Who Experiences Burnout? The Emotional Impact of Language Teaching

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Abstract
Despite the rapid growth of language teaching, the emotional impact of employment within this industry has not been adequately explored using standardised tools. Accordingly, a convenience sample of 45 online teachers aged between 21 and 67 years (SD=13.35) completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory and Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale. Regression analyses revealed that burnout could be predicted from specific workload and demographic variables, such as work modality and the age of the teacher. Interestingly, no associations were found for group lessons or for asynchronous tasks, such as providing written feedback, listening to recorded interviews and grading practice oral exams. The results are compared with normative data and suggest online language teaching places staff at the same risk of burnout as working within an offline context. The implications for preventing burnout in teachers are explored and advice offered to teachers and managers.

Keywords
Burnout, online teaching, TESOL, language teachers, Covid-19

Introduction

Sociocultural theories of language acquisition suggest that within offline and online classrooms there are shared normative values for helpful and acceptable behaviours (Morita, 2000; Loh & Liew, 2016). From this perspective, attendees initially gain awareness of language via a process of socialisation and are therefore observing the behaviours of other group members and trying to determine the rules (Duff, 2007; 2010). However, belonging to the language community can require constraining authentic behaviours and seeking to adopt the behaviours of the group. For example, surface acting is a term that describes hiding a genuine emotion and affecting an emotional response more suited to a professional role (Lee & van Vlack, 2018). Indeed, human service professionals frequently need to hide or regulate their emotional displays to better assist others (Kantas & Vassilaki, 1997). Surface acting can require modulating tone of voice, facial expressions and other verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and the demands of this sustained adaption are conceptualised as "emotional labour" (Lee & van Vlack, 2018).

Emotional labour has the potential to impair teacher wellbeing as masking emotions can be exhausting (Lee & van Vlack, 2018). This exhaustion can have devastating and long term implications, including staff attrition (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Wang et al, 2015) and low student satisfaction ratings (Aguayo, Vargas, de la Fuente & Lozano 2011). These findings are especially pertinent to employers, as high language teacher turnover can be disruptive to learners, costly and detrimental to an institution's reputation (Carmel & Badash, 2018).

There is little doubt that language teaching can be a stressful occupation, yet this "stress" is easy to pathologize but difficult to define (MacIntyre, et al, 2020). One solution is to consider a more focussed approach to occupational hazards**,** understand interactions which require investment or emotional regulation as potentially draining for human services professionals providing care, instruction or advice (García-Carmona, Marín, & Aguayo, 2019; Kantas & Vassilaki, 1997). This negative reaction has been conceptualised as "burnout", whereby an experience of depleted emotional reserves is accompanied by distancing and a perception of reduced accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1984).

Burnout describes a specific set of responses to roles that require emotional labour. Over almost forty years, numerous studies have examined burnout in teachers (for a meta-analytic review of burnout interventions in education, see Iancu et al, 2018). Burnout has been operationalised and measured in various ways, however, the most widely accepted and utilised conceptualization is Maslach's (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996) multilateral phenomenon comprising Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalisation and Personal Accomplishment.

One of the most commonly used tools for measuring burnout remains the MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), and referred to as the "gold-standard" tool for assessing the emotional consequences of a human service role (Schutte, Toppinen, Kalimo, & Schaufeli, 2000). It has been translated into multiple languages and employed to assess staff in many different contexts, including emergency nurses in China (Li et al, 2018), Dutch police officers (Bakker & Heuven 2006) and university teachers (Blix, 1994; Hogan & McKnight, 2007). There are several versions of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, adapted to capture the experiences of different occupational groups and the MBI-ES is tailored to teachers. Within the education industry, the MBI-ES has been found able to predict intention to quit, and is a useful measure for employers to monitor staff wellbeing (Leung & Lee, 2006; Samadi, Bagheri, Sadighi & Yarmohammadi, 2020).

International review of burnout in teachers, has noted other observable outcomes including absenteeism, poor general health and personal difficulties outside of the workplace (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2014). However, of papers reviewed only a minority of reported on ESL/EFL teaching contexts. In summary, the research evidence demonstrates teacher burnout has potentially far-reaching implications for classroom practice, teacher welfare and employer image and moreover, language teaching warrants greater attention.

Large scale studies of burnout in teachers have been conducted, including several meta-analyses using MBI data. For example, Maslach et al (1996) began collating large samples of data from several occupational groups providing a basis for comparing MBI scores. These normative scores from over ten thousand teachers, nurses, police officers and other human-service professionals offer a useful benchmark for observing occupational similarities and differences, and can permit organisations to estimate if burnout has reached problematic levels (Maslach et al, 1996). In these data collections, teaching samples were delineated by the age group of their students, not the subject area, therefore, normative data for any language teachers is not yet available.

Review of Burnout in EFL/ESL Teachers

Examination of burnout and its consequences has been extensive, with over 34,000 research articles published since 1980, and some professions scrutinised more than others. Aloe, Amo and Shanahan (2014) commented that the global relevance of burnout in education can be represented by the growing numbers of studies from different locations around the world. For

instance, a search of the Web of Science database using the terms "burnout "and "teacher" or "teachers" or "teaching" revealed that this topic has generated over four thousand peer reviewed articles and book chapters since 1996, yet focus within language teachers has been limited**.** This is surprising given researchers have noted that burnout is frequently correlated with intention to seek a position in another teaching institution, or even leave the teaching profession entirely (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Samadi et al 2020).

Burnout, individual differences and work modality

Whilst large-scale meta analyses are largely absent, smaller studies have explored burnout in EFL and ESL teachers and revealed possible associations and predictive factors across both individual differences and classroom practices, notably; language proficiency (Nayernia & Babayan, 2019), emotional intelligence **(**Dewaele, 2018) perfectionism **(**Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2017), teacher age (Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010) teaching style **(**Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2016) and corrective feedback **(**Köksal, Özdemir, Tercan, Süleyman & Bilgin, 2018). Although the literature focussing on burnout in language teachers is limited, workload and teacher age have been linked to burnout in other samples of teachers (for example, Makarenko & Andrews, 2017; Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010; Watts & Robertson, 2011), with younger teachers showing higher burnout scores and teachers who completed a higher load of marking also showed higher burnout. Accordingly, the present study will explore associations between teacher age, work modality and burnout.

Burnout and self-efficacy

One variable that has received particular attention within evaluations of language teaching is that of self-perceived efficacy. Studies have compared teacher efficacy as a means of evaluating teacher-training courses or comparing graduate success (e.g. Tahsildar & Kabiri, 2019), revealing more confident teachers (those with greater self-efficacy) who feel better able to adopt a range of teaching strategies, appear to report lower levels of burnout. Indeed, Khani and Mirzaee (2015) suggest that teacher perceived efficacy could potentially mediate or moderate the impact of burnout. However, within the existing literature, studies do not necessarily follow standardised procedures, and this makes comparisons problematic. For instance, whilst Köksal et al (2018**)** explored perceived efficacy in teachers in Turkey, as did Sabokrouh and Barimani-Varandi (2013) in Iran, neither included mean scores. Moreover, although Horvitz et al (2015) and Khani and Mirzaee (2015) used a standardised measure, The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), they applied a 5-point scale, rather than a 9-point continuum with 5 markers, as advised by the authors, precluding direct comparisons (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). In summary, within the current literature it is difficult to determine the causal nature of the relationship, and further investigation may help tease out the relationships and implications of teacher efficacy and burnout.

Burnout, teacher age and self-efficacy

In 2013, Sabokrouh and Barimani-Varandi observed that research into the efficacy of EFL and ESL teachers was scarce; and a scoping assessment of current literature revealed that published quantitative papers still remain rare. With such paucity of available literature one approach is to review the findings from other samples and related occupations, particularly since comparisons within and between different groups of human service professionals have demonstrated evidence for a link between burnout and staff efficacy**.** For example, Shoji et al (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of 57 studies with data from over 22,000 individuals and concluded that burnout was significantly linked to self-rated efficacy. This pattern was observed across different industries and different countries; with nurses, teachers and social

workers who reported high efficacy also revealing low burnout, as assessed by the MBI and TSES (Maslach Burnout Inventory, MBI, Maslach et al 1981/1996; Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale, TSES, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), amongst other standardised tools. However, the strength of these relationships differed depending on age and occupation. Older and more experienced staff appeared less vulnerable to burnout and the burnout-efficacy effect was stronger in this group, especially amongst teachers (Shjoi et al, 2016). However, the reasons behind these differences are unknown, it is unclear if older professionals are benefitting from social support or strategies gained during their career, or if younger staff are more prone to burnout due to caring responsibilities outside of the workplace.

In summary, burnout in teachers is a global phenomenon with implications for occupational health and staff turnover, and with growing evidence that teacher efficacy operates protectively, suggesting implications for teacher support and training initiatives. However, as data is commonly pooled or possibly even unpublished, little is known about the specific experiences of language teachers. In this article we thus seek to explore teacher burnout. We examine whether levels of burnout amongst ESL/EFL teachers are comparable with normative values according to the Maslach Burnout Inventory, whether work modality (synchronous, asynchronous workload) predicts burnout, whether teacher age or years of experience is associated with burnout, and whether teacher perceived self-efficacy is associated with burnout in ESL/EFL teachers.

Materials and Methods

Ethical approval

The project was granted Ethical Approval by Lancaster University and permission was gained from the management team of the participating teaching organisation. Participants were informed of the aims and they completed an online consent form before accessing the survey.

Recruitment

The study was advertised online via internal company newsletters, a strategy selected over public social media such as language teacher forums, to ensure that participants were genuinely employed within language teaching.

Participants

A convenience sample of online language teachers was recruited. 55 participants attempted the survey, with 45 usable responses, although not every participant offered full demographic information. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants.

Table 1
Demographic Details of the Participants

Criteria	Frequencies		
Gender identity	Male=3	Female= 34	Other/prefer not to say=2
Employing branch	UK=31	USA=4	Other=4
Employment status	Main source of employment is language teaching=28	Main source of employment is not a language teaching role=9	Prefer not to say=2

Mean age of participants was 38.26 years (range=21-67 years, SD=13.35) and most respondents indicated that teaching was their main source of employment. The majority were located in the UK or USA and had varying duration of teaching experience; between 0 and three months (n=9), up to one year (n=7), between one year and three (n=12) and more than three years' experience (n=9).

Materials

Maslach Burnout Inventory: Educators Survey (MBI-ES, Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996)

We utilised the MBI-ES to measure burnout, which is tailored to teachers and within teaching contexts has been found to predict intention to quit, and is a useful measure monitoring of wellbeing (Leung & Lee, 2006; Samadi, Bagheri, Sadighi & Yarmohammadi, 2020). The MBI-ES, a tripartite tool comprising the following subscales; Personal Accomplishment (PA, 8 items), Emotional Exhaustion (EE, 9) and Depersonalisation (D, 5). PA is characterised by the sense of perceived success a teacher experiences, in contrast, the remaining subscales relate to less positive reactions, with D assessing the feeling of negativity and detachment towards learners and EE is a sense that one's emotional reserves have become depleted due to engaging in "people work" (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al, 1996).

Over the past forty years the MBI-ES has been systematically tested and demonstrated high reliability and validity in different teaching settings around the globe (Abu-Hilal & Salameh, 1992; Byrne, 1992; Iwanicki & Schwab, 1981; Platsidou, & Daniilidou, 2016). For example, although burnout shares certain commonalities with other negative affective responses, including depression, factor analysis has determined that it is a unique concept and therefore this burnout measure has discriminant validity (Leiter & Durup, 1994).

The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001)

To capture teachers' beliefs and appraisals regarding their role we used the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), a standardised selected as it has been widely used to establish perceived efficacy of EFL and ESL teachers and is validated for use within this group and other disciplines (Karami, Mozaffari & Nourzedah, 2019). Moreover, it has been translated into several languages and demonstrated utility in different teaching contexts, notably employed in universities to monitor the impact of training (Duffin et al, 2012; Tahsildar & Kabiri, 2019).

The TSES is available in either 12 or 24 item forms and both have demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity (Fives & Buehl, 2010). For the sake of brevity, the short version of the TSES was chosen. Within this measure, items 1, 2, 3, 4 assess Efficacy for Instructional Strategies, items 5, 6, 7, 8 assess Efficacy for Classroom Management and items 9, 10, 11, 12 asses Efficacy for student engagement.

After the survey closed, the data files were downloaded from Qualtrics as Excel files and then analysed using Statistics for Windows, Version 26.0 (IBM SPSS, 2019).

Survey internal consistency

The internal consistency of the survey was determined using Cronbach's alpha and as shown in Table 2, the two measures demonstrated that they were reliable.

Table 2
Cronbach's Alpha

Scale and subscales	Total items	α
MBI	22	.795
Emotional Exhaustion	9	.892
Depersonalisation	5	.759
Personal Accomplishment	8	.717
TSES	12	.853
Instructional Strategy	4	.733
Classroom Management	4	.852
Student Engagement	4	.766

Results

RQ1: Are levels of burnout amongst ES/EFL teachers comparable with normative values according to the Maslach Burnout Inventory?

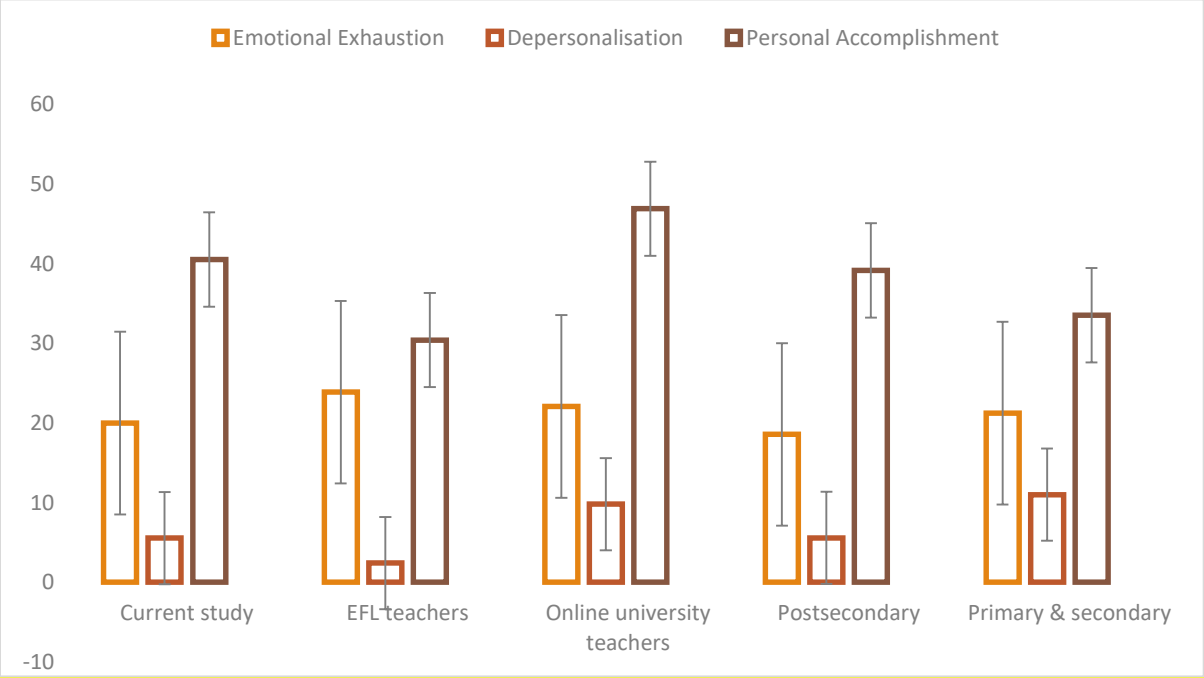
The Maslach Burnout Inventory- Educators Survey (MBI-ES, Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996) scores revealed that burnout was comparable to other samples of teachers as illustrated in Table 3 and Figure 1 below.

Table 3
A Comparison of Burnout Scores from the Current Study and the Research Literature

Authors	Sample	Mean PA (SD)	Mean EE (SD)	Mean D (SD)
Current study	Online ESL/EFL teachers	40.54 (5.92)	19.98 (11.47)	5.55 (5.79)
Nayernia & Babayan, (2019)	EFL teachers (n=110)	30.42 (12.75)	23.87 (11.70)*	2.41 (1.15)*
Hogan & McKnight (2007)	Online university teachers (n=76)	46.91 (6.62)	22.08 (11.59)*	9.81 (4.68)*
Maslach et al (1996)	Normative data, Postsecondary education teachers (n=4163)	39.17 (7.92)*	18.57 (11.95)*	5.57 (6.63)*
	Normative data, primary and secondary school teachers (n=635)	33.54 (6.89)*	21.25 (11.01)*	11.0 6.19)*

* Within 1 SD of the current study

Figure 1
An Illustration of how Burnout Scores from Current Study Compare with Other Samples of Teachers



Teacher efficacy
Teacher efficacy assessed using the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and as shown in (Table 4 and Figure 2) revealed comparable with data from other samples of teachers working offline.

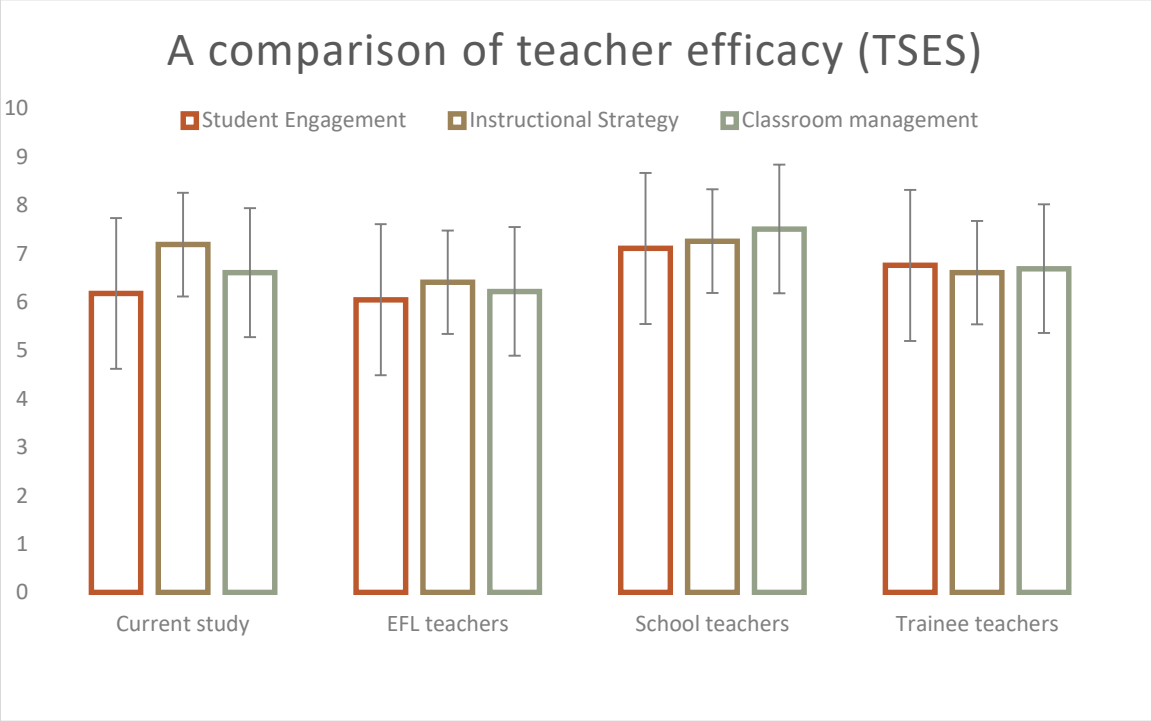
Table 4
A Comparison of Efficacy Scores from the Current Study and the Research Literature

Authors	Sample	Mean classroom management (SD)	Mean Instructional Strategy (SD)	Mean Student Engagement (SD)
Current study	Online ESL/EFL teachers	6.61 (1.33)	7.19 (1.07)	6.18 (1.56)
Fives & Buehl, (2010)	Primary and secondary teachers in the USA (n=372)	7.51(1.02)*	7.26 (1.01)*	7.11(0.84)*
Duffin et al (2012)	Sample 1: Trainee teachers attending a university in the Midwest, USA (n=272)	6.69 (1.23)*	6.61 (1.18)*	6.76 (1.14)*

	Sample 2: Trainee teachers attending a university in the Midsouth, USA (n=180)	6.10 (1.49)*	5.74 (1.50)	5.76 (1.42)*
Tahsildar & Kabiri (2019)	Sample 1: EFL teachers in schools in Afghanistan, graduates of University X (n=70)	6.22 (1.23)*	6.41(1.30)*	6.05 (1.34)*
	Sample 2: EFL teachers in schools in Afghanistan, graduates of University Y (n=35)	5.44 (1.27)*	5.39 (1.27)	5.18 (1.17)*
Horvitz et al (2015)	Online university teachers working in the USA (n=91)	Measured TSES using a 5-point scale, rather than a 9-point continuum with 5 markers, as advised by the authors, therefore direct comparisons are not possible (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001)		
Khani & Mirzaee	EFL teachers working for private language institutions in Iran (n= 216)	Measured TSES using a 5-point scale (see above).		
Köksal et al (2018	EFL teachers working in state universities in Turkey (n=36)	Mean scores were not provided		
Sabokrouh & Barimani-Varandi (2013)	EFL teachers in private institutions in Iran (n=68)	Mean scores were not provided		

* Within 1 SD of the current study

Figure 2
An Illustration of how Efficacy Scores from Current Study Compare with other Samples of Teachers from the Research Literature



Inferential Statistics
Pearson's correlations between the test scores revealed statistically significant relationships between burnout, perceived efficacy, workload and demographic variables. Plonsky and Oswald (2014) suggest that the effect size of a correlation can be judged by the r-value, with scores closer to .25 representing a small effect, close to .40 a medium effect and .60, a large effect. According to this guidance, the relationships were small to medium, with the largest effect size observed for workload variables (see below).

RQ2: Does work modality (synchronous, asynchronous workload) predict burnout?
The total number of synchronous classes taught was positively and significantly related to burnout (r= .441, n=37, p=.006). By contrast, asynchronous corrections of speaking tests and written scripts were not associated with burnout. Accordingly, the link between burnout scores and synchronous workload variables (Group Lessons, GLs, individual Lessons, PLs), was examined more closely to determine which aspects of burnout (Personal Accomplishment, PA, Depersonalisation, D and Emotional Exhaustion, EE) and which aspects of the teachers' workload were associated. Pearson's correlations determined that the number of group lessons (GLs) was not significantly correlated with burnout or perceived efficacy. However, higher Personal Accomplishment (PA) was significantly correlated with the number of individual lessons (PLs) completed on average per month (r= .408, n=38, p= .011).

RQ3: Is teacher age or experience associated with burnout?
A significant negative relationship was detected between Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and age (r= -.338, n=39, p= .035) suggesting levels of EE were lower for older teachers, and consistent with previous findings that burnout can be higher in some age groups due to career duration, higher student contact or differences in employee status (Makarenko & Andrews, 2017; Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010; Watts & Robertson, 2011). Further investigation was

undertaken to determine whether lower burnout was also linked to greater professional experience. Since teaching experience data had been collected as categories, four groups were chosen reflecting the frequency of respondents in each career duration category and the dataset was split (0-3 months, 4-12 months, more than 1 year, more than 3 years). ANOVA was used to compare MBI subscale means with no significant differences detected when grouped by online career duration: Emotional Exhaustion: F (3,33)= .854, p= .474, Personal Accomplishment: F(3,33)= .568, p=.640, Depersonalisation: F(3, 33)= .521, p=.671.

RQ4: Is teacher perceived self-efficacy associated with burnout in EFL/ESL teachers?
Personal Accomplishment was significantly and positively correlated with two aspects of teacher efficacy, Instructional Strategy (r=.323, n=39, p= .045) and Student Engagement (r=.376, n=39, p=.018), suggesting that teachers experiencing a greater sense of satisfaction in their teaching performance, also rated their ability to engage with students and issue helpful instructions more highly.

Linear regression models
Variables met the requirements for multiple regression (Field, 2013; Plonsky & Oswald, 2014), allowing two predictive models to be tested.

Predicting emotional exhaustion
The EE model was significant (F(1,38) =4.780, p=.035) and age was shown to explain 11.4% of the variance in teachers' Emotional Exhaustion (R^2= .114). This means that other unknown variables are responsible for the majority of EE.

Predicting personal accomplishment
As reported earlier, Pearson's correlations revealed relationships between Teacher Engagement, Instructional Strategy, Private Lessons (PLs) and Personal Accomplishment (PA), however, of the variables entered into the model, only PLs were able to predict teacher PA (F(3,37) =4.004, p=.015). When entered into the predictive model separately, PLs accounted for 16.6% of the variance in PA (R^2= .166, F(1,37)=7.183, p=.011)

Discussion
The relationship between burnout and teaching ESL/EFL
Teaching can be understood as a human service occupation with a high degree of emotional labour and the correlation between workload and burnout was not unexpected (García-Carmona et al, 2019). However, not all teachers' duties were linked with facets of burnout: marking written work, giving feedback on speaking tests and teaching group lessons, showed no association with teacher burnout. Only one-to-one lessons were associated with Personal Accomplishment, however, the reasons for this finding are unknown. Group and individual lessons differ in a multitude of ways and so there are several possible explanations linked to relationship building, student feedback and classroom interaction. Indeed, it is possible that working one to one with students allowed the teacher to observe progress over time and this potentially contributed to a greater sense of Personal Accomplishment.

Emotional Exhaustion was negatively associated with teacher age, however, further analysis ruled out the mitigating influence of years of experience as an explanation. Therefore, it is unclear why younger teachers in this study showed higher EE. This pattern has occurred in other samples of teachers (e.g. Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vlachakis, 2006; Hogan, & McKnight, 2007) and other occupational groups (e.g. Brewer & Shaphard, 2004) and it is thought that

older employees are able to use strategies gained over the course of their lives to better protect themselves from burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2016).

Burnout levels in online ESL/EFL teachers

That evidence was discovered of burnout levels comparable with teachers working in several offline contexts could suggest that burnout is a pervasive experience, and that working remotely, (as opposed to in a traditional classroom environment) confers no protective effect, especially if remote working has been mandated to mitigate a viral threat, such as Covid-19. Research conducted by the newly formed trade union, TEFL Workers Union-London, a branch of the international union, Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic had exacerbated existing problems within the industry, specifically pay and job security (TEFL Workers Union-London, 2020). Others have commented on the emotional impact of teaching students remotely during sudden quarantine conditions (MacIntyre et al, 2020). It is difficult to determine how representative such studies are, especially as convenience and snowball sampling have been used, however, there is tentative evidence of significant emotional distress (Griffin, 2020; MacIntyre et al, 2020, TEFL Workers Union-London, 2020).

In addition to the logistical burden of rapidly designing an online curriculum, Gacs, Goertler and Spasova (2020) observed that this was also a time of trauma and financial hardship for many. Gacs et al (2020) provide strategies for language teachers who were required to adjust swiftly their own expectations and those of their students. If expectations are key, there is thus an important distinction to be made between ESL/EFL teachers abruptly switching to online delivery, and those who routinely teach online. Unfortunately, this latter group are rarely studied.

Furthermore, according to the literature review and the current sample, burnout does not appear to be quantitatively different between TESOL and other disciplines. However, Personal Accomplishment scores in the online teachers were higher than the scores from EFL teachers working within a traditional classroom (Nayernia & Babayan, 2019). Further research is required to determine if this finding consistently occurs across the profession.

Burnout and teachers' sense of efficacy

It is important to note that the TSES is not an objective measure of teacher competence, but rather perceived or self-rated efficacy; therefore, the current sample of online teachers appear very confident in their abilities to manage their classroom, deliver instructions and engage with learners. Furthermore, their scores were frequently within one standard deviation of other teachers, including participants working in EFL. The literature had linked burnout in the online classroom to teacher perceived efficacy, with some studies suggesting that efficacy could mediate the experience of burnout (Khani & Mirzaee, 2015), however, due to the potential for multiple stressors acting upon an unknown number of outcome variables, the current study did not meet the requirements for mediation analysis (Valeri, & VanderWeele, 2013). Nevertheless, a significant association was observed between one facet of burnout, Personal Accomplishment and two aspects of teacher efficacy, Instructional Strategy and Student Engagement. This relationship could be explored further using a larger dataset to determine if efficacy in online teachers mediates their experience of burnout.

Implications

The Covid-19 pandemic saw a rapid switch to online teaching and several studies have emerged measuring the stress of teaching staff (e.g. Griffin, 2020; Hartshorn, & McMurry, 2020). Yet, planned online language teaching has received relatively little scrutiny, and this understudied

population has much to offer. The education community has witnessed a rapid revolution, with blended and remote learning likely to be more commonplace in the future (MacIntyre et al, 2020). There is opportunity to learn from organisations and teachers already engaged in online ESL and EFL teaching and we would encourage language companies to conduct research and disseminate the findings. Furthermore, rather than speculating about employee experiences, or promoting generic support, it is advisable to collect specific information and determine the needs of the teachers. To better target resources, founders of the MBI advise that educational organisations collect data on organisational culture, workload and sense of community. Maslach and colleagues recommend using the Areas of Work Life Survey in addition to the MBI, to monitor staff welfare, and also determine the efficacy of training and employee assistance programmes (Maslach, Jackson & Schwab, 2018).

Limitations

Whilst meeting its goals, this study acknowledges several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small, especially relative to the size of the participating teaching company and the wider industry. Whilst we report several significant results, it is unclear how well these findings represent the wider population of online teachers employed by this organisation. In addition to recruiting a larger sample, it would be useful to gain responses from more teachers working outside of the UK and USA. The participating company is a large multinational language school employing thousands of teachers, however only a small proportion of participants indicated that they were working in South America, Continental Europe, Africa or Asia.

Second, our sample may have felt especially positive about their role or that they had spare time to contribute to research. Such response biases are a consequence of using a convenience sample and we would urge large organisations to use their resources to access a large, representative sample that reflects more teachers. In addition to the potential for response biases, our survey only collected data at a single time point in time and the scores may only represent teaching experiences during June 2020; a time of significant change and stress due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Conduct of a longitudinal study following online language teachers over the course of at least a year to control for the influence of unprecedented global events and seasonal variations in student numbers would be welcome.

Third, one of the measures, the TSES aims explicitly to assess self-perceived efficacy for classroom management, and was not designed specifically for online teachers. This may challenge its validity and it would be useful to explore experiences of online language teachers to determine if their experiences are qualitatively and quantitatively distinct from the traditional classroom, and whether a specific tool should be created.

It is surprising that online language teachers have received relatively little research attention as teaching English online as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL or EFL) is an established growth industry (Forbes, 2018). Delivering classes remotely can confer benefits through enabling learners to participate from more locations and at a potentially a lower cost than traditional teaching modalities (Huang & Hsiao, 2012). Moreover, the flexibility regarding time and location provided by online teaching can benefit both learners and teachers, especially individuals with significant caring responsibilities, busy schedules or complex health concerns. Therefore, online language learning has potential positive implications for accessibility and widening participation (Hirvela, 2006; Pearson & Koppi, 2002**).**

However, there are distinct challenges to online teaching and the Covid-19 pandemic has provided a unique lens with which to explore the online language learning industry, as more teachers made the shift from traditional classroom, or blended learning formats, to exclusively teaching online. For instance, between January and April 2020 researchers were able to monitor participants and providers of programmes as they rapidly switched from in person teaching to online delivery. Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) reported that students attending an average of eighteen synchronous online classes per week felt that despite this relatively high number of teaching hours, they were missing some vital aspects of the learning experience. Feedback from learners and teachers revealed concerns about the provision of social support and noted that opportunities to gain cultural competences and the myriad of interaction-led aspects of language learning were lost (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020).

Other studies have observed the challenges of creating and maintaining a digital community of learners. For example, Griffin (2020) noted that colleagues and students were initially daunted by the prospect of online learning, however, collaboration between learners and teachers enabled a rigorous new online programme to be delivered. A shared sense of identity and community can be useful for collaborative tasks, however within an online classroom, technical difficulties can impair collaboration, communication and relationship forming (Baralt & Morcillo Gómez, 2017). Consequently, successfully leading an online lesson requires modelling strategies, observing responses and encouraging learners to collaborate to reach beyond their existing competence (Griffin, 2020). Accordingly, online language learning is perhaps as challenging as working within a more conventional language teaching setting, if not more so.

MacIntyre, Gregersen and Mercer (2020) suggest that being a language teacher carries a specific set of challenges due to the emotional labour inherent in teaching, but also because language is inseparable from identity and status. Language is enmeshed with beliefs, values and social practices and consequently language teachers have much to consider and control when teaching (Loh & Liew, 2016). Online language teaching, with its specific demands can therefore be especially challenging, both emotionally and cognitively (Swain, 2013; Lin, 2014; Loh & Liew, 2016), and future studies should seek to employ measures specifically able to assess and explore teacher's reactions to online language teaching, in addition to their sense of professional competence.

The results suggested that the online teacher experience was very similar to teachers working in more traditional settings, however, the measures were not specifically designed to capture the experiences of this sample. Accordingly, there may be key variables unique to online working, and more importantly, online language teaching, that have been missed by the current measures. It is vital to emphasise that TSES and MBI were useful for comparing scores across samples and also their quality has been determined, however, I would advise that future research includes some questions specifically assessing variables of the online ESL/EFL environment.

Recommendations

In 2001 Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter noted that there are now several decades' worth of burnout interventions aiming to improve employee wellbeing and reduce staff attrition; yet burnout remains a concern for human-service professions, such as teaching. However, it is worth noting that mitigation strategies are usually focussed at the individual, rather than organisational level, based on the premise that it is more economical to change the staff, than the company. The authors of the MBI would argue that this is a mistaken assumption and rather

that collaborative efforts between teachers and managers are more effective (Maslach et al, 2001). A meta-analysis of 513 studies revealed that successful innovations for reducing teacher burnout included mindfulness training and professional development, both of which could be delivered remotely to online teachers (Iancu et al, 2018). Overall, online language teaching offers great flexibility, however, as with all human service occupations, burnout is a danger and employers should actively consider how best to mitigate the impact.

Conclusion

This study revealed that teacher efficacy and burnout scores were similar to other educators, working online and offline, in TESOL and other disciplines; however, the numerical scores do not provide the full picture. Reports of low pay, precarity and limited support are frequent across the TESOL industry (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020). A recent survey from a newly formed trades union concluded that teaching EFL/ESL had been beset with problems for a long time and appeals were made for change (TEFL Workers Union-London, 2020).

However, it would be overly simplistic to solely blame managers, students or even teachers for burnout or other industrial problems. Burnout is an occupational hazard; however, it varies in severity, its consequences are not inevitable and it can be avoided. The research literature demonstrates teacher burnout has far-reaching implications for classroom practice, teacher welfare and company image. There has been frequent comment about the role of managers and institutions in ensuring satisfactory and sustainable standards of performance and welfare. Consequently, all involved in teaching, including learners and teachers, employers, benefit from targeting burnout based on best research evidence. After all, as Lourdes Ortega (Ortega, 2015) once commented in a discussion on research ethics, "For what and for whom is our research?"

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