
Exploring Causes of Teachers' Burnout at The Higher Secondary Level in District Peshawar

Gohar Rehman¹, Iffat Ara Hussain², Khurshid Khan³, Stana Din⁴

¹ PhD Scholar, Qurtuba University of Information Science & Technology Peshawar.

Email: rehmangohar822@gmail.com

² Professor, Qurtuba University of Information Science & Technology Peshawar.

Email: iffathussain91@yahoo.com

³ PhD Scholar, Qurtuba University of Information Science & Technology Peshawar.

Email: Khurshid.qup000@gmail.com

⁴ PhD Scholar, Qurtuba University of Information Science & Technology Peshawar.

Email: stanadin.afridi2023@gmail.com

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding teachers' burnout at higher secondary school level, so phenomenological design of research is applied. The population for this study was all subject specialist in district Peshawar from which only 20-subject specialists were selected conveniently through the use of convenient sampling technique. A self-developed semi-structured interview guide is taken as a tool for conduction of interviews and collection of qualitative data which is analyzed thematically for getting results. The presence of burnout teachers at higher secondary school level in district Peshawar is revealed from the results as a result of various reasons that are access responsibilities of teachers, lack of administrative support and poor working conditions. From the findings and conclusion of this study, it may be recommended that workload may be effectively managed through the inclusion, induction and hiring of more teaching staff at higher secondary school level as well as teachers at higher secondary school level may be made free from administrative tasks and assignments. It may also be recommended that working conditions may be made effective through the provision of required resources and improvement in infrastructure.

Key Words: Teachers' Burnout, Causes of Burnout, Higher Secondary Schools

Introduction

Teacher is the main pillar of educational system and quality of educational system is based on the quality of a teacher. However, the role of teacher is further subject to instructional challenges (Khan, 2026) and professional development. The environment of school is also an indicator that affects the quality of a teacher along with the availability and usability of conflict management skills (Din & Hussain, 2025) and strategies by teachers and principals (Din & Hussain, 2026). The interest of students towards different subjects at intermediate level (Azam et al., 2026) along with socio-cultural, socio-economic barriers and other factors in the promotion of education (Din et al., 2026) are also affecting teacher's role.

Teacher faces many challenges at all school level in general and higher secondary school level in particular. The burnout of teacher is one of the most vital and harmful challenge for teachers (Madigan

et al., 2023). It is the state in which a teacher feels immense exhaustion, disturbance in emotions and lowering level of motivation (Tikkanen et al., 2022). The burnout of teachers is also affecting a teacher in chasing his own dreams and professional endeavors. It affects the well-being of teacher and quality of his instruction along with disturbing the academic environment of school and academic outcomes of students (Calin et al., 2022).

According to recent research, burnout of teacher is not associated with psychological domain of a teacher only but is also related with institutional bottlenecks and system's instruments which is impacting the outcomes of education negatively (Adeoye et al., 2023). In developing countries like Pakistan, where there is scarcity of resources, lack of administrative support, and lack of professional development opportunities, the intensity and consequences of burnout are often magnified. In the context of educational sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa particularly, the challenges face by teachers at higher secondary levels are multifaceted such as overcrowded classrooms, excessive work load and societal expectations. The limited access to mental health, limited awareness of personal wellbeing and lack of emotional support from others further exacerbates the stress among teachers. Consequently, teacher burnout has emerged as a major impediment to effective teaching and learning (Bedir, 2023). Its ripple effects extend beyond educators, directly influencing students' attention, motivation, and capacity to retain knowledge.

The burnout and emotionally stressed and unmotivated teachers face problems for sustainment of enthusiasm and empathy that is required for effective instructional environment. This led a teacher to deliver in an undesirable manner that is not according to the needs of students. Burnout teachers became depersonalized due to showing emotional detachment from students, eroding the relational foundation essential for a supportive classroom climate (Bell et al., 2024). Meanwhile, a diminished sense of personal accomplishment fosters self-doubt and disengagement, further compromising pedagogical quality.

Burnout is a global phenomenon (Bonea, 2025) which is significantly documented by many researchers. But in developing countries like Pakistan, it is still an unexplored area especially in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the research is negligible to tertiary-level institutions and failing to delineate impacts on higher secondary students. Recent regional analyses in Punjab and Sindh have begun to highlight workload and policy gaps as key drivers, but none have systematically examined the mechanistic pathways through which burnout disrupts attention, motivation, and retention in KP's public higher secondary schools particularly in high-stakes Pre-Medical and Pre-Engineering streams where academic outcomes determine future professional trajectories. This study is aimed at exploring the perceptions of teachers regarding the presence of teachers' burnout at higher secondary school level.

Objective of the study

1. To explore the perceptions of teachers regarding causes of teachers' burnout at higher secondary school level.

Research Question

Q-1: What are the perceptions of teachers regarding causes of teachers' burnout at higher secondary school level?

Methodology

The objective of this research is to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding teachers' burnout at higher secondary school level, so for the conduction of this research phenomenological design is applied. The population for this study was all the higher secondary school teachers in district Peshawar that 267-subjects specialists. A total of 20-subject specialists were taken as sample through convenient

sampling techniques. And collection of data was made through the conduction of semi-structured interviews and was analyzed thematically for findings results. The codal formalities of research ethics were dually followed by the researchers.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed through thematic analysis and the following themes and sub-themes were emerged:

Causes & Sources of Teacher Burnout

The collected data from semi-structured interviews revealed different sources and causes of teacher's burnout. These sources and causes of burnout of teachers are presented in the form of sub-themes in the following manner:

Excessive Workload & Duties

The collected data from twenty higher secondary school's teachers have revealed that the excessive work burden and variety of official duties are the real causes of teachers' burnout at higher secondary school level. As two responding teachers revealed that they are subject to perform multiple tasks as well as to teach different classes which make it difficult for them to do effective time management and teaching and these tendencies are leading teachers towards burnout. (T-1, T-4).

Another teacher has shared similar remarks in these words:

“Teaching at higher secondary schools is a difficult job due to high work burden and many teachers face burnout from it.” (T-12)

Another teacher has shared that time management between academic and social tasks is the real factor for teacher's burnout. As he remarked:

“Teachers need to designate their time between academic and social events, tasks and responsibilities. And excessive load of these responsibilities makes them unable to do effective time management due to which they became burnout from teaching.” (T-5)

A set of six teachers revealed that teaching alone is not the cause of burnout. The additional responsibilities such as conduction of examination, checking of papers, official unproductive meetings and social disagreement among teachers due to workload is the potential reasons of teachers' burnout from teaching. (T-2, T-3, T-8, T-13, T-15, T-19)

Another set of three teachers reflected that the increased number of classes due to the addition of various faculties at higher secondary school level has exhausted the teaching faculty that lead them towards burnout. (T-6, T-14, T-20)

Another teacher has reflected that extensive documentation has made them reluctant to perform their duties. As he remarked:

“Teachers are expected to do extensive documentation along with teaching which adds unnecessary pressure on them and became burnout.” (T-7)

A set of four teachers revealed that they are considering their selves as labors rather than teachers due to non-teaching responsibilities such as meeting with parents and admission interviews which make teaching a burden for us. (T-8, T-9, T-10, T-16)

Data has also reflected that continuous pressure to meet deadlines, complete syllabus, and handle extra tasks contributes greatly to burnout of teachers at higher secondary school level.

Administrative & Management Pressure

The collected data from semi-structured interviews revealed that the burnout of teachers is also caused by administrative and management pressure for the completion of assigned tasks and duties. A one of

the responding teachers revealed that administrative pressure from high-ups is making teachers mentally retorted from their jobs. As he remarked:

“We are regularly burdened with additional responsibilities assigned by administration such as reporting of all academic events and documentation of all academic process. The pressure of completing all tasks in time is stressful and makes us burnout from our jobs.” (T-1)

The creation of official inquiries on teachers in the wake of official responsibilities and line of duty is also reported to be a potential cause of teacher’s burnout. As two respondents have shared those official inquiries on teachers for negligence or other official codes make the encoded teachers burnout from the administrative behavior. (T-18, T-19)

Another responding teacher shared similar remarks:

“An inquiry is placed against my fellow teacher on the account of disobedience and not following official code of conduct while teaching. Such strict behavior against teacher is pulling over nervous for joint strike and quitting our jobs.” (T-14)

The regular change in government policies is also reflected to be a cause of teacher’s burn out. As a set of seven respondents have shared that the regular changes in policy from administration and management of schools is creating confusion and an environment of stress due to which teachers are expected to perform according to the launched policy guidelines as a result teachers are facing immediate pressure from administration and cause burnout especially from senior teachers. (T-2, T-3, T-5, T-10, T-12, T-13, T-20)

Another responding teacher remarked:

“Decision-making is highly centralized, and teachers have little voice, which creates frustration and disengagement.”(T-8)

Pressure of administration for getting hundred percent results in examination is also leading teachers to burnout.

As a set of five teachers revealed that getting hundred percent results is not their job responsibilities and it make them furious, humiliated, mentally stressed and burnout. (T-4, T-7, T-11, T-12, T-15)

Another set of two responding teachers reflected that teachers are facing pressure from administration rather than support that is why their desire to teach is converted into burnout from our job. (T-6, T-16)

Another teacher remarked in similar way:

“The pressure to implement new initiatives without adequate training or resources leads to stress and burnout.”(T-9)

Poor Working Conditions

The higher secondary schools of elementary and secondary education department are presenting poor working conditions. As the collected data has revealed that the infrastructure of higher secondary schools is very poor that is why teachers are burning out from their responsibilities due to lack of resources and poor working condition. As one of the responding teacher remarked: “The classrooms are overcrowded and poorly ventilated, which makes it exhausting to teach effectively throughout the day.” (T-14)

Another responding teacher has remarked that the size of classroom is too huge to manage properly. As he remarked:

“We are expected to manage large class sizes without adequate furniture or teaching resources, which adds constant stress and lead to burnout.”(T-1)

The lack of resources and teaching learning add is also highlighted by teachers as potential source for burnout. A set of four teachers revealed that work burden as well as lack of resources is the factor of weak performance of teachers due to which teachers are facing worst mental condition and leading them to burnout. (T-2, T-3, T-7, T-11)

The humiliation of poor working condition is also highlighted by another set of four teachers that the lack of basic facilities such as proper lighting, clean drinking water, and functional washrooms, which affects both their comfort and motivation and lead them to burnout.(T-4, T-12, T-13, T-15)

Six subject specialists who are teaching science at higher secondary school level were of the views that science labs presents a grave picture with lack of proper science equipment and unbearable working conditions. They were of the views that such conditions are compelling them to leave their jobs. (T-4, T-5, T-16, T-7, T-17, T-18)

Another responding teacher was of the view that he is considering to leave his job due to unsafe and poor structure of our school. Similarly, two respondents shared that they have to work in buildings that are not well-maintained, and sometimes it feels unsafe, especially during extreme weather conditions. (T-19, T-20)

All the responding teachers were of the views that teachers at higher secondary school level are too sensitive and poor working conditions, lack of resources, missing basic facilities and poor building conditions are major factor for their burnout.

Discussions

The thematic results of major theme and sub-themes revealed that excessive workload, lack of institutional support, classroom management challenges, and lack of recognition are the major contributors to burnout. A large proportion of interviewed teachers reported that teachers are overwhelmed by multiple responsibilities, which aligns with previous research indicating that workload is primary predictors of burnout (RAZMAN et al., 2025). Similarly, the qualitative findings highlighted that administrative pressure, unrealistic expectations and poor working conditions as key stressors. It supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) perspective, which posits that burnout occurs when job demands exceed available resources (Mazzetti et al., 2023).

Conclusion

According to the results and discussions of this research that highlighted the presence of burnout teachers at higher secondary school level in district Peshawar due to various potential reasons. So from the findings it is concluded that the access responsibilities of teachers, lack of administrative support and poor working conditions are the major causes of teachers’ burnout at higher secondary school level in district Peshawar.

Recommendations

1. From the findings and conclusion of this study, it may be recommended that workload may be effectively managed through the inclusion, induction and hiring of more teaching staff at higher secondary school level as well as teachers at higher secondary school level may be made free from administrative tasks and assignments.
2. It may also be recommended that It may also be recommended that working conditions may be made effective through the provision of required resources and improvement in infrastructure.

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