*Original Article*

# The Level of Professional Burnout of Primary and Secondary Education Teachers

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*Abstract: This research focuses on the Professional Burnout of Primary and Secondary Education teachers, exploring its dimensions—Emotional Exhaustion, Personal Accomplishment, and Depersonalization. The significance of the study lies in addressing the negative impact of burnout on teachers' well-being and educational performance. The findings reveal a moderate level of Emotional Exhaustion, low Depersonalization, and high Personal Accomplishment among teachers, emphasizing the individualized nature of burnout. The study proposes solutions, including improved training, increased support, and better working conditions, with potential contributions to policy development. The research aligns with existing literature, utilizing Maslach and Jackson's model. Despite limitations, such as reliance on self-reported data, the research provides valuable insights and sets the stage for further exploration into teacher well-being and burnout.*

*Keywords: Depersonalization, Emotional Exhaustion, Personal Accomplishment, Professional Burnout, Teachers.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The educational process constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of our society, shaping the future and expectations of the younger generations. As Sharp (1975) points out, the primary aim of education is the production of the free man, who engages in self-overcoming, self-perfecting and creativity. The role of teachers in Primary and Secondary Education is crucial, as they undertake this significant task of the production of the free man. What makes their role so critical is that it is not limited solely to the transfer of knowledge, but it also involves creating an environment that influences their professional lives. This research explores the topic of Professional Burnout of Primary and Secondary Education teachers along with its components, namely Emotional Exhaustion, Personal Accomplishment, and Depersonalization, which are being analyzed. The goal is to provide detailed answers to questions that concern not only the educational community but also society at large.

This issue is extremely significant as Professional Burnout is a major concern for teachers and has a negative impact on their health, quality of life, and performance. It is characterized by high levels of Emotional Exhaustion, cynical attitudes, and a reduced perception of Personal Accomplishment at work (Salyers et al., 2017). Furthermore, this research is interesting since the quality of education depends largely on teachers and their professional performance. Analyzing the factors that affect Professional Burnout and the quality of life of teachers can contribute to improving their professional lives and, consequently, enhancing the quality of education they provide. Moreover, the research has the potential to provide data and proposals related to the improvement of Professional Burnout and the quality of life of teachers. Some suggestions that may arise from the research include enhancing the professional training and development of teachers, increasing support and resources available to teachers, and improving working conditions, such as reducing workload and recognizing their work. Additionally, this research can offer insights for the development of policies and programs aimed at improving the professional lives of teachers. For instance, it may indicate the need for changes in policies related to the evaluation of teachers and the management of their workload.

Overall, the particular research is significant for improving the quality of education provided to students and the working conditions of teachers. The quality of education depends largely on the Quality of Professional Life of teachers, as perceived by Ingersoll (2001). According to him, the tendency of teachers to leave their jobs is related to reduced education quality. Moreover, he claims that teachers who feel that they have less time and support for teaching and professional development are more likely to leave their jobs (Ingersoll, 2001). Furthermore, according to Anastasiadis, Anastasiadou, and Katsiris (2017), if teachers feel exhausted and dissatisfied with their work, this can have a negative impact on the quality of education they provide to their students. Additionally, improving the quality of life for teachers is essential for retaining and attracting more talented individuals to the teaching profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). This can have significant implications for the quality of education provided to students, as experienced and well-trained teachers can deliver significantly better education to their students.

Improving Professional Burnout is crucial for enhancing the quality of education and overall improvement of the educational process (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). According to Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2006), when teachers feel supported, encouraged, and have a satisfactory balance between their work and their personal life, this can lead to greater productivity and better performance in the field of education. The authors explore the correlation between Professional Burnout and high work engagement among teachers. The results of the study indicate that positive correlations exist between intrinsic professional satisfaction and the sense of support at work with intense work engagement and productivity among teachers. Furthermore, addressing this issue can lead to recognizing the challenges faced by teachers and developing practical and policy proposals. The development of support programs and encouragement for teachers, as well as creating a more favourable working environment for them at all levels of education, are also considered possible outcomes.

This research can contribute to informing and raising awareness among teachers and relevant authorities about the issues faced by teachers regarding Professional Burnout in Primary and Secondary Education. Additionally, it may enable the support of education and training for teachers to develop skills and abilities to cope with Professional Burnout. Another potential area of utilization of the findings is the development of support programs and the provision of personal assistance to teachers experiencing Professional Burnout. These programs may include counselling sessions, seminars on stress and Burnout management, and training in maintaining a healthy balance between professional and personal life. They serve as a means of providing on-the-job support for such professionals at risk of burnout (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996). Furthermore, educational programs can be developed for school administrators and teachers involved in school management, aiming to ensure support and enhancement for teachers facing Professional Burnout. These training programs can include stress management techniques, as well as training in recognizing and addressing Professional Burnout.

## A. Definition of Professional Burnout

Professional Burnout has emerged as a common way to refer to work-related pressures and the overall condition of individuals when they feel they have depleted their physical, psychological, and/or emotional resources due to their work (Schaufeli et al., 1996). According to the study of Maslach et al. (2001), it typically occurs when job demands exceed an individual's ability to cope with them, either due to the volume of work, the difficulty of the demands, or the time spent on work. According to Smith (1986), most definitions of Professional Burnout describe a syndrome of anxiety caused by physical, psychological, and cognitive symptoms. It involves a complete depletion of the individual's physical and mental reserves and is caused by the excessive effort of the individuals to fulfil unrealistic goals in their work (Smith, 1986).

The introduction of the term into the academic field was made in 1974 by the psychologist Herbert Freudenberger. He attempted to describe the set of symptoms displayed by volunteers and professionals working in the field of mental health. In 1980, he characterized this specific condition as a state of exhaustion and disillusionment, occurring when an individual dedicates himself/herself to a purpose or a specific lifestyle without the expected reward. Specifically, Professional Burnout, often referred to as burnout syndrome, characterizes individuals in the modern era whose professional duties are related to providing services and assistance to members of society (Freudenberger, 1980).

Cristina Maslach (1976), a social psychologist and distinguished professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, known for her research on Professional Burnout, used the term to describe self-overwhelm that evolves into a severe loss of energy and a restriction of individual performance. Additionally, it is defined as a consequence of prolonged work-related stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). According to Kyriacou (2001) and Maslach et al. (2001), the term is often associated with occupational medicine, as burnout is a health problem frequently linked to work and professional lifestyle. However, it primarily affects individuals working in professional fields associated with physical, emotional, and behavioural symptoms, such as service-oriented professions.

## B. Models of Professional Burnout

As the understanding of burnout characteristics became more defined, the subsequent task involved the development of assessment tools to measure them. Several measures were proposed, each rooted in distinct assumptions about burnout, with many relying on the apparent validity of the measurement items (Maslach & Leiter, 2017). It becomes apparent that the models of Professional Burnout attempt to explain the impact of the professional environment on the health and well-being of individuals. They are designed to contribute to the understanding of factors related to exhaustion and fatigue in the workplace. The first comprehensive psychometrically researched burnout measure was the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). It was expressly crafted to evaluate the three dimensions of the burnout experience identified in earlier qualitative research. In contrast, initial burnout measures concentrated solely on the dimension of exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 2017).

The distinction between measures assessing multiple dimensions of burnout and those focusing solely on exhaustion persists today, representing diverse conceptualizations of burnout. For instance, the Bergen Burnout Inventory is designed to

measure three core dimensions of burnout, namely Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism and Sense of Inadequacy (Feldt et al., 2014). The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory evaluates two dimensions, Exhaustion and Disengagement from work (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005). While some burnout measures concentrate solely on exhaustion, they distinguish between various aspects of exhaustion. The Shirom-Melamed Burnout Questionnaire, for instance, contains 22 items in four subscales: "Physical Fatigue", "Cognitive weariness", "Tension", and "Listlessness" (Lundgren-Nilsson et al., 2012). Similarly, the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory differentiates between physical and psychological exhaustion (Kristensen et al., 2005).

The three-dimensional model by Maslach and Jackson (1982) is the focus of this work. It is a model developed by Christina Maslach and her colleagues, describing burnout as a three-dimensional phenomenon, attributing it to three interacting, yet distinct states: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and reduced Personal Accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1982). This model focuses on individuals' perceptions of their work and their interaction with their environment. It involves analyzing the emotional reactions of individuals to their work, as well as the conditions influencing these reactions. Regarding Emotional Exhaustion, it is the perception that one's energy has been depleted, and he/she cannot meet the demands of their work. This exhaustion can be manifested as discouragement and loss of enthusiastic disposition. Additionally, Depersonalization refers to the perception that one cannot focus on their work and connect with the world around them. It typically manifests as indifference, hostility, or negative behaviour. Finally, the sense of reduced Personal Accomplishment is related to the feeling that work is not effective, and there is no progress or results corresponding to the effort invested. This dimension affects an individual's self-esteem and can lead to disappointment, discouragement, and loss of enthusiastic disposition.

## C. Consequences of Professional Burnout

Professional Burnout affects the individual in multiple dimensions and can have serious consequences on both professional and personal life. According to Salvagioni et al. (2017), burnout was a significant predictor of the following physical consequences: hypercholesterolemia, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, hospitalization due to cardiovascular disorder, musculoskeletal pain, changes in pain experiences, prolonged fatigue, headaches, gastrointestinal issues, respiratory problems, severe injuries and mortality below the age of 45 years. Additionally, Professional Burnout can lead to an increased number of workplace accidents due to reduced attention and concentration of employees (Bakker et al., 2014). It is evident that it is even associated with decreased self-esteem, job satisfaction, and the quality of life of employees (Maslach et al., 2001).

Moreover, according to Cherniss (1992), the long-term effects of burnout are of great social significance. If high levels of burnout are associated with long-term problems in career adaptation, then the problem of burnout is even more serious than previously thought of. In addition to this, burnout is associated with sustained activation of the autonomic nervous system and dysfunction of the sympathetic-adrenal-medullary axis, with alterations in cortisol levels. Limited studies have also shown altered immune function and changes in other endocrine systems. Consequences of burnout include increased allostatic load, structural and functional brain changes, excitotoxicity, systemic inflammation, immunosuppression, metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease and premature death (Bayes et al., 2021). Beyond the aforementioned consequences, it can impact the performance of the organization itself, as employees experiencing Professional Burnout may have reduced productivity and performance (Bakker et al., 2014). Therefore, it is essential to focus on the management and addressing of Professional Burnout and enhance practices for its effective management.

## D. Related Studies

Studying the issue of Professional Burnout in the field of education, particularly in Primary and Secondary Education, it is deemed crucial to note that teachers face high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion. Consequently, their professional performance and teaching are affected. Numerous studies have proven that Professional Burnout can lead to a decrease in teachers' performance and professional deterioration (Kyriacou, 2001). Especially in recent years, teachers are facing increasing challenges and demands in the educational process and the school environment, as well as in society at large. Despite the ultimate goal of providing high-quality education, difficulties are constantly rising, creating an atmosphere of stress and professional exhaustion for teachers. This occurs as demands increase without corresponding resources to meet them (García-Arroyo et al., 2019). Additionally, Koustelios and Tsigilis (2005) interpret Professional Burnout as the point where professional demands and dissatisfaction faced by an individual in their work lead to a gradual loss of illusions they had regarding their professional life until reaching the end of this process.

Since the 1980s, Professional Burnout has attracted interest for further research. According to Kloska and Raemasut (1985), the main reasons causing stress among teachers include the lack of motivation from students, student discipline issues, insufficient time to solve daily problems, difficulties in communication among teachers, and the lack of necessary

technological tools. In the late 1980s, research continued to analyze factors related to the Professional Burnout of teachers. These factors include the teacher-student ratio, the level of education, and workload. A more contemporary approach recognizes many other factors causing stress and Professional Burnout among teachers. These factors include lack of resources, role overload, professional development, role ambiguity and conflict, poor relationships with colleagues, low salaries, inappropriate student behaviour, relationships with parents, pressure from management, lack of communication, lack of prestige, and social criticism towards teachers (Griffith et al., 1999; Dimitropoulos, 1998; Kantas, 2001). Lastly, in another analysis the percentage of teachers in Greece reporting Emotional Exhaustionis low, while the percentage of Depersonalization is also low. Conversely, the percentage of Personal Accomplishment appears to be higher among teachers in Greece compared to other countries at the European and international levels (García-Arroyo et al., 2019).

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research question that was examined is as follows: What is the level of Professional Burnout among Primary and Secondary Education teachers? In addressing the research question, a systematic collection and analysis of data with the aim of understanding Professional Burnout of teachers in Primary and Secondary Education, was employed. For the conduct of this research, it was decided to use convenience non-probability sampling. In total, 230 teachers from Primary and Secondary Education participated in this sample, representing various regions across Greece. 85.7% of the sample was women, and the remaining 14.3% was men.

The research tool used, is the questionnaire, a popular research instrument designed to collect data (Marshall, 2005). It is addressed to teachers of the aforementioned levels of education to record their views and experiences regarding Professional Burnout. The Professional Burnout questionnaire used in this study was originally created by Maslach et al. (1996). For the purpose of this research, the translated version by Kokkinos (2002) was used. It includes 22 statements that refer to three aspects of Professional Burnout. The questionnaire does not measure overall Professional Burnout. Instead, it investigates Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment of the participants. The subscale for Emotional Exhaustionincludes 9 statements, specifically statements 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13, 14, 16, 20, while the subscale for Depersonalization includes 5 statements (5, 10, 11, 15, 22). Finally, the dimension of Personal Accomplishment includes 8 statements (4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, 21). The questionnaire is based on a Likert-type scale with 7 degrees, where 0 represents "Never," 1 represents "Sometimes or less than once a year," 2 represents "Once a month or less," 3 represents "Several times a month," 4 represents "Once a week," 5 represents "Several times a week," and 6 represents "Every day". For each of the three dimensions of the questionnaire, a score is calculated. This score evaluates the levels experienced by the participant in relation to the aspects of Professional Burnout; for instance, high, moderate, or low. Emotional Exhaustionis considered high if it is 27 or above 27, moderate, if it is between 17 and 26, and low, if it is between 0 and 16. Depersonalization is considered high, if it is 14 or above 14, moderate, if it is between 9 and 13, and low, if it is between 0 and 8. As for the dimension of Personal Accomplishment, which is assessed in the opposite direction to the other two subscales, it is considered high from 0 to 30, moderate from 31 to 36, and low from 37 or above 37.

The research process began with the approval of the questionnaire by the supervisor of the study, Ms. Androutsou. Subsequently, after minor corrections were made, the questionnaire was transferred to its electronic form using the Google Forms platform. This specific platform was chosen because it aims to ensure the anonymity of the participants. In the final stage, the questionnaire was distributed to the teachers of the sample using a link, through social media groups, and also via acquaintances. After the distribution of the questionnaire, approximately a two-week period was given just before and during the Easter break (April 2023) to gather responses on the Google Forms platform. After the two weeks, the questionnaire ceased to accept responses, and all the responses from the teachers were collected in a Microsoft Excel file. Subsequently, the process of data analysis and writing followed. The data collected from the questionnaire were transferred to an encoded system in a suitable format for analysis.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the data from Table 1, that is presented, the mean value of Emotional Exhaustionvariable is 25.9, with a standard deviation of 11.7. This indicates that participants have a moderate level of Emotional Exhaustion, with significant variability in their responses. Some participants exhibit higher levels of Emotional Exhaustion, while others have lower levels. Additionally, the mean value of the Depersonalization variable is 5.70, with a standard deviation of 5.12. This suggests that participants have a relatively low level of Depersonalization, with little variation in their responses. This may indicate that they do not perceive a significant loss of human contact and emotional connection with others in their workplace. Finally, the mean value of the Personal Accomplishment variable is 20.3, with a standard deviation of 6.81, indicating that participants have a relatively high level of Personal Accomplishment, with significant variability in their responses. Some participants feel that they achieve their personal goals and feel energized, while others may have a lower sense of achievement.

In general, the results indicate that overall Professional Burnout varies among the different aspects. While Emotional Exhaustionis of moderate level, Depersonalization is relatively low, and Personal Accomplishment is high. However, it is important to note that there is significant variation in the responses of the participants, suggesting that Professional Burnout can affect individuals differently.

**Table1: Mean Value and Standard Deviation of the Three Variables for Professional Burnout**

|  | Emotional Exhaustion | Depersonalization | Personal Accomplishment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mean Value | 25.9 | 5.70 | 20.3 |
| Standard Deviation | 11.7 | 5.12 | 6.81 |

The main finding of the particular research procedure is that teachers have a moderate level of Emotional Exhaustion, a low level of Depersonalization, and a high level of Personal Accomplishment. Therefore, the level of Professional Burnout among teachers varies depending on the individual aspects.

The analysis of the data presented in Table 1 provides valuable insights into the levels of Professional Burnout among the participants, as measured through the variables of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. These findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of how teachers experience burnout in the workplace.

Firstly, focusing on the Emotional Exhaustion variable, the mean value of 25.9 suggests a moderate level of Emotional Exhaustion among the participants. The standard deviation of 11.7 indicates considerable variability in responses, emphasizing that some teachers experience higher levels of Emotional Exhaustion while others report lower levels. This finding underscores the heterogeneous nature of teachers' emotional experiences, highlighting that factors influencing Emotional Exhaustion may differ widely among individuals.

In contrast, the Depersonalization variable exhibits a mean value of 5.70, signalling a relatively low level of Depersonalization among the participants. The small standard deviation of 5.12 suggests limited variation in responses, indicating a consensus among teachers that they do not perceive a significant loss of human contact and emotional connection with others in their workplace. This finding may suggest a positive aspect of the participants' work environment, where interpersonal relationships are maintained at a satisfactory level, potentially acting as a buffer against Depersonalization.

Turning attention to the Personal Accomplishment variable, the mean value of 20.3, coupled with a standard deviation of 6.81, suggests a relatively high level of Personal Accomplishment among the participants. This implies that, on average, teachers feel they achieve their personal goals and experience a sense of accomplishment in their work. However, the significant variability in responses indicates that some participants may not share this sentiment, emphasizing the diverse experiences teachers have regarding their sense of achievement.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn from this study is that teachers have a moderate level of Emotional Exhaustion, a low level of Depersonalization, and a high level of Personal Accomplishment. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, the level of Professional Burnout among teachers varies depending on the individual aspects. Considering a study mentioned above, the percentage of teachers in Greece reporting Emotional Exhaustion is low, while the percentage of Depersonalization is also low. On the contrary, the percentage of Personal Accomplishment seems to be higher among teachers in Greece compared to other countries in European and international levels (García-Arroyo et al., 2019). In this case, there is a difference only in Emotional Exhaustion. This may be attributed to factors such as culture, educational practices, and socio-economic factors.

In summary, the results suggest a multifaceted picture of Professional Burnout among teachers. While Emotional Exhaustion is moderately prevalent, indicating a degree of shared emotional strain, the low levels of Depersonalization and high levels of Personal Accomplishment suggest a generally positive work environment for the participants. Nonetheless, the substantial variability in responses across all variables underscores the individualized nature of Professional Burnout, emphasizing that its impact can manifest differently among teachers. These findings underscore the importance of personalized interventions and support mechanisms to address the diverse needs of teachers in managing and mitigating burnout.

*Interest Conflicts*
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publishing of this paper.

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