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**Harmony in Diversity: Multidisciplinary
Perspectives on Glocalisation**

26-27 March 2021 at Mahasarakham University, Thailand

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Mahasarakham University, Thailand
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STRATEGIES ONLINE TEACHERS UTILIZE WHILE MITIGATING BURNOUT AT BURIRAM RAJABHAT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Teacher burnout creates problems for all involved in the learning process and symptoms manifest in many forms. Teacher burnout has been extensively researched; however, strategies to avoid or minimized burnout experienced by online Thai teachers during the COVID-19 crisis are miniscule. The objective of this study seeks to investigate strategies used by Business English (BE) teachers at Buriram Rajabhat University (BRU) while switching from in-person to online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent or mitigate burnout. Fifteen BE teachers participated and completed a self-assessment questionnaire with 18 five-point Likert Scale questions ranging from one to five, adapted from MacIntyre et al. (2020). Statistics utilized in data analysis were percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The findings showed that there are six strategies that have a statistical significance higher than $M=4.40$ and are active coping: concentrating efforts on doing something about the situation and taking action to try to make it better ($M=4.60$), relationships: developing good relationships with students ($M=4.60$), positive reframing: seeing the situation from a different more affirming light; seeking something good in it ($M=4.46$), goals: setting reasonable goals ($M=4.46$), time management: being a better time manager ($M=4.40$), and acceptance: acknowledging the reality of the situation and learning to cope with it ($M=4.40$), respectively. More positive strategies were used which conforms with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954). Findings indicated that training and social supports should be provided to mitigate burnout.

Keywords: strategies, burnout, online teaching

1. Introduction

Teacher burnout creates problems for all involved in the learning process, and symptoms manifest in many forms such as extreme mental or physical exhaustion, frequent illness, and lack of enthusiasm and energy resulting from excessive work demands (Combley, 2011; Hornby, Ashby, & Wehmeier, 2000; Mayor, 2009). Psychology Today defined burnout as “a state of emotional, mental, and often physical exhaustion brought on by prolonged or repeated stress. Though problems at work most often cause it...” (Psychology Today, 2021). People suffering from burnout may be described as being burnt-out (Combley, 2011). Herbert Freudenberger (1974), an American psychologist, is credited with using the term burnout to describe consequences of severe stress and high ideals in helping professions, as care-providers in helping professions sacrifice themselves for others and often succumb to burnout. Burnout has been divided into three key dimensions: emotional exhaustion, cynicism or depersonalization, and inefficacy or reduced personal accomplishment, which is shared within the care-provider industry (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Simbula & Guglielmi, 2010) or those in the helping professions (Williams, 1989); this includes teachers. Teachers frequently assist students with their educational and personal needs while balancing the needs and demands of educational institutions, communities in which they live, and family. Teachers experience prolonged stress, emotional and mental fatigue, feelings of being isolated, and

disrespect while helping students and balancing organizational demands, which may result in burnout, physical illness (Enyedi, 2015), and hopelessness which may end with teacher resignation (Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1982), or in worst case scenarios, being terminated.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a paradigm shift in pedagogy from onsite teaching to online teaching, where teachers provide instruction from the comfort of their homes and students learn at home. This change affected everyone in the educational process globally and includes language instructors at all levels of education. Typical days prior to COVID-19 produced copious stressful situations globally; however, currently, COVID-19 has multiplied sources of teacher stress due to constraints on time, ideas, materials, expertise, and support (Enyedi, 2015). Lowered work productivity, decreased motivation, increased stress, and diminished mental health status is now the status-quo as employees are required to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021), impacting educators globally.

Teacher burnout has been extensively researched; however, strategies to avoid or minimize burnout experienced by online Thai teachers during the COVID-19 crisis are miniscule. Investigating strategies used by BE instructors at BRU related to burnout during the COVID-19 crisis is significant and beneficial. This research indicates the need to provide support as these instructors are valuable resources in the Business English program. They struggle to meet the ever-increasing demands of their students, communities, families, and educational institutions in which they labor. Findings suggest that teachers will receive benefits as they cope with stressors producing burnout. The results will increase administrator awareness relative to the types and amount of stress teachers experience balancing needs to educate students in the online learning environment during COVID-19.

2. Review of literature

Teacher burnout has been extensively researched. However, there are only a few studies on teacher burnout and stress coping strategies conducted after the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, strategies to avoid burnout of Thai teachers, especially during the COVID-19 conversion to online teaching, were not previously explored.

Sokal et al. (2020) conducted a study on *Supporting Teachers in Times of Change: The Job Demands-Resources Model and Teacher Burnout During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Sokal et al. (2020) investigated the Job Demands-Resources Model with a survey of 1,278 Canadian teachers to identify benefits for examining teacher burnout in this unusual context. They found that the model, in general terms, indicated that the many demands placed on teachers were most strongly correlated with the initial exhaustion stage of burnout. Still, not all resources were most strongly associated with the later stages of burnout, suggesting that examining specific resources in the context of a pandemic as opposed to examining resources together as a latent variable contributes to the development of a more refined model. When teachers are in the initial stages of burnout and exhibiting high exhaustion, strategies reducing burnout involve decreasing demands and providing selected resources as appropriate and recommended.

Shlenskaya et al. (2020) conducted studies related to teachers' burnout in online university courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. As adapted by Vodopianova (2013), the Maslach questionnaire was employed to determine the level of burnout and the factors of difficulties in education online teaching questionnaire was developed. The study was conducted at the beginning of June 2020. Sixty-six teachers who provided online classes in higher education responded to the questionnaires, and 94% taught foreign languages at universities. This research sought to evaluate the burnout of university teachers and evaluate the factors influencing their burnout during the pandemic. The investigation revealed that gender was not a factor and did not affect their burnout; however, differences were found in burnout's components.

Roohani and Dayeri (2019) examined the relationship between Iranian English for Second Language (EFL) teachers' burnout and motivation, a mixed-methods study with a sequential design. One hundred and fifteen EFL teachers from language schools in southwest Iran participated in the study. The researchers collected data using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986). Soenens et al. (2012) developed the motivation to teach questionnaire and utilized a semi-structured interview with 15 participants. Descriptive statistics indicated that EFL teachers had low levels of burnout and were autonomously motivated in their teaching. Correlation analysis also revealed negative relationships between autonomous forms of motivation, i.e., intrinsic motivation and burnout. Moreover, multiple regression analysis demonstrated that independent forms of motivation and external regulation could better predict teachers' burnout. The qualitative data from the interviews provided further insight into the quantitative results and explained some person-and work-related factors about teacher burnout. Some implications were offered to decision-makers in EFL pedagogy to improve EFL teachers' autonomous motivation to reduce their burnout experiences.

Güneş and Uysal (2019) investigated the relationship between teacher burnout and organizational socialization among English language teachers, investigating EFL teachers' burnout and organizational socialization levels and any relationships between these two aspects. They employed Richmond's et al. (2001) Teacher Burnout Scale and Erdoğan's (2012) Organizational Socialization Scale as quantitative tools. The study further explored the causes of teacher burnout and unsuccessful organizational socialization through a qualitative semi-structured interview. The results revealed that teachers had low levels of burnout, high levels of organizational socialization, and a negative correlation between teacher burnout and organizational socialization. The interviews indicated that independent of the EFL teachers' burnout levels, the major issues that led to burnout were pre-service education, heavy workloads, poor administrative and collegial support, and low student motivation and misbehaviours.

Cross and Pollk (2018) wrote an article titled *Burn Bright, Not Out: Tips for Managing Online Teaching*, which discussed how managing the online classroom presents new challenges for faculty members. New online faculty members can become confused with the process of teaching and creating content online due to a lack of support and inexperience with tools and strategies. Issues often arise in online teaching due to the ubiquity of the online classroom and finding appropriate tools to help transfer face-to-

face strategies to the digital classroom. By integrating digital tools and personnel support, faculty can flourish in the online environment.

MacIntyre et al. (2020) examined the stress and coping answers of 600 language teachers who responded to an online survey in April 2020, which measured stressors and 14 coping strategies grouped into two categories: approach and avoidance. Teachers reported substantial levels of stress. Correlations indicated that positive psychological outcomes (wellbeing, health, happiness, resilience, and growth during trauma) correlated positively with approach coping and negatively with avoidance coping. Avoidance coping consistently only correlated between 0.42 and 0.54 with negative outcomes (stress, anxiety, anger, sadness, and loneliness). In addition, ANOVA showed that although approach coping was consistently used across stress groups, avoidance coping increased as stress increased, suggesting that there may be a cost associated with avoidance coping strategies. Stepwise regression analyses using the 14 specific coping strategies showed a complex pattern of coping.

3. Method

Participants and context

The objective of this study aimed at investigating strategies BE teachers used at BRU to mitigate burnout during the COVID-19 conversion from onsite to online instruction. Fifteen BE teachers participated, whose ages ranged from 26-55 years of age. Participants possessed either a master's degree or terminal degree in the English language or a related field. The length of time in the teaching industry ranged from one to 16 years. They had to go online/remote to teach from 1-7 days/week. The study utilized purposive sampling, which produced 15 participants who BRU employed. The rationale for participant selection rested in the university's need to switch from onsite to online instruction necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and identify strategies used by the participants to mitigate burnout.

Instrument

Data were collected using an online self-assessment questionnaire containing 18 items adapted from MacIntyre et al. (2020). The questionnaire contained four sections: 1) personal participant information, 2) strategies used to mitigate burnout while teaching online, 3) BRU BE teachers provided suggestions for other strategies which assisted in mitigating burnout, 4) additional opinions and suggestions. The demographics section utilized a checklist; the second section employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from one to five: 1.00-1.80, low: 1.81-2.60, moderate: 2.61-3.40, high: 3.41-4.20, high, and 4.21-5.00. The last two parts applied an open-ended form. Three experts examined the research instrument to assess content validity. They utilized the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) developed by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977) (as cited in Turner & Carlson, 2003), which scored between 0.67 and 1.00.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers scheduled face-to-face appointments with participants and discussed the requirements of the study ensured they clearly understood objectives, provided details concerning the process, and provided an opportunity for questions and answers. After the question-and-answer session concluded, the researchers distributed the research instrument to the participants who were allowed two weeks, from February 15th to the 26th of 2021, to fill out the questionnaires and return them. Statistics utilized in data analysis were percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

4. Findings

The following results were presented in line with the research objective:

Strategies BRU BE teachers employed to mitigate burnout

Table 1 Strategies used by BRU BE teachers to reduce burnout

No.	Strategy	M	S.D.	Meaning
1	Acceptance: I acknowledge the reality of what happened and learn to cope with it.	4.40	0.91	Highest
2	Emotional Support: I obtain emotional support and seek comfort and understanding.	4.33	0.62	Highest
3	Positive Reframing: I see the situation from a different, more affirming light; I seek something good in it.	4.46	0.52	Highest
4	Active Coping: I concentrate efforts on doing something about the situation and try to make it better.	4.60	0.51	Highest
5	Instrumental Support: I try to get advice or help from others about what to do.	4.00	1.00	High
6	Planning: I devise a strategy about what to do. I think about steps to take.	3.60	1.24	High
7	Behavioural Disengagement: I give up trying to deal with it or abandon attempts to cope.	2.26	0.88	Low
8	Self-Distraction: I turn to work or other activities to take my mind off things. I do something to think about it less.	3.34	0.48	Moderate
9	Venting: I verbalize unpleasant feelings to let them escape or generally express negative feelings.	2.53	0.99	Low
10	Humor: I make jokes about it, or I make fun of the situation.	3.67	0.81	High
11	Religion: I find comfort in spiritual beliefs. I pray or meditate.	2.34	1.17	Low
12	Activities: I make time for enjoyable activities.	3.80	0.94	High
13	Exercise: I get plenty of physical exercises.	3.13	1.06	Moderate
14	Outside: I get outside.	3.20	0.86	Moderate
15	Social Activities: I make time for social activities.	3.34	0.82	Moderate
16	Relationships: I develop good relationships with students.	4.60	0.83	Highest
17	Goals: I set reasonable goals.	4.46	0.52	Highest
18	Time Management: I develop better time management skills.	4.40	0.51	Highest
Total		3.69	0.81	High

As shown in Table 1, BRU BE lecturers rated the strategies used for mitigating burnout from most often used to least often used while teaching online. The combined total average for all 18 strategies registered at a high level ($M = 3.69$). The strategies used most were 1)

Active Coping: I concentrate efforts on doing something about the situation and take action trying to make it better (M = 4.60), 2) Relationships: I develop good relationships with students (M = 4.60), 3) Positive Reframing: I see the situation from a different and more affirming light; I seek something good in it (M=4.46), 4) Goals: I set reasonable goals (M=4.46), 5) Time Management: I get better at time management (M=4.40), 6) Acceptance: I acknowledge the reality of what happened and learn to live with it (M=4.40). The least used strategy was Behavioral Disengagement: I give up trying to deal with it or abandon attempts to cope (M=2.26).

Other strategies suggested by BRU BE teachers to mitigate burnout

The teachers also suggested some strategies for avoiding burnout when teaching online as follows: Working out, pursuing passions such as dancing, taking photos, writing blogs, living with mindfulness, meditating daily, asking for help, and finding hobbies such as learning to cook or planting flowers.

Additional opinions and suggestions

Additional opinions and suggestions are summarized as follows:

Besides the strategies they used, the participants requested that the program or people involved giving them support, i.e., providing knowledge through in-service training related to technology for online teaching. They stated that this training would increase their knowledge and better prepare them to teach online. This will help them with effective online class management, especially when conducting remote student assessments. They also opined that they need to join online teacher communities to gain more techniques and share their online teaching practices. Social supports are important because they provide needed assistance and resources, help to ease mental tensions, minimize depersonalization, and provide assurances that help is readily available from stakeholders in the institution and the community to assist them with professional development and personal efficacy.

5. Discussion

Choosing positive strategies

The strategies used to avoid burnout during the conversion to online teaching ranked from the highest level as follows: active coping: concentrating efforts on doing something about the situation and taking action to try to make it better (M=4.60), relationships: developing good relationships with students (M=4.60), positive reframing: seeing the situation from a different more affirming light; seeking something good in it (M=4.46), goals: setting reasonable goals (M=4.46), time management: being a better time manager (M=4.40), and acceptance: acknowledging the reality of the situation and learning to cope with it (M=4.40), respectively. The data suggest that participants chose positive strategies to cope with burnout. Choosing to use positive strategies will affect positive psychological outcomes. This is following MacIntyre's et al. (2020) examination of stress and coping responses of 600 language teachers who responded to an online survey in April 2020. They found that positive psychological outcomes such as wellbeing, health, happiness, resilience, and growth during trauma correlated positively with approach coping. Therefore, more strategies should be introduced to the

participants, especially positive approach types of coping strategies: working out, pursuing passions such as dancing, taking photos, writing blogs, living with mindfulness, meditating daily, asking for help, and finding hobbies, such as learning to cook or planting flowers. Participants depended less on Behavioral Disengagement: giving up trying to deal with it or abandoning attempts to cope ($M=2.26$). This means participants rejected avoidance burnout coping strategies. When teachers prefer approach strategies to avoidance strategies, students and organizations receive benefits from the teachers' tenacity to persevere in the face of adversity, choosing not to succumb to burnout or abandon attempts to cope. This is also supported by MacIntyre et al. (2020), who speculates that positive psychological outcomes correlated negatively with avoidance coping. Therefore, teachers should be trained to use positive coping strategies for obtaining positive psychological results.

Social and physical strategies

Some strategies for avoiding burnout when teaching online offered by the participants included working out, pursuing passion such as dancing, taking photos, writing blogs, living with mindfulness, meditating daily, asking for help, and finding hobbies such as learning to cook or planting. These additional strategies reveal a winners' mindset and determination to use positive and active coping strategies to mitigate burnout. People with low burnout will use active coping strategies to motivate themselves to be on the right track. This conforms with Roohani and Dayeri (2019) that EFL teachers had low levels of burnout and were autonomously motivated in their teaching. They will find ways to motivate themselves. These participants used creative activities to mitigate burnout. This is in line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1954). The hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising physiological (food and clothing), safety (job security), love and belonging needs (friendship), esteem, and self-actualization. Self-actualization means achieving one full potential, including creative activities.

Additional opinions and suggestions

Other opinions and suggestions from participants showed that participants need support from the Business English program and people involved, such as university administrators or program committee members. They should provide online teacher training to enable teachers to provide effective instruction. Joining online teacher communities could identify new instructional techniques and provide opportunities for teachers to share their experiences with online practices. This suggests that participants who choose to use positive approach burnout coping strategies to deal with burnout by seeking help from the more prominent online teacher communities' function better in the instructional process; and, at the same time, share their own teaching practices to assist other educators in their professional development. They also need societal support because they opined that social supports are essential. They desired to secure help from online and offline communities to alleviate burnout. This is in line with Cross and Polk (2018) that faculty can flourish in the online environment by integrating digital tools and personnel support, and it is also in conformity with Güneş and Uysal (2019), who posited that teachers who experienced lower levels of burnout also had a higher level of organizational socialization. This indicates that when teachers have opportunities to socialize within appropriate forums, the level of burnout will be lower. Isolation and social disengagement are symptoms of burnout but not the root cause. Therefore, the

organization should provide opportunities for teachers to connect with other people through socialization in online or offline environments.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate strategies used by 15 BE teachers at BRU to prevent burnout during the COVID-19 conversion to online teaching. The research utilized a self-assessment questionnaire with 18 items. Percentage, mean, and standard deviation were employed in data analysis. The findings showed that six strategies had a statistical significance higher than $M = 4.40$. The strategies are active coping: concentrating efforts on doing something about the situation and taking action to try to make it better ($M = 4.60$), relationships: developing good relationships with students ($M = 4.60$), positive reframing: seeing the situation from a different, more affirming light; seeking something good in it ($M = 4.46$), goals: setting reasonable goals ($M = 4.46$), time management: being a better time manager ($M = 4.40$), and acceptance: acknowledging the reality of the situation and learning to cope with it ($M = 4.40$), respectively. Societal supports are essential and should be provided. Due to the pervasive problem of burnout and its problematic consequences, the strategies identified in this study can be beneficial in managing burnout.

7. Suggestions for future studies/implications

More participants and research tools should be used in future studies, which incorporate interviewing to obtain rich, in-depth information relative to participants' experiences with coping and burnout. The strategies found in this study can be used by teachers in coping with burnout, and the results of the study can be used by educational stakeholders to provide support systems and tools for teachers to mitigate burnout during COVID-19 online teaching.

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Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Mahasarakham University

Identity:

Being multilingual, academically strong, and mutually committed to local development

Philosophy:

Language diversity, wisdom and ethics all together lead the community to international recognition.

Vision:

Leading in humanities and social sciences, with emphasis on producing graduates with good quality standards and international recognition

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