting widespread attention.. However, current research still lacks depth in exploring its causes and proposing systematic countermeasures. This study aims to explore the causes of teachers' job burnout by targeting the challenges faced by teachers at different career stages and propose practically actionable strategies to address this issue. By reviewing relevant theories and research findings domestically and internationally through a literature review, this study aims to clarify the causes of teacher burnout from the perspectives of social expectations, organizational management, and personal traits, and proposes strategies to alleviate teacher burnout at the social, school, and individual levels.

Keywords: Teacher Burnout, Countermeasures, Educational Field, job burnout

1. Introduction

As the core driving force in the field of education, the working state of teachers has a direct impact on educational quality and student growth. In recent years, the phenomenon of teacher burnout has become increasingly common. It not only harms teachers' physical and mental health, reduces their job satisfaction and sense of professional achievement, but also negatively affects teaching quality and student development—thus attracting widespread attention. However, current research still lacks depth in exploring the causes of teacher burnout and proposing systematic countermeasures. Against this backdrop, this study focuses on the causes of teacher burnout, aiming to propose practical guiding strategies [1]

The study will systematically synthesize domestic and international theories and research findings through literature review. The significance of this study lies in its systematic clarification of these causes of teacher burnout from multiple aspects such as social expectations, organizational management, and personal traits, and proposing strategies to alleviate teacher burnout from three levels: society, school, and individual, thereby providing a reference for improving teachers' working state and enhancing educational quality.

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2. Overview of the current situation of teacher burnout

2.1. Description of the current situation of teacher burnout

As primary participants in educational activities, teachers shoulder the critical mission of imparting knowledge, cultivating character, and nurturing student growth. Their working state directly affects the quality of education and student development. Traditionally, the teaching profession has continuously faced high-intensity teaching tasks, complex teacher-student dynamics, diverse evaluation systems, and bottlenecks in career development, leading some teachers to gradually fall into a state of physical and mental exhaustion, a state defined as "professional burnout". This state not only diminishes teachers' work enthusiasm and professional efficacy but may also have adverse impacts on their physical and mental health, teaching quality, and thus the entire educational ecosystem. It is an urgent issue requiring attention and resolution in the field of education [2].

2.2. Characteristics of teacher burnout

Currently, teacher burnout exhibits three key characteristics: pervasiveness, diversity, and concealment, which are specifically manifested as follows:

2.2.1. Wide coverage

Primary and secondary school teachers face a high incidence of burnout due to the pressure of academic progression and complex class management; university teachers also suffer from burnout driven by research assessments and academic competition. Both urban and rural teachers are affected, while rural teachers experience heightened burnout due to resource scarcity and heavy tasks, whereas urban teachers encounter pressure from fierce competition and high parental expectations.

2.2.2. Distinct core symptoms

Mainly manifesting as emotional exhaustion (such as irritability, loss of enthusiasm), depersonalization (such as indifference to students, alienation from colleagues), and reduced personal achievement (such as doubt about teaching value, disapproval of results). The overlap of these symptoms easily forms a vicious cycle.

2.2.3. Complex triggers

In addition to traditional factors such as heavy teaching tasks and monotonous evaluation mechanisms, new factors such as increased communication costs between home and school, excessive societal expectations for teachers, and unclear career development paths intertwine, making the sources of stress more diverse [3].

3. Causes of teacher burnout

3.1. Excessive workloads and pressure from evaluation systems

Kindergarten and primary school teachers must simultaneously fulfill teaching duties and caregiving responsibilities: specifically, kindergarten teachers are responsible for children's feeding and nap supervision, while primary school teachers manage student safety during breaks. After class, they

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must frequently communicate with parents to provide feedback on students' daily school life; during lesson preparation, to accommodate the attention spans of younger students, a large number of interactive activities need to be designed, resulting in actual working hours frequently exceeding standard hours [4]. In terms of evaluation systems, core indicators focus on "process-based performance," encompassing dimensions such as student attendance rate, classroom order stability, and parental satisfaction; some schools further include knowledge mastery (such as proficiency in pinyin and accuracy in calculations) of lower-grade students in the assessment scope, placing continuous pressure on teachers to continuously balance between "basic teaching implementation" and "daily affairs management."

Influenced by the orientation towards further education, junior high and senior high school teachers can teach an average of 4-6 classes per day. After class, they need to complete homework correction for the whole class, organize evening self-study Q&A sessions, monitor fluctuations in student academic performance, and develop personalized tutoring plans. During holidays, they often participate in subject research, teaching training, or make-up classes—their time is largely occupied by teaching-related tasks. Their evaluation system is centered around "quantitative outcomes," with indicators such as the entrance examination and college entrance examination success rates, class average scores, and subject rankings directly tied to teachers' performance pay and professional title promotions; some schools implement a "last-place elimination system," with assessment pressure intensifying cyclically with further education milestones such as the high school entrance examination and college entrance examination.

University teachers must balance three core responsibilities: first, classroom teaching (including curriculum design and courseware updates); second, research work (e.g., thesis writing, project applications, experiment conduction); third, student guidance (covering graduation project supervision and academic competition coaching). In addition, they must participate in school administrative meetings, subject evaluations, and other affairs, the concurrent nature of these multiple tasks leads to workload overload. At the same time, university courses are highly challenging, requiring teachers to have a profound knowledge base and excellent teaching skills. Ineffective teaching methods can easily lead to low student engagement and a lack of interest in learning, thereby further increasing the burden on teachers.

In the evaluation system, mechanisms exhibit a "research-over-teaching" bias. Key career development milestones such as professional title advancement and project applications mainly rely on research achievements (such as paper impact factors and project levels), while teaching evaluations serving merely as a basic reference indicator. Insufficient research output can readily impede a teacher’s career development.

3.2. High social expectations and insufficient school support

At the social expectation level, parental expectations for kindergarten and primary school teachers extend beyond basic teaching: parents not only require teachers to impart basic knowledge but also expect them to cultivate students' behavior habits and social skills. Some parents even delegate their family upbringing responsibilities (such as correcting student personalities and enlightening interests) to teachers; when students face developmental challenges, they frequently attribute the cause to perceived inadequacies in teacher performance.

At the school support level, there is a lack of professional supporting resources, such as the absence of full-time early childhood or child psychologist counselors. Teachers face difficulties in obtaining professional guidance when dealing with students' behavioral deviations (such as crying or peer conflicts); Meanwhile, schools have failed to establish flexible work arrangements, leaving

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teachers with limited flexibility to adjust their work schedules when addressing personal emergencies (such as family medical needs) [5]

At the societal level, At the social level, there is a relatively prominent tendency in expectations for junior and senior high school teachers: society often considers the results of middle school and college entrance exams as one of the core competencies for evaluating schools and teachers, and pays more attention to 'enrollment rates.' In comparison, there is less emphasis placed on cultivating students' comprehensive qualities.. Teacher evaluations are simplified to 'whether they can improve students' scores,' and meanwhile, the societal anxiety about further education is indirectly transmitted to teachers, forming a single expectation pressure that focuses solely on scores. The school's support is significantly lacking: In pursuit of enrollment targets, teachers' training time and rest periods are often compressed; there is a lack of full-time psychological support personnel, leaving teachers under high pressure without timely psychological counseling; moreover, teaching resources (such as high-quality students and advanced teaching equipment) are unevenly distributed, making it more difficult for teachers in non-key classes to obtain resources, and thus the support and guarantee are relatively weak.

The social expectations for university teachers present a 'dual high standard': they are required to 'teach well' and cultivate high-quality talents that meet societal needs, while also being expected to 'produce research outcomes' to promote academic innovation and the transformation of research findings. The expectation for dual capabilities in 'teaching + research' far exceeds the reasonable capacity of a single position; furthermore, the demand for the practical application value of research findings is increasingly high, which further increases the work pressure on teachers.

The school's support has significant shortcomings: Research resources (such as funding, experimental equipment, cooperation platforms) tend to favor senior teachers or key disciplines, making it difficult for young teachers to apply for research resources; there is insufficient training on new teaching models (such as online-offline blended teaching and interdisciplinary curriculum design), leaving teachers lacking necessary technical support and methodological guidance when responding to the demands of teaching reform.

3.3. Career cognitive biases and inadequate psychological adjustment abilities

At the level of career cognition, there are deviations among some kindergarten and primary school teachers: equating the profession with 'care + basic teaching', neglecting the professionalism of 'psychological guidance' and 'habit formation' in early education, which makes it difficult for them to perceive the value of their profession from work and leads to a sense of "professional meaninglessness"; another group of teachers fall into the 'perfectionism' misconception, demanding that all students reach a unified development standard, and experiencing self-negation due to the difficulty in achieving goals.

In terms of psychological regulation ability, facing parental doubts, students repeatedly making mistakes, etc., they are prone to negative emotions such as anxiety and irritability; moreover, they have not systematically learned emotional management techniques (such as deep breathing regulation, rational attribution analysis), and the long-term accumulation of negative emotions can easily lead to burnout.

Career cognitive deviations among junior and senior high school teachers are mainly reflected in two aspects: one is influenced by 'score-only' thinking, where some teachers directly link 'student performance' with 'self-worth', and when class grades decline, they tend to deny their own teaching abilities; the other is viewing 'professional title advancement' as the sole criterion for career success, neglecting the sense of achievement gained during the teaching process (such as student progress,

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student recognition), leading to a singularization of career goals and further exacerbating psychological pressure.

Insufficient psychological regulation ability is manifested as follows: long-term exposure to high pressure from students' further education makes them prone to problems such as tension and insomnia; due to heavy workloads, they lack effective channels for stress relief such as exercise and social interaction; meanwhile, they do not proactively seek professional psychological help from schools or external sources, making it difficult to effectively channel negative emotions. Career cognitive biases among university teachers are mainly manifested in two ways: Some teachers, influenced by evaluation orientations, form a 'research-first' mindset, reducing teaching investment and leading to a decline in teaching quality. Consequently, they fall into anxiety due to 'lack of teaching achievement sense'; another group of teachers underestimate the difficulty of research, and in the early stages of their careers, they are prone to "career frustration" due to failed paper publications or project applications [6].

In terms of psychological adjustment ability, research work is characterized by a long cycle and high uncertainty in results, which can easily trigger emotions such as anxiety and depression among teachers. Moreover, university teachers have a relatively independent working mode, lacking emotional communication and support among colleagues; in addition, they do not master scientific psychological adjustment methods (such as goal decomposition, stress transfer), making it difficult to effectively alleviate long-term research pressure.

4. Countermeasures to the current situation

4.1. Individual

Teachers need to start from themselves, adjust their professional cognition, master stress management skills, and actively alleviate psychological burdens.

Kindergarten and primary school teachers can learn basic emotional management methods (such as deep breathing, rational attribution—attributing "parental doubts" to "insufficient information communication" rather than "personal ability issues"); join teacher mutual aid communities, exchange "experiences in solving student-related problems" with peers, and release negative emotions; regularly arrange "personal relaxation time" (such as one exercise or one reading session per week) to avoid the accumulation of negative emotions [7].

Junior and senior high school teachers can recognize the "the value of teaching lies not only in scores but also in student growth" by recording "student progress cases" (such as improvements in the academic performance of students with weak foundations and breakthroughs in classroom participation among introverted students) through teaching reflection logs; break the one-dimensional perception that "professional title = career success", incorporate "student recognition and teaching innovation" into sources of career satisfaction, and reduce the pressure of single-minded goals. They can utilize fragmented time for stress relief (such as 5 minutes of meditation during breaks or listening to soothing music on the commute); proactively participate in social activities (such as colleagues' dinners or interest groups) to compensate for social isolation caused by busy work; when negative emotions are difficult to manage independently, proactively schedule psychological counseling at schools or social institutions to avoid emotional buildup.

For university teachers, to relieve pressure by reducing the allocation of academic administrative work, the key lies in three aspects: clarifying job responsibilities and assigning non-core administrative tasks (such as attendance checking and grade entry) to support staff; simplifying processes through digitalization to reduce communication time; and dynamically adjusting the

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workload based on teachers' existing teaching-research tasks and personal circumstances, thereby freeing up their energy to focus on teaching and research.

4.2. School

As the primary institutional environment for teachers' work, schools need to focus on three aspects: "reducing burden, reforming evaluation, and supplementing resources" to alleviate teachers' pressure.

For kindergartens and primary schools, reduce teachers' burden by optimizing workloads (clarifying the boundaries between teaching and care responsibilities, adding full-time life/safety staff, and setting fixed hours for parent communication), improving evaluation systems (adjusting assessment weights, adding professional competencydimensions, and replacing lower-grade tests with growth records), and supplementing resources (assigning child psychology counselors and allowing emergency compensatory leave).

For junior and senior high school teachers, scientifically manage workloads: Reasonably compressing the daily class hours according to the teaching syllabus (controlled at 3-4 classes per day), implementing a 'tiered system for homework review' (focusing on correcting homework for students with weaker foundations; for high-achieving students, 'student peer evaluation + teacher spot checks' can be used); reducing the frequency of research and tutoring during holidays, stipulating no more than two tutoring sessions per year to ensure teachers have rest time [8].

Reforming the evaluation mechanism: Breaking away from 'score-only' thinking, incorporating 'students' comprehensive quality improvement' (such as social practice participation, mental health level) and 'teaching innovation cases' into assessments, reducing the weight of admission rates and average class scores; abolishing the 'last-place elimination system', implementing a 'stepped performance' approach to avoid drastic fluctuations in assessment pressure with enrollment milestones. Strengthen support resources: Equip schools with full-time psychological support personnel to provide regular psychological counseling for teachers (such as monthly group counseling and on-demand individual consultations); evenly distributing teaching resources to ensure that non-key classes and key classes have equal opportunities for high-quality student recruitment and access to advanced teaching equipment.

For university teachers, optimize task allocation: Establishing a 'teaching-research-administration' task diversion mechanism, allowing young teachers to choose between 'teaching-focused' or 'research-focused' development directions in their early career, reducing the pressure of multitasking; implementing a 'specialist liaison system' for administrative affairs, with each department equipped with full-time administrative assistants to represent teachers in participating in non-core meetings and evaluations. Adjusting the evaluation orientation: Balance the assessment weights of 'teaching and research', incorporating 'student course satisfaction' and 'teaching reform achievements' equally into professional title promotion indicators; shift the evaluation of research achievements from a 'quantity-oriented' approach (number of papers, project level) to a 'quality-oriented' approach (conversion rate of research outcomes, academic influence), thus preventing teachers from falling into 'research output anxiety'.

Supplementing resource supply: Establish a 'Young Teachers' Research Special Fund', lowering the application threshold for research resources; regularly conduct training on new teaching models (such as online and offline blended teaching, interdisciplinary curriculum design), and provide technical support (such as instructional platform operation guidance, courseware production tools). Revise and make it rigorous and logical.

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4.3. Society

Society needs to rectify its cognitive biases towards teachers, reduce excessive expectations, and create a relaxed professional environment for them.

Regarding the guidance work for teachers at different stages, there are both commonalities and differences that align with the characteristics of each stage. In terms of commonality, all guidance aims to 'relieve unreasonable pressure on teachers,' promoting a more rational understanding through multiple channels. On one hand, this dismantles the monolithic nature of evaluation. on the other hand, it clarifies key boundaries or differences, ultimately guiding the public to view teachers' value in a comprehensive and objective manner [9].

The differentiated content varies according to the focus at each stage. For kindergarten and primary school teachers, the guidance focuses on the parent level: it reduces one-sided accusations from parents by clarifying the boundaries of home-school responsibilities and establishing standardized "home-school communication conventions". For junior and senior high school teachers, more emphasis is placed on showcasing teachers' diverse contributions through media publicity, and on ultilizing the diversified admission cases released by educational departments for the high school entrance examination and college entrance examination to mitigate teacher pressure. For university teachers, the focus is on reducing the pressure of teaching administration work, thereby helping teachers concentrate on their teaching tasks [10].

5. Conclusion

Through a review of existing literature and interviews, this study establishes that teacher burnout is the result of the interplay of social, school, and individual factors. At the societal level, there are excessive single-minded expectations for teachers. At the school level, issues such as unreasonable work distribution, rigid evaluation systems (e.g., emphasizing process assessment in lower grades, 'score-only' policies in junior and senior high schools), and insufficient supporting resources exist. At the individual level, it is influenced by career cognitive biases and insufficient psychological adjustment abilities. Addressing this issue requires collaboration among three parties: society guiding reasonable expectations and clarifying responsibility boundaries; schools optimizing work distribution by grade level, reforming evaluation mechanisms, and supplementing resources; individuals adjusting their career cognitions and mastering scientific stress management skills.

The study has three limitations: first, the sample representativeness was limited, not fully covering different regions, school types, and teacher groups; second, the research method exhibited a qualitative bias, relying on literature and interviews, lacking quantitative analysis support; third, the study on emerging factors such as educational digitization and the 'Double Reduction' policy is not deep enough.

Future research can be improved along three dimensions: expanding the sample scope to cover multiple regions, school types, and teachers at all grade levels, enhancing the generalizability of conclusions; optimizing research methods by combining questionnaire surveys with statistical analysis, which helps to enhance data reliability; focusing on emerging topics and special groups such as rural special-post teachers and middle-aged teachers to deepen research content.

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