

Análisis del Síndrome de Burnout en docentes de enseñanza de inglés. Caso estudio: Unidad Educativa en el cantón Loja

Analysis of Burnout Syndrome in English Language teachers. Case study: Education Institution in the province of Loja

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Resumen

El Resumen debe: El síndrome de burnout, común en la educación se caracteriza por estrés crónico y agotamiento emocional, afectando el rendimiento laboral. Este estudio se centra en su impacto en el desempeño profesional, especialmente en las estrategias pedagógicas y factores externos. Se utilizó un enfoque cualitativo, con entrevistas a tres docentes en una institución particular de la ciudad de Loja, para entender este fenómeno. Se encontró que la distracción estudiantil tras el recreo afecta el flujo de las clases y las estrategias docentes debido a la exigencia de disciplina en la institución. La presencia de más de cuatro estudiantes con Necesidades Educativas Especiales grado dos y tres requiere ajustes en las estrategias pedagógicas. Además, el desequilibrio del idioma inglés de los estudiantes dificulta sus estudios en cuanto a los contenidos adquiridos durante el año académico, especialmente si no está permitido el uso de TIC cruciales para la adquisición de un nuevo idioma. Por lo tanto, es esencial adoptar estrategias como el modelo de clase invertida y las habilidades del siglo XXI para brindar apoyo tanto al docente como al estudiante dentro del aula de clase.

Palabras clave: cansancio emocional, Síndrome de burnout, Estrés laboral, distracción estudiantil, nivel de inglés, estrategias pedagógicas

Abstract

Burnout syndrome, which is common in education, is characterized by chronic stress and emotional fatigue, affecting job performance. This study focuses on its impact on professional performance, especially on pedagogical strategies and external factors.

A qualitative approach was used, with interviews with three teachers in a private institution in the city of Loja, to understand this phenomenon, it was found a student distraction after recess affects the flow of classes and teaching strategies due to the requirement of discipline in the institution. The presence of more than four students with Special Educational Needs levels two and three requires adjustments in pedagogical strategies. In addition, the students' English language imbalance complicates their studies in terms of the content acquired during the academic year, especially if the use of ICT, crucial for the acquisition of a new language, is not allowed. Therefore, it is essential to adopt strategies such as the flipped classroom model and 21st-century skills to support both the teacher and the student in the classroom

Keywords: Emotional fatigue, burnout syndrome, chronic stress, student distraction, English level, pedagogical strategies.

Introduction

Burnout syndrome is a pathological condition that occurs as a result of chronic stress in professions that provide intensive long-term care to people and has been described as a significant pathological condition resulting from chronic burnout in teaching professionals. (Rodríguez, 2020)

In the academic environment, the teacher has been considered a portal of vulnerability where the teacher is prone to suffer emotional fatigue, stress, and neglect of his role as a teacher since he feels exhausted at work. Additionally, the new educational models and new demands on teachers demand greater responsibilities associated with administrative tasks, this leads to a lack of cooperation among teachers, which inevitably favors the development of this situation.

It means that teachers are tired by the heavy work they do in their profession and do not give the expected potential so that emotional exhaustion arises. (Aguiar, Velázquez, & Aguiar, 2019). An example is the research done by Ordoñez (2022) in Brazil, concluded that it is necessary to re-signify the educational work, improve the working conditions and reduce the Burnout Syndrome.

Based on the above, the main purpose of this research is to analyze how Burnout Syndrome affects the performance of three professionals in the English area of an Education Unit located in the city of Loja. This general objective is divided into two specific objectives: To know how pedagogical practices affect the mental health and well-being of teachers and then To propose strategies to prevent or reduce Burnout Syndrome.

In order to achieve the objectives, this research will analyse how burnout syndrome affects the professional performance of three English teachers in an educational unit in the Loja Canton, which will benefit current and future teachers to learn about the reality of education and, above all, will present alternatives on how to overcome them.

In addition, it is hoped that the results of the research will provide information for future work that will allow them to explore in depth in more institutions and show the reality of teaching, which demands much more commitment and is sometimes not well remunerated. On the other hand, stakeholders in the educational field will become aware and thus help teachers to do their job much better.

Methodology

These interviews will consist of 10 open-ended questions, designed to allow participants to relate their experiences, opinions, and experiences within the context of the classroom. The main focus of the research is on burnout syndrome in relation to pedagogical strategies, as

well as the impact of this work-related stress on teachers' daily activities. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, conceived as a case study involving three English language teachers. The methodology employed involves face-to-face interviews, designed to gather testimonies that contribute to a deeper understanding of the social phenomena in question. These interviews will consist of 10 open-ended questions, designed to allow participants to relate their experiences, opinions, and experiences within the context of the classroom. The main focus of the research is on burnout syndrome in relation to pedagogical strategies, as well as the impact of this work-related stress on teachers' daily activities.

Results and Discussion

The results of the present research were acquired through the implementation of face-to-face interviews with three teachers belonging to a private educational establishment located in the city of Loja. The selection of these teachers was carefully conducted, considering their academic background and professional experience in the field of English.

This study focuses mainly on the analysis of non-numerical data in order to understand the actual opinions and experiences in the work environment. These data were collected using a qualitative collection method, with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the research problem in question.

Besides, the interviews focused on the analysis of work stress, commonly known as burnout syndrome, within the context of pedagogical practices and strategies aimed at mitigating it in the work environment. For this reason, 10 open-ended questions were asked to allow the interviewees to express themselves with absolute truthfulness.

Analysis question 1: In what work situations, specifically in pedagogical practice, do you perceive that your progress is hindered or stagnant

In this case, teacher one (T1), comments that, after the break, the dynamics in the classroom are affected due to the need to re-establish order and concentration of the students, which has an impact on the ability to teach classes optimally.

"I have to worry more about class control, so it exhausts me, it frustrates me".

On the other hand, teacher two (T2) emphasizes the negative impact of his pedagogical strategies when students show a lack of interest in the classroom or generate excessive distractions.

In addition, T2 and teacher three (T3) point out a significant concern related to the number of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in their classroom, as these teachers cater for more than four cases per classroom. This situation implies the need to adapt classes to meet the individual needs of all students, which can be challenging.

In addition, the teacher mentions that some students with SEN seem to feel exempted from academic responsibilities due to the perception that school authorities cannot apply severe disciplinary measures, such as retention in remedial exams or repetition.

There is an increase in the demands and requirements teachers face in their daily routine, as well as in the expectations related to the role of an exemplary educator. The perception of an effective teacher is influenced by competencies and strategies when teaching, the ability to evaluate students' progress, and the willingness to carry out research that contributes to perfecting their pedagogical approach (Ordoñez & Grasst, 2021)

Analysis question 2: Main challenges faced in their teaching practice, specifically in terms of workload and demands in the classroom.

T1 expresses that one of the main challenges she faces is effective group management, given that the institution attaches great importance to this skill, assessing the teacher's ability to maintain discipline in class. She mentions: "The students, at certain times, don't collaborate and make me lose the direction of my classes".

This disease is widespread in all professions that affects people, and the number of cases continues to increase among professionals related to the education sector. Faced with this situation that the country is experiencing, teachers face various stressful situations, such as reactions from students or poor learning, which affect their mind and mental health, causing psychoemotional changes and the presence of related diseases (Albarracín, et al. 2019).

Additionally, T2 mentions that emotionally it is sometimes difficult to separate the personal from the work, which generates instability when teaching. As for the workload, although she considers it adequate, she considers that it is poorly distributed. Here we can identify similarities in both T2 and T3, because the latter also mentions that she is pleased with her workload, but perceives that the organization and distribution are not equitable. Days with only two hours of class time and others with full days without a break. In addition, unforeseen situations or various events generate stress, affecting the weekly planning of content.

Analysis question 3: In the institution where you work, what factors contribute to generate work stress?

T1, considers that not being able to work as a team is a factor that generates stress since it is necessary the support of everyone to comply with English fairs, presentations, and storytelling, and sometimes due to discussions within the area, the activities are not carried out satisfactorily.

As mentioned by the pedagogue Jaime Sarramona, cooperative work is presented as the most appropriate method to promote competency-based learning, which includes activities aimed not only at vocational training but also at the integral development of individuals, enabling them to address the demands of society. However, when it is not implemented effectively, it can cause imbalances in the area and eventually affect the performance of job responsibilities.

Subsequently, T2 alludes to the fact that one factor is the treatment of the teacher by the parents. Although the teacher applies pedagogical strategies adjusted to the content, some of these may be perceived as too difficult or easy by some parents.

Sometimes these parents do not approach the subject properly and, without consulting the teacher, criticize his or her approach without understanding or asking about his or her teaching strategies or methods.

On the other hand, T3 touches on a crucial point where she states literally: *"In this area, I find it stressful to meet students who have different levels of knowledge within the same classroom, that is, some have a higher level of understanding than others"*, thus this disparity causes variations in classes and also in the teaching methods that any English teacher employs.

In response to this, the authors Karner, et al. (2021) refer to the need to have a thorough and valid understanding of the different factors that make up the varied learning abilities and needs present in a classroom. Teachers need to assess both the learning processes of students and the individual and situational characteristics that may influence these processes. Briefly, it is a matter of adapting teaching in a specific and personalised way to meet the diverse needs of learners.

The above, in the specific area of English, is a challenge, since the diversity of abilities within a class, where some students have a more advanced level of knowledge than others, implies that pedagogical strategies are not completely effective for all students. This is because individual needs and abilities vary, which requires adaptations in teaching to ensure the progress of each student and also a delay for the teacher

Analysis question 4: What support do you receive from the educational institution to manage stress and maintain a work-life balance?

T1, T2 and T3 express that, frankly, they do not receive significant support from the institution. Although suggestions for active breaks are occasionally provided, they feel that these do not constitute substantial support. Rather, they perceive considerable pressure due to the multiple responsibilities they must fulfill. More effective activities aimed specifically at improving their well-being and professional performance would be beneficial.

Analysis question 5: Have you experienced job stress also known as burnout syndrome at some point in your work career? How did you identify it and what did you do to deal with it?

In the analysis of this issue, the presence of several factors is observed. Among them, the workload and the demands that, besides being fulfilled, seem to exceed the limits, merely due to the nature of the teaching role in a private institution, stand out. In the case of T1, the significant influence of the expectations imposed to excel in such an institution stands out, where a greater demand is perceived in comparison with other educational environments.

As the author Mendoza (2023) states the teacher's role involves facilitating, guiding, and coordinating activities, as well as accompanying the creation of innovative educational processes that adapt to contemporary demands. They must adopt a new mentality in their pedagogical approach, implementing updated teaching and learning strategies that promote excellence in educational work. However, when demands become impositions without clear limits, instead of improving, they can generate a sense of discomfort that hinders the proper development of the teacher in the classroom.

As English teachers, it is needed to raise the level of demands on the students. Finally, schedules had to be established to balance their responsibilities inside and outside the institution.

T2 faces a high demand for paperwork in a short period, which forces him to use part of his class time to complete his administrative tasks. On the other hand, teacher three mentions that her role as coordinator presents a significant challenge due to the resistance of her colleagues to follow the established guidelines. Although these guidelines were well organized, the lack of cooperation from her colleagues led her to seek another job opportunity.

Analysis question 6: How do you consider the relationship between students and the teaching dynamics in the classroom impact your mental health and well-being?

In this case, there is a notable coincidence among T1, T2 and T3, who point out that the dynamics of their classes depend to a great extent on the groups of students. While some groups do not need to be reprimanded and allow for a calm working environment, others demand greater attention in terms of discipline, which sometimes makes it difficult to teach the class in a smooth manner. Therefore, the active collaboration of the students is a fundamental element to guarantee the effective development of the topics to be addressed

Analysis question 7: How do you think the demands placed on you at work may conflict with the pedagogical strategies you use?

T1, T2, and T3 agree on three specific requirements: participation in extracurricular activities, the non-use of information and communication technologies such as cell phones and tablets, and the restriction of recreational activities outside the classroom. It was evidenced through the analysis of the questionnaires applied that the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) constitutes a highly effective and valid strategy for language teaching. This finding is based on the perception and experience of the students, who highlighted the significant benefits of the integration of ICTs in the language learning process.

Further, an increase in motivation, participation and comprehension of language content was observed when appropriate and relevant technological tools are used in the educational context. Research conducted by Atwan (2020) emphasizes that there is a need for blended learning with traditional education with e-learning and the use of technology and its applications in the educational process.

In addition, social media platforms and various websites, including forums and chat rooms, are being used to facilitate this blended learning approach and thereby reinforce English language skills. These results support the importance of consciously and planned incorporation of ICT in pedagogical practice to enhance the development of language skills in students (Zambrano, et al. 2022).

Analysis question 8: What changes or adjustments, do you think you could make in the work environment to help reduce the impact of burnout syndrome?

T1 and T3 proposes reducing the amount of homework assigned or, alternatively, making it shorter. In addition, he strongly suggests strengthening the flipped classroom strategy, arguing that some students present a less solid level of English proficiency. The application of a flipped classroom technique in the educational environment could improve students' ability to achieve their learning objectives and cultivate their critical thinking skills (Khasawneh, 2023).

In this regard, prior access to reading and review material before each class would be extremely beneficial for more effective progress in language learning. T2 suggests that the school management should show more empathy towards the teaching staff. Given that, as previously mentioned, all English teachers have a double workload, teaching both in the morning and the afternoon, he considers that it would be fair to treat them more sympathetically and to use ICTs during class hours.

Analysis question 9-10: Are there any specific policies or practices you think the educational institution should implement to support the mental health and well-being of teachers; What recommendations or strategies would you propose to prevent or reduce burnout syndrome in the workplace?

In this case, T1, T2 and T3 agree to respect their hours off, one of them states: *"I think it would be prudent to respect our free hours, that is, I am aware that we have to review assignments, projects, among others. However, sometimes we could go out to the bar to be able to relax and continue with our work but in our institution, they are always on the lookout for all this, if you are on the computer, what programs you use, if you go out, and that is very strong for me, I feel that they are drowning me."* For this reason, it is important to recognize the need for rest and disconnection in order to maintain an adequate work-life balance, which will contribute to improve the well-being and productivity of the personnel.

An important point to mention is the opinion of respondent 2: he suggests that the DECE staff could show more empathy towards teachers, considering that sometimes psychologists tend to favor students or ask teachers to review students' overdue assignments, even after

having given them multiple opportunities. There is a need for the DECE to adopt a more equitable and fair perspective in all areas, taking into account the responsibilities and challenges faced by teachers in their educational work.

Moreover, the implementation of activities in which the students participate more actively than the teacher was recommended. This will foster an interactive learning environment and promote the development of critical thinking skills and teamwork among students.

Conclusions

According to the above and the analysis carried out in relation to the burnout syndrome, particularly in terms of pedagogical strategies, it was concluded that, despite being different teachers, they share common aspects in the same institution.

In the private institution in the city of Loja, three cases of English teachers suffer from emotional fatigue in different aspects and degrees. One of the causes is the interruption of the class flow after the breaks, due to the students' behavior and therefore the difficulty in class management and the development of the class.

In addition, the lack of interest of the students, their distractions, negatively affect the strategies implemented by the second teacher, and another challenge they face is having more than four cases of students with SEN per classroom, although teachers are highly prepared to manage this type of groups, managing a large group with students who have different needs is more exhausting than usual.

In almost all contact professions, the prevalence of burnout syndrome is high, which is why, according to the experiences shared, it is concluded that group management is important both for the balance between the personal and the professional, due to the demands of the institution, the need to maintain discipline is essential.

In addition, this pressure is accentuated by the unequal distribution of workload and lack of organization. This affects not only the psychological well-being of teachers but also their ability to teach effectively.

In the teaching profession, a number of external factors influence educational development beyond the classroom environment; team dynamics, the relationship with parents and managing the diversity of levels in the same classroom.

The necessity and importance of teamwork is highlighted in this research in order to decrease the stress associated with assigned responsibilities, since lack of cooperation affects the fulfillment of assigned responsibilities.

On the other hand, differences in students' levels make it impossible to apply an effective methodology for all, especially when faced with varying degrees of English language proficiency.

From the evidence collected, the institution where these teachers work does not provide effective support for them, although they suggest taking active breaks as an activity to lower burnout levels, these are not sufficient to relieve the stress associated with their multiple responsibilities both inside and outside the classroom.

The analysis of this topic emphasizes that all teachers have suffered burnout syndrome, better known as work stress, in which the workload and excessive demands, in collaboration with the imposed expectations, generate significant pressure both for the development of their classes and not to lose their jobs.

In the same way, it should be highlighted the importance of balancing work responsibilities and organising more equitable class schedules in order to promote a healthy working environment allowing teachers to have balanced days for better classroom management and implementation of pedagogical strategies.

Additionally, teachers are aware that certain guidelines must be followed regarding the paperwork that must be fulfilled, but when it is assigned for a short period of time, there is some discomfort that may even hinder the proper development in the classroom when trying to accomplish the assignments.

In terms of the relationship between students and the teaching dynamics in the classroom has a great impact, it was concluded in the three cases that their classes, because it is a particular institution, are strongly influenced by the groups of students, since while some groups collaborate effectively facilitating a quiet working environment, there are others that require more attention in terms of discipline, which hinders the smooth delivery of class. That is why it is important to emphasize that the active collaboration of the students is a crucial factor to guarantee the development of the learning to be addressed in class.

The demands of work may conflict with the pedagogical strategies employed, particularly in the context of English language teaching. Demands made include participation in extracurricular activities and the prohibition of the use of information and communication technologies in the classroom.

The analysis of the interviews conducted revealed that the use of ICT is a highly effective and valid strategy to reinforce the four essential language skills. However, the institution strictly prohibits their use, which limits teachers' ability to implement modern and up-to-date pedagogical strategies.

Evidence shows that lack of respect for time off and constant institutional supervision can lead to discomfort and work-related stress for teachers, affecting their well-being and performance in the classroom.

In the traditional model, teachers often carry the full weight of teaching in the classroom, which can lead to stress, burnout and task overload, which is why implementing the flipped classroom approach, along with 21st-century skills, allows teachers to design more dynamic, interactive and meaningful activities can reduce emotional exhaustion and feelings of monotony, factors that contribute to burnout.

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