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Professional Burnout among English Language Teachers in Public and Private Schools in  
Yerevan: A Mixed Methods Study

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Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By

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*To my daughter*

*Lucé*

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## **Abstract**

Professional burnout is mental and physical exhaustion that is related to the workplace. It is common among teachers because teaching requires an excessive amount of daily interaction with students, parents, and colleagues. However, the problem of teacher burnout is not well-studied among the Armenian teacher population. Therefore, this study aims to estimate the prevalence of burnout among English language teachers in public and private schools in Yerevan. It also aims to investigate the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics, work-related aspects, and burnout. Moreover, it explores the main causes of burnout according to English teachers in Armenia.

The mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was used in this study. The first part included a survey that was conducted among a sample of 63 English language teachers from public and private schools. The second part of the study included semi-structured interviews with teachers selected based on the results of the first part to ensure maximum variability of perspectives.

The study found that 25.4% of English language teachers suffered from high emotional exhaustion, while only 6.3% suffered from depersonalization, and only 2% suffered from reduced levels of personal accomplishment. The study found that the main factors that relate to burnout and its sub-dimensions are prior teaching experience, attending training programs, the level of education, and relationships with colleagues. It also identified several perceived causes of burnout such as inadequate salaries, inappropriate student behavior, lack of moral and emotional reward, and overcrowded classrooms. The study concludes with recommendations about specific practices that policy makers and school administrations can adopt to mitigate the effect of work stressors and reduce teacher burnout levels.

*Keywords:* Professional burnout, emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), personal accomplishment (PA), teachers, English as a foreign language (EFL).

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Education is one of the most important means to advance societies. In many developing countries, efforts to improve education are mainly focused on updating curriculums, building new schools, and renovating old ones. However, improving education should also consider the mental and physical well-being of its workforce. In other words, if teachers, who are one of the key elements of the educational process, are suffering from stress and burnout, the educational process will be harmed. In fact, teaching is among the most stressful types of professions as it requires a constant and excessive amount of interaction with pupils every day (Heus & Diekstra, 1999). As a result, professional burnout, the mental and physical exhaustion that affects workers' motivation, mood, productivity, and performance and influences workers' attitudes toward themselves and others (Khezerlou, 2017), is very common. This phenomenon is well researched in the education sectors of many countries. Many studies claim that teacher burnout can affect students' academic performance (Arens & Morin, 2016; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Schleicher, 2018), lead to poor student performance in language learning (Klusmann et al., 2008), and affect classroom management (Schleicher, 2018).

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

The literature on Armenia lacks data on the level of professional burnout among teachers in general and English language teachers in particular. However, in order to make prompt and proper interventions to improve both teachers' and students' well-being and performance, it is important to investigate the potential presence of professional burnout among English language teachers in the country.

## 1.2 Purpose Statement (Research Questions)

This study aims to address the lack of research on professional burnout among English language teachers in Armenia. It aims to establish the prevalence of burnout among English language teachers in the country and to identify the groups that are most vulnerable to burnout by examining the relationship between teachers' socio-demographic characteristics, work-related aspects, and burnout among English language teachers in Yerevan, Armenia. Moreover, this study aims to identify the perceived major causes of burnout according to teachers and give a list of recommendations to mitigate the effect of work stressors. In this respect, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the prevalence of professional burnout among English school teachers in Yerevan?

RQ2: Does the level of teacher burnout differ according to school type (public or private)?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, level of education, income, years of experience) and the level of burnout?

RQ4: Is there a relationship between work-related aspects (workload, relationship with administration, relationship with colleagues) and the level of burnout?

RQ5: What are the perceived causes of burnout among English teachers?

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on professional burnout has gained substantial popularity in the last decade (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Professional burnout can affect workers of different professions. However, it is more common among human services workers such as social workers, health workers, and teachers (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998; Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Many teachers around the world suffer from burnout (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Excessive workload, inadequate salaries, inappropriate student behavior, and many other factors can contribute to teachers' burnout. The following section provides an overview of the concept of *professional burnout* and reviews the studies which investigate burnout in educational settings.

### 2.1 The Definition of Professional Burnout

In the early 1970s, German-American psychologist Dr. Herbert Freudenberger noticed that human service workers and health care workers who had extensive workload suffered from loss of motivation and commitment and identified this phenomenon as burnout (Lubbadeh, 2020; Maslach et al., 2001). He concluded that being burned out means “becoming exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources in the workplace” (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017, p. 2). He divided the symptoms of burnout into two categories: physical symptoms and behavioral symptoms. The physical symptoms included insomnia, shortness of breath, frequent headaches, gastrointestinal problems, tiredness, fatigue, and exhaustion (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017; Ponocny-Seliger & Winker, 2014). Behavioral symptoms included signs very similar to depression like low mood, loss of energy, and loss of pleasure (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to Freudenberger, these behavioral symptoms also included frustration, suspicious attitude, anger, and frequent use of medications such as pain relievers and tranquilizers. Freudenberger also noticed that people who suffer from

burnout tend to be cynical and sometimes show signs of overconfidence or omnipotence (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). In addition to describing the symptoms of burnout, he discussed the personality traits and factors that make people more vulnerable to becoming burned out such as being overcommitted and dedicated to a job (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Freudenberger claimed that burnout occurs in working environments that require the employees to do tasks that involve a substantial amount of emotional and personal involvement, empathy, and intrinsic motivation without getting a decent amount of payment and reward. These types of jobs are usually found in the healthcare field, social work, and education (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017).

The research done by Freudenberger was followed by a great number of studies about “*professional burnout*”. Burnout was also explored by psychologist Christina Maslach (Gold, 1985; Khezerlou, 2017; Maslach et al., 2001). Christina Maslach is a professor of psychology and a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley. She is a pioneer of research on the concept of “*job burnout*” and she has been studying burnout for more than 35 years now (*Christina Maslach*, n.d.). In her perception, “burnout is a prolonged response to chronic, emotional, and interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach et al., 2001, p.397). She is the creator of the most widely used burnout measurement tool which is called the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and her work was the reason that led the World Health Organization (WHO) to add “*job burnout*” as a disorder in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) (*Christina Maslach*, n.d.). The ICD-11 defines burnout as “a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.” (World Health Organization, 2022).

Today, the American Psychological Association (APA) defines burnout as the “physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion accompanied by decreased motivation, lowered performance, and negative attitudes toward oneself and others” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2020).

According to the APA, people who deal with high levels of stress due to being exposed to long hours of physical or mental work are more likely to suffer from professional burnout (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2020).

Researchers also tried to observe how burnout develops over time to better understand this phenomenon and to be able to diagnose it with certainty. Psychologists Herbert Freudenberger and Gail North described the phases that employees go through during their working journey (Ponocny-Seliger & Winker, 2014). According to them, the first phase is “*a compulsion to prove oneself*”, in this phase, employees usually put all their effort into accomplishing the tasks handed to them. They develop fear from not getting the work done appropriately and they tend to become perfectionists and show high levels of motivation. The second phase is “*working harder*”, the desire to complete all tasks perfectly increases. The employee starts believing that they should do everything on their own and they act with all job requirements as they are urgent. They also have trouble delegating tasks to other people and they like to rely mostly on themselves. The third phase is “*neglecting their needs*”, in this phase the employee starts to neglect natural needs like getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and exercising. Moreover, they start neglecting their social needs. Their life becomes unhealthy and they perceive this unhealthy situation as normal and comfortable. The fourth phase is “*displacement of conflicts*”, in this phase, the employee often transfers the negative emotions they are dealing with at work to their family life. Their relationships with family members become strained. The worker starts forgetting about appointments, often arrives late to meetings, and accumulates the



work. The fifth phase is “*revision of values*”. The employee in this phase starts looking at things differently, their emotions become dull and hardened, their priorities and preferences change. The people who were very important in the employee’s life become secondary. The sixth phase is “*denial of emerging problems*”. In this phase, the employee starts losing connection to the outside world and their lives become centered around their jobs only. They become impatient, intolerant, and aggressive. They become cynical and unkind. The quality of their performance decreases and they start developing physical symptoms. The seventh phase is “*withdrawal*”. In this phase, the employee refuses to receive any kind of criticism. Their relationship with family members becomes worse, they start developing a feeling of helplessness, and they lose their orientation. To feel better, the employee may turn to other ways of gratification. The eighth phase is “*obvious behavioral changes*”. In this phase, the employee becomes so apathetic that nothing matters to them anymore. They start feeling that they are being attacked no matter what the other person does and they try to avoid completing any new work demands. Moreover, they see it as a burden. The ninth phase is “*depersonalization*”. In this phase, the employee often starts neglecting their physical well-being and they lose the meaning of their lives. Furthermore, they start feeling that they are acting like machines that are forced to function. The tenth phase is “*inner emptiness*”. In this phase, the employee experiences feelings of sadness, uselessness, and emptiness. They start having anxiety symptoms and they might experience having panic attacks. The eleventh phase is “*depression*”. In this phase, the severity of the symptoms increases, and the employee starts suffering from constant feelings of exhaustion, misery, and self-hatred. They become hopeless, they lose the desire to wake up and go to work, and they might develop suicidal thoughts. The twelfth phase is “*burnout syndrome*”. The employee in this phase needs

medical intervention. The situation becomes more dangerous and the employee collapses physically and mentally (Ponocny-Seliger & Winker, 2014).

After Freudenberger's 12-model theory, researchers wanted to simplify these stages. Therefore, psychologist J. Grinberg proposed 5 stages that an employee goes through before reaching absolute burnout. The first stage is "the *honeymoon*". In this stage the employee feels happy and satisfied with the new tasks and responsibilities, they feel enthusiastic and encouraged to perform their best. The second stage is "*fuel shortage stage*". In this stage, early signs of burnout start showing. The employee starts feeling exhausted, apathetic, and tired, sleeping problems may occur and their motivation level decreases especially with the absence of incentives and rewards. They become less productive and might violate work rules. Some might continue maintaining their performance level at the price of losing their health. The third stage is the "*chronic stage*". In this stage, the employee feels that they are constantly out of time, they spend too much time at work which makes them become vulnerable and predisposed to mental and physical illnesses as well as exhaustion. The fourth stage is the "*crisis stage*". In this stage, the employee loses their work capacity. They feel unsatisfied with their abilities and the quality of their life. The final stage is "*hitting the wall stage*". In this stage, the person becomes seriously impaired. Their mental and physical health deteriorates and their job becomes in jeopardy (Behun-Trachuk, 2017; Pandey, 2020).

## **2.2 The Sub-Dimensions of Burnout**

Burnout is typically characterized by three constructs; these are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). Emotional exhaustion (EE) is the most commonly and widely reported symptom among burned-out workers, and it is well studied and analyzed. However, having high levels of emotional

exhaustion is not enough to diagnose a person with burnout syndrome. In general, emotional exhaustion occurs when an individual has drained all their emotional resources through contact with the person or people they work with (Maslach et al., 1997). It represents the emotional part of burnout and it is linked to stress, sleeping problems, fatigue, anxiety, and tension (Lee & Ashforth, 1991; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). It is not a simple feeling that a person experiences, rather it cognitively and emotionally distances the person from their work as a subconscious defensive mechanism to deal with the excessive workload (Maslach et al., 1997). A teacher who is suffering from emotional exhaustion would feel that their emotional resources are being depleted. They will lose their energy, their desire to teach, and their passion for teaching. Moreover, they will feel constantly tired. In other words, they will feel overwhelmed every time they have to go and deal with a classroom full of students (Akbari & Roudi, 2020; Melanda et al., 2021).

Depersonalization (DP) or cynicism, as it is referred to in some sources (Maslach et al., 2001; Melanda et al., 2021), manifests by developing dehumanized perceptions of the people with whom one works (Maslach et al., 1997). People who are suffering from DP often have a cold approach toward work. They become indifferent in order to stay safe and to protect themselves from being hurt and disappointed. They lack hope and often think that the future is bleak. Having these feelings constantly can damage their psychological well-being (Maslach et al., 1997). Moreover, symptoms related to depersonalization include interpersonal detachment and having dehumanized attitudes toward their surroundings (Melanda et al., 2021). In other words, the person starts treating others as impersonal objects (Lee & Ashforth, 1991; Maslach, 1982). This symptom can be noticed among teachers who treat their students as numbers rather than as people. They become careless toward their students' emotions and learning outcomes

(Akbari & Roudi, 2020). Depersonalization might also affect cognitive abilities like attention and give the teacher a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014).

Reduced personal accomplishment (PA) or ineffectiveness, as it is referred to in some sources (Maslach et al., 1997, 2001), refers to one being dissatisfied with their performance at work or output. In this dimension of burnout, workers lose self-confidence and start feeling incapable of making a difference. They become overwhelmed with the tasks, especially when they are asked to do something new. They feel that their accomplishments are unnecessary and unimportant. Usually, when others feel that the worker is not confident, they start losing confidence in this worker (Maslach et al., 1997). Moreover, workers may regard themselves as failures and consider themselves incompetent. In other words, they develop a negative self-image that significantly affects their performance. Teachers who deal with symptoms of reduced personal accomplishment start blaming themselves for their students' problems. They feel that they are the reason for any failures that may occur in the learning process (Akbari & Roudi, 2020).

### **2.3 Variables Related to Burnout in Educational Settings**

Teacher burnout can be affected by many variables, these variables can be divided into two sections which are, socio-demographic variables and work-related variables. The first includes variables such as age, education level, school type, etcetera, and the latter refers to the aspects that are related to the workplace such as student behavior, over-crowded classrooms, unsupportive administrations, having conflicts with colleagues, and many others. This section describes these variables in detail.

### ***2.3.1 Socio-Demographic Variables***

Many studies examined the relationship between socio-demographic variables and the level of burnout. It was found that characteristics such as age, gender, level of education, previous work experience, school type, and other characteristics can influence the probability of having burnout.

Several researchers have found that the age of the teachers is associated with the likelihood of developing burnout symptoms (Gold, 1985; Helou et al., 2016; Koruklu et al., 2012; Li et al., 2020; Manassero Mas et al., 2006; Mousavy & Nimehchisalem, 2014; Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010; Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014; Sezer, 2012; Tymbota et al., 2017; Wulolign et al., 2020). However, these studies have contradicting results as to which age group is more likely to develop burnout, possibly due to cultural differences between countries. Some of them claimed that the younger a teacher is the higher the possibility of them having high levels of burnout will be (Gold, 1985; Helou et al., 2016; Koruklu et al., 2012; Li et al., 2020; Manassero Mas et al., 2006; Sezer, 2012; Tymbota et al., 2017; Wulolign et al., 2020). However, other researchers challenged those findings by either concluding the opposite (Mousavy & Nimehchisalem, 2014) or by simply not finding any significant relationship between age and burnout (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014). Maslach et al. (2001) were among those researchers who supported the negative correlation between age and burnout. However, they argued that one should always take into consideration the problem of survival bias as most teachers who reach high levels of burnout resign or make a career shift after a couple of years of starting their teaching journey. Moreover, age is related to the amount of teaching experience that a teacher would have, which may reflect on their level of burnout. Teachers who are older often have more experience in dealing with problems that can occur while communicating with parents and

students. Time allows teachers to develop coping strategies that can help them deal with their stress levels (Çağlar, 2011). In other words, younger teachers who are inexperienced and supervised by others can be more vulnerable to burnout because of their lack of experience (Gold, 1985; Helou et al., 2016). However, some studies did not even find a significant relationship between previous teaching experience and burnout (Atashpanjeh et al., 2020; Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2016), which makes matters all the more unpredictable.

The education level of teachers is among the variables that were frequently studied in the literature on professional burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) stated in one of her publications that the higher the employee's education is the higher their burnout level would be. She attributed that to the fact that those with higher levels of education often get higher positions and are usually assigned to have more responsibilities, thus, they develop burnout symptoms. Many other researchers studied the influence of the level of education on teacher burnout (Akyüz & Kaya, 2014; Alloh et al., 2019; Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014; Sezer, 2012; Wulolign et al., 2020) with the majority of studies finding a positive correlation between the two. However, Sadeghi & Khezrlou (2014), who conducted a study among Iranian English teachers in secondary schools, institutions, and universities in Iran found different results. The study used the Maslach Burnout Inventory (IBM) to measure the three sub-dimensions of burnout and examined the relationship of teacher burnout levels with a number of socio-demographic characteristics, and the level of education was among these variables. The results of the study showed that teachers who had Bachelor's degrees had higher burnout levels than those who had Master's and PhD. They interpreted that result by stating that teachers with higher levels of education have more reasonable and realistic expectations at their workplaces. Therefore, they have less stress when teaching and a higher sense of personal accomplishment. On the other hand, the studies that

found the opposite stated that teachers with higher levels of education usually have higher expectations from their jobs and are often shocked by the reality that they find once they start working (Maslach, 1982; Wulolign et al., 2020). In general, regardless of teachers' educational background, providing opportunities for teachers to attend training programs and achieve professional development must be a core concern in language teaching organizations for its positive effects on teachers' wellbeing and their relationships with their students (Fiorilli et al., 2020; White et al., 2008). Many studies have discussed the influence of training programs on burnout (Fiorilli et al., 2020; Goddard et al., 2001; Helou et al., 2016; Koruklu et al., 2012), and some of them found that receiving training can prevent employees from becoming burned out (Goddard et al., 2001; Gold, 1985). However, asking teachers to attend random training programs that do not have good quality or do not meet teachers' needs can be a cause of burnout based on a study that was done among Lebanese teachers (Helou et al., 2016). Moreover, teachers' attitudes toward the training programs that are offered to them should be positive for them to reach the optimal benefit and improve their teaching practices (Fiorilli et al., 2020).

School teachers can be divided into two categories, those who work in public schools and others who work in private schools. Research shows that teachers experience different levels of burnout based on the type of school they work in. Many studies examined the relationship between these two to better understand the causes and effects of teacher burnout. A quantitative study conducted in Portugal aimed to examine the level of presenteeism and burnout among 281 elementary school teachers in public and private schools. It concluded that public school teachers had higher levels of burnout compared with the ones who worked in the private sector (Ferreira & Martinez, 2012). Many researchers supported this claim (Genç, 2016; Kroupis et al., 2017; Li et al., 2020), while others had contradictory results. A study that was done in Iran aimed to do a

comparison between public and private school EFL teachers regarding their level of burnout. They used a mixed-method approach through conducting surveys and interviews among 180 teachers from public and private schools. They concluded that private school teachers exhibited significantly higher levels of burnout compared to public school teachers (Bahrami & Moradkhani, 2019).

Teachers' salaries and income range are also considered to have major effects on increasing the level of burnout among them. Many teachers are being forced to change their profession, tutor after a long school day, or even find afternoon jobs in training centers just for the sake of making an acceptable living. Teaching in public schools is considered among the most underpaid jobs (Bullough, 2002). Many studies measured the correlation between teachers' income and the level of burnout with most of them reporting a negative correlation between the two variables. Being unsatisfied with the salary was among the main causes of burnout according to many teachers (Akbari & Roudi, 2020; Atashpanjeh et al., 2020; Gold, 1985; Gulzar & Rashid, 2020; Kroupis et al., 2017; Li et al., 2020; Maslach et al., 2001; Safari, 2020). A study that was done in Kenya aimed to identify the different factors of burnout among school teachers. Questionnaires were administered to 168 teachers and it was found that teachers were unsatisfied with the low levels of salaries and found them inadequate based on the work that they were asked to do (Matiang'i et al., 2016). Helou et al. (2016) also found that low teacher payment is one of the reasons for teacher burnout, however, this factor was not among the major reasons for teacher resignation in said study. In general, even though all studies found that financial reward is essential for teacher wellbeing, it is not enough for them to feel satisfied according to Maslach et al. (2001), who emphasized in their research the importance of receiving emotional reward and appreciation in preventing teacher burnout and decreasing its levels.



### ***2.3.2 Work-Related Variables***

Teachers often suffer from high levels of workload. They are usually required to teach several grades, prepare lesson plans, add complementary materials, communicate with parents, coordinate with colleagues and administration, attend periodic teacher meetings, complete paperwork, and provide feedback for students' assignments and exams. Based on many studies, having an excessive workload can be a reason for developing burnout (Akbari & Roudi, 2020; Gulzar & Rashid, 2020; Helou et al., 2016; Kamtsios, 2018; Maslach et al., 2001; Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010). A study that was done in Greece aimed to examine the relationship between burnout and having to deal with job stressors such as job demands in different stages of teachers' professional burnout. In this study, 1447 pre-primary, primary, and secondary school teachers were asked to complete three questionnaires: the Maslach burnout inventory, a questionnaire on the ways of coping, and a questionnaire on teachers' professional stress. The results showed that workload and time pressure are among the main causes of burnout (Kamtsios, 2018). Another study that was done among school teachers in Spain showed that the major reason for teacher burnout is "not having enough time to prepare lessons" and excessive paperwork (Manassero Mas et al., 2006).

In addition to workload, another factor that can be a reason for teacher burnout is having to work in a stressful environment. Having conflicts and bad relationships with colleagues, dealing with unsupportive administration, and having to deal with destructive feedback might have significant effects on teachers' well-being. Many studies discussed whether dealing with such situations can be considered as one of the causes of teacher burnout. In general, the majority of the studies found that having to bear with unsupportive supervisors and unhelpful colleagues can increase the possibility of becoming burned out (Akbari & Roudi, 2020; Helou et al., 2016;

Koruklu et al., 2012; Melanda et al., 2021; Richards et al., 2018; Wulolign et al., 2020; Zhouchun, 2012). Many challenges that teachers often go through in their workplaces can play a role in making the work environment a toxic one. For example, having to deal with judgmental comments from the administration, sudden interference of supervisors in the middle of the class, the absence of guidance and support when needed, especially in matters related to classroom management and preparing lesson plans, constant negative feedback, the absence of feedback, disrespectful behavior toward teachers, illogical demands, and lack of appreciation can all be reasons for burnout (Helou et al., 2016). The findings of (Helou et al., 2016) supported Maslach's claim about the importance of "*fairness*" in workplaces (Maslach et al., 2001). Unfair division of workload, inequity in the salaries and emotional reward, ambiguous criteria for promotions, and many other factors can affect the employee's well-being and increase the probability of developing burnout (Helou et al., 2016; Maslach et al., 2001). Furthermore, dealing with constant conflicts and quarrels with colleagues can also have a significant effect on developing burnout (Wulolign et al., 2020). It was found that dealing with uncomfortable situations such as backstabbing, alliance building, and not feeling like a part of the team can contribute to teachers' level of burnout (Helou et al., 2016). In other words, teachers who work in supportive, positive, and nurturing school environments have lower levels of burnout (Richards et al., 2018).

Having to work in a bad environment does not only include having bad relationships with administrators and colleagues, it also includes having negative relationships with students. Positive relationships between teachers and students can reflect on teachers' well-being and decrease the probability of having burnout (Melanda et al., 2021). A longitudinal study that was conducted in Brazil aimed to examine the effects of psychological violence on teacher burnout.

The participants were 430 public school teachers who were asked to complete questionnaires and participate in interviews. Psychological violence was defined as exposure to situations in which teachers might experience being insulted, bullied, disrespected, or embarrassed by their students, colleagues, or administration. The results showed that having bad relationships with students can have a direct effect on teacher burnout (Melanda et al., 2021). Winding et al. (2022) supported this finding in a study that was done in Denmark and concluded that there was a significant association between students' aggressive behavior and teacher burnout. Overall, many other studies have also found that dealing with impolite, irresponsible, and aggressive student behavior is one of the major causes of having burnout (Gulzar & Rashid, 2020; Helou et al., 2016; Kamtsios, 2018; Manassero Mas et al., 2006).

Another student-related issue that may affect burnout is the number of students in class. Many studies examined the relationship between these two variables and found very similar results. They found that having to deal with overcrowded classrooms is one of the major reasons for teacher burnout (Akbari & Roudi, 2020; Gulzar & Rashid, 2020; Helou et al., 2016; Manassero Mas et al., 2006; Melanda et al., 2021; Sezer, 2012). However, Melanda et al. (2021) questioned the direct effect of overcrowded classrooms on burnout and discussed the possibility of considering it as a confounder that leads to increased workload which is proved to have a high effect on teacher burnout. A study that was done in Iran aimed to identify the main causes of teacher burnout. The participants of this study were 15 Iranian public-school teachers who were asked to complete several types of instruments including the Persian version of the Maslach burnout inventory, semi-structured interviews, individual journals, and classroom observations. The results showed that dealing with oversized classrooms along with other reasons was one of the major reasons for teacher burnout (Akbari & Roudi, 2020).

In general, there are many other reasons for teacher burnout. The lack of control over one's work, the inability of the worker to make independent decisions regarding their responsibilities, not having enough space to be creative, and having to follow strict policies all the time are common reasons for burnout (Maslach et al., 1997). Teachers often suffer from such situations when they are asked to teach in a specific way using a textbook without having the right to make any changes and with a very narrow space for innovation and creativity. Moreover, teachers who do not find the school curricula interesting and effective show higher levels of burnout compared with others who find the curriculum suitable for their students (Koruklu et al., 2012).

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to estimate the prevalence of professional burnout among English language teachers in public and private schools in Yerevan and examine the relationship between the levels of professional burnout, socio-demographic characteristics, and work-related aspects among teachers of English as a foreign language in Yerevan. This study also explored the perceived causes of burnout among these teachers.

The study follows the mixed-methods explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2014). In this design, a quantitative component is used to answer the main research questions and is followed by a qualitative component that seeks to explain the results of the quantitative part (Creswell, 2014).

Based on the aim of this study, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: What is the prevalence of professional burnout among English school teachers in Yerevan?

RQ2: Does the level of teacher burnout differ according to school type (public or private)?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, level of education, years of experience) and the level of burnout?

RQ5: Is there a relationship between work-related aspects (workload, relationship with administration, relationship with colleagues) and the level of burnout?

RQ6: What are the perceived causes of burnout among English teachers?

This section describes in detail the study population, the instruments used to measure burnout and other variables, and plans for the analysis of study results.

### 3.1 Research Setting

This study takes place in Yerevan, Armenia. The absolute majority of people in Armenia speak Armenian as a mother tongue. School children start learning Russian as a foreign language

starting from the second grade as well as a second foreign language of the school's choosing starting from the third grade. In the majority of schools, specifically for 68% of school children, this second foreign language is English (Language Policy Division, 2009). It is worth noting that only 40% of the people in Armenia have basic English knowledge and about 4% have advanced English knowledge, thus, it is quite a steep learning curve for students, and a challenge for many teachers (Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2013). Schools are required to offer a minimum of 2 hours of English classes per week and students are expected to have an A1 knowledge of the language by grades 5-6 and an A2 level by grades 7-9 (*Criteria for the Second Foreign Language in Middle Schools*, 2012). In general, the desire to learn English among Armenians has been on the rise since Armenia acquired independence in 1991, but Russian remains the dominant second language in the country. However, because English is gaining more popularity among the younger generations and is essential for people to enter the job market, many schools are trying to improve their English language teaching programs to win over more students. Moreover, parents are motivated to register their children at language training centers and seek the help of private English tutors to keep up with the development and to provide better employment and studying opportunities for their children. Currently, there are 801 English teachers who work in Yerevan's 211 public schools and 41 private schools (Education Management Information System (EMIS), 2022).

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study used the sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach (QUAN->qual) to answer the research questions. This method is a popular mixed-methods approach in research (Creswell, 2014; Ivankova et al., 2016; Pardede, 2019). It starts with a quantitative stage which is usually the main stage of the study and then moves to the qualitative (Creswell, 2014). The

qualitative stage is usually built on the results of the quantitative stage and aims to explain the quantitative findings. The following figure helps better understand the structure of the sequential explanatory study:

**Figure 1**

*The mixed-methods sequential explanatory design*



*Note. The mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. Adapted from Creswell (2014)*

This study was initially powered to estimate the level of burnout among the entire population of English teachers in Yerevan's schools while ensuring external and internal validity through stratified cluster sampling, a probability sampling technique where a mixture of stratified sampling and cluster sampling is used. The strata were represented by the type of school: private or public, and the clusters were the schools. In other words, the schools were divided into two strata to ensure adequate representation of each, then, a suitable number of schools was selected randomly from each stratum to ensure the generalizability of the results. Within each selected school, all English teachers were approached (Sedgwick, 2013). This sampling technique was used in the initial period of data collection. However, due to the very low response rate among the study population, which was greatly lower than anticipated, the required sample size could not be reached. To have an appropriate sample size, a mixture of convenience and snowball sampling techniques was used to reach an acceptable number of participants. In other words, after receiving about 20 responses with the stratified cluster sampling technique, the data collection process was continued by approaching schools that were expected to cooperate and were not among the schools contacted initially, and with the help of

key people in Yerevan's English teachers' community. Each respondent who agreed to participate went through the quantitative stage of this study and only those who provided their contact information in the quantitative stage were asked to be interviewed.

### **3.3 Participants**

The participants of this study were 63 teachers who teach English as a foreign language to students from all grades in Yerevan's public and private schools. Of these 63, twelve teachers expressed their willingness to participate in interviews, and three of these were interviewed as a part of the qualitative stage of the study. The participants of the qualitative part were selected based on their score on the scale of emotional exhaustion, which was the most prevalent sub-dimension among the study population. A teacher with a high EE score, another with a moderate EE score, and a third with a low EE score were selected to ensure maximum variability.

### **3.4 Instruments**

For the quantitative stage of this study, a questionnaire was used (Appendix A). The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first section included questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and work-related aspects. The second section of the questionnaire included the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educator Version (MBI-ES) developed by psychologist Christina Maslach in 1996 (Chalghaf et al., 2019; Maslach et al., 1997). At the end of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, an item that measures the main causes of burnout was added to explore the teachers' perceptions about the potential presence of a causal relationship between the investigated variables, because a correlational cross-sectional study cannot determine causation. The questionnaires were offered online through Google Forms. However, for those teachers who could not complete an online questionnaire for whatever reasons, a paper-based option was offered. After that, the qualitative stage of the study was



conducted through semi-structured interviews (Appendix B). The questions of the interview were designed based on the quantitative findings.

### ***3.4.1 The Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Work-Related Aspects Questionnaire***

The “socio-demographic characteristics and work-related aspects questionnaire” consisted of 11 items. The items were a mixture of multiple choice and short answer questions. They aimed to explore the participant’s gender, age, education level, type of school, the grades they teach, years of experience in English teaching, training programs they attend (other than the ones provided by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports), salary range, level of workload, relationship with the school administration, and relationship with colleagues.

### ***3.4.2 The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES)***

The Educators’ version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which is also known as the “MBI-ES”, comprised the main part of the second section of the questionnaire. This is the most commonly used tool in the literature to measure burnout among teachers, and thus, it allows for drawing comparisons between Armenia and other countries. Later on, many specialized versions of the MBI such as the human services survey, the medical personnel survey, and others were developed. This study used one of these specialized MBI versions, the educator’s version (MBI-ES), which is also the most commonly used tool among teacher populations. Several studies have investigated the validity and reliability of the MBI-ES. Iwanicki and Schwab (1981) and Gold, (1985) found the 3-factor model was valid for the population of teachers in the US. Both studies found very similar reliability estimates for the three sub-dimensions of the MBI-ES (Gold, 1985; Iwanicki & Schwab, 1981; Maslach et al., 1997). Iwanicki and Schwab (1981) reported Cronbach alpha estimates of 0.90, 0.76, and 0.76 for Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization,

and Personal accomplishment respectively. These estimates are also very similar to those of the original MBI.

The MBI-ES was used among teachers in many countries such as Iran (Shirazizadeh & Karimpour, 2019), Malaysia (Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010), Qatar (Alloh et al., 2019), Syria (Sharifian, 2017), Lebanon (Helou et al., 2016), Georgia (Bitsadze & Japaridze, 2011), Greece (Rentzou, 2012), Serbia (Vukmirovic et al., 2020), the USA (Chigerwe et al., 2014), and others. It is a 22-item psychometric tool that measures the three dimensions of burnout according to Maslach (1981). Emotional Exhaustion (EE) is measured by nine items which are: 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13, 14, 16, and 20. Depersonalization (DP) is measured by five items which are: 5, 10, 11, 15, and 22, and Personal Accomplishment (PA) is measured by eight items which are: 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, and 21. The questionnaire uses a Likert scale that has six options which are: never = 0, a few times a year or less = 1, once a month or less = 2, a few times a month = 3, once a week = 4, a few times a week = 5, every day = 6. However, the scores for PA are calculated in the opposite direction, for example, never = 6 not 0, because a reduced level of personal accomplishment is associated with burnout as opposed to an increased level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization being associated with it. The score for each sub-dimension is calculated by summing the scores of the single items. Table 1 shows the interpretation of burnout sub-dimension scores.

**Table 1**

*The MBI-ES Scoring Key*

Sub-dimension	Low	Moderate	High
Emotional Exhaustion	0-16	17-26	27 or over
Depersonalization	0-6	7-12	13 or over

Personal Accomplishment	39 or over	32-38	0-31
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*Note. Retrieved from "Burnout experience of secondary and preparatory school teachers in West Gojjam and Awi zone in Amhara regional state" by A. Wulolign, A. Solomon, K. Solomon, 2020, Research in Pedagogy, 10(2), 133-148.*

Following the MBI-ES, an item that consisted of 14 sub-items about the potential causes of burnout taken from the literature was used. The item explored the participants' perceived impact of several factors on their level of burnout. These included having an unsupportive administration, having bad relationships with colleagues, perceived workload, over-crowded classrooms, inadequate salaries, lack of moral and emotional reward, inappropriate student behavior, curriculum-related issues, and inability to make independent decisions regarding the lessons. Each factor had five response options in the form of a Likert scale. These were: no effect, minor effect, neutral, moderate effect, and major effect.

### **3.4.3 Interviews**

At the end of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide contact information if they wished to participate in a follow-up interview session conducted by the researcher to help enrich the results of the questionnaire. This qualitative part of the study used semi-structured interviews that consisted of three open-ended questions developed based on the results of the quantitative part. The first question aimed to explore the causes of burnout in a more detailed way by asking the participants to describe what they think are the main causes of burnout and provide examples. The second question aimed to encourage them to make suggestions of improvements that may mitigate the effect of the causes they mentioned, and the third aimed to explore the coping strategies that teachers use to cope with burnout.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

Data for the quantitative part were collected from February 11 to March 25, 2022. The majority of the quantitative data were collected online through a Google Forms questionnaire, and a few were collected in paper format for the convenience of the participants. After a preliminary analysis of the quantitative results, three interviews were conducted from March 26 to April 6, 2022. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. A descriptive analysis of the survey results was conducted and the relationships between the variables were calculated using Spearman's correlation, Pearson's correlation, Mann Whitney U test, and Kruskal Wallis test. As for the qualitative data, thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview results.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

The quantitative part of this research was anonymous so the teachers were not asked to provide their names in the questionnaire. The participants were assured that any indirect identifiers will be handled confidentially. The teachers were also not required to provide the names of the school where they worked, and the names of the schools that were selected for sampling were not included in the data files of the results. The participants and the school administrations were ensured that the school names will not be mentioned in the thesis, presentation, or any other report. The participants of the qualitative part were also assured of confidentiality in handling their info. All participants were also made aware that participation is voluntary and refusal to participate would not bear any consequences for them.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The current study was conducted to answer five research questions related to professional burnout among English teachers who teach in public and private schools in Yerevan. This chapter aims to present the outcomes of the study by answering each question in detail. Descriptive statistics (percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to answer the questions on the prevalence of burnout and the perceived causes of burnout (research questions 1 and 5). In addition to descriptive statistics, the Mann-Whitney U test, the Kruskal-Wallis test, and Spearman and Pearson correlations were used to answer the second, third, and fourth research questions which aimed to discover the type of the relationship between burnout and several variables related to socio-demographic characteristics and work-related aspects. This chapter also presents the results of the interviews which aim to complement the findings of the quantitative stage to achieve a better understanding of the major causes of burnout.

In total, 63 English teachers responded to the quantitative part of this study. Table 2 demonstrates the characteristics of these participants. The mean age of the participants was 40.16 (SD = 11.8) and the mean duration of prior work experience among them was 14.8 years (SD = 10.3). As demonstrated in Table 2, of these 63 teachers, the absolute majority were female (98.4%) and more than half worked in private schools (58.7%). Around 66% of the respondents have a master's degree and claimed that they participate in training programs other than those conducted by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports. Moreover, 41% receive a monthly salary of less than 100,000 AMD and about half of the respondents claim to have a high level of workload. On the other hand, 81.0% of the participants describe their relationship with the school administration and their colleagues as positive, and while no participants described

their relationship with the school administration as negative, only one participant opted to describe their relationship with their colleagues as such.

**Table 2**

*Socio-demographic and Work-related Characteristics of the Sample*

Socio-demographic and work-related characteristics	Frequency	Percentages
	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	62	98.4%
Male	1	1.6%
<b>School Type</b>		
Public	26	41.3%
Private	37	58.7%
<b>Education Level</b>		
BA	21	33.3%
MA	42	66.7%
<b>Participation in Trainings</b>		
Yes	42	66.7%
No	21	33.3%
<b>Salary</b>		
Less than 100,000 AMD	25	41.0%
Between 100,000 and 200,000 AMD	20	32.8%
Between 200,000 and 300,000 AMD	7	11.5%
More than 300,000 AMD	9	14.8%
<b>Perceived Workload</b>		
High	32	51.6%
Moderate	28	45.2%
Low	2	3.2%
<b>Relationship with Administration</b>		
Negative	0	0%
Neutral	12	19.0%
Positive	51	81.0%
<b>Relationship with Colleagues</b>		
Negative	1	1.6%
Neutral	11	17.5%
Positive	51	81.0%

#### 4.1 Prevalence of Burnout

RQ1: What is the prevalence of professional burnout among English school teachers in Yerevan?

To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics were conducted. First, the mean scores of the three sub-dimensions of burnout were calculated using SPSS. The mean EE score was 18.6 ( $SD = 10.8$ ); the mean DP score was 5.5 ( $SD = 5.2$ ), and the mean PA score was 14.8 ( $SD = 10.2$ ). As for the prevalence of burnout (Table 3), 25.4% of the participants scored high on the emotional exhaustion (EE) scale and 25.4 % had moderate levels of EE. Concerning depersonalization (DP), the majority experienced low levels of depersonalization (69.8%) and only 6.3 % had high levels of it. On the other hand, only 1.6% of the participants demonstrated low levels of personal accomplishment (PA) while the vast majority (90.5%) exhibited high levels of personal accomplishment. Table 3 illustrates the prevalence of the three sub-dimensions of burnout among the study sample. Additionally, the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey showed good reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.86, 0.61, and 0.83 on the Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment scales, respectively.

**Table 3**

*The Prevalence of the Sub-dimensions of Burnout*

Sub-dimension	Frequency	Percentages
	n	%
<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>		
Low	31	49.2%
Moderate	16	25.4%
High	16	25.4%
<b>Depersonalization</b>		
Low	44	69.8%
Moderate	15	23.8%
High	4	6.3%
<b>Personal Accomplishment</b>		
Low	1	1.6%
Moderate	5	7.9%
High	57	90.5%

## 4.2 School Type and Burnout

RQ2: Does the level of teacher burnout differ according to school type (public or private)?

As illustrated in Table 4, in public schools, the mean EE score was 17.23 ( $SD = 8.9$ ), the mean DP score was 5.6 ( $SD = 4.2$ ), and the mean PA score was 17.23 ( $SD = 25$ ), while in private schools, the mean EE score was 19.5 ( $SD = 11.8$ ), the mean DP score was 5.35 ( $SD = 5.86$ ), and the mean PA score was 13.0 ( $SD = 9.0$ ). In both types of schools, teachers had a moderate level of EE, a low level of DP, and a high level of PA.

**Table 4**

*Professional Burnout by School Type*

Sub-dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>		
Public	17.2	8.9
Private	19.5	11.8
<b>Depersonalization</b>		
Public	5.6	4.2
Private	5.3	5.8
<b>Personal Accomplishment</b>		
Public	17.23	11.2
Private	13.0	9.0

To examine the relationship between burnout and school type, the Mann-Whitney U test was used. No statistically significant difference was found in the degrees of EE, DP, and PA between teachers employed in private and public schools ( $p = .635$ ,  $p = .316$ ,  $p = .144$ ), respectively.

## 4.3 Burnout and Socio-demographic Characteristics

RQ3: Is there a relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, years of experience, level of education, training) and the level of burnout?



### 4.3.1 Burnout, Age, and Teaching Experience

In response to the third research question, we first explored the possible correlations between the teachers' reported levels of burnout and their teaching experience and age. Table 5 presents the bivariate correlations of each of the subdimensions with teachers' age and years of experience. The results of the Pearson correlation showed that there was a significant negative correlation between the level of emotional exhaustion and the amount of prior experience,  $r(62) = -.27, p = .036$ . However, no significant correlations were found between teachers' prior experience and their reported levels of DP and PA ( $r(62) = -.27, p = .094$  and  $r(62) = -.01, p = .927$ ). Furthermore, as demonstrated in Table 5, no significant correlations were found between age and any of the sub-dimensions of burnout.

**Table 5**

*Summary of Intercorrelations between Burnout Sub-dimensions, Teaching Experience, and Age*

	1	2	3	4
1. Emotional exhaustion	-			
2. Depersonalization	.60**			
3. Personal accomplishment	.01	.13		
4. Teaching experience	-.27*	-.21	-.01	
5. Age	-.19	-.11	-.05	.91**

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### 4.3.2 Burnout, Level of Education, and Training

In response to the second part of the third question, we explored the differences in the teachers' reported levels of burnout according to their level of education (Master's or Bachelor's) and attendance in training programs. With regard to education levels, the results of the Mann-Whitney U test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the degrees of EE and PA ( $p = .057$  and  $p = .564$ , respectively). However, the teachers holding a BA degree reported a higher degree of DP than the teachers holding an MA degree ( $U = 171, p <$

.001). To calculate the effect size, the following formula was used  $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$ , where  $N$  is the number of the students (Pallant, 2016). The calculated effect size,  $r = 0.5$ , can be considered a large effect size (Cohen, 1988).

In regard to attending training programs, no significant difference was found in the degrees of EE ( $p = .484$ ), however, the differences in the degrees of DP and PA were statistically significant. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test showed that the teachers attending additional trainings reported higher degrees of DP ( $U = 637, p = .004$ ). The respective effect size,  $r = 0.4$ , is considered a medium effect size. At the same time, the degree of PA was also higher among teachers attending additional trainings ( $U = 627, p = .007$ ). The calculated effect size,  $r = 0.3$ , can be considered a medium effect size. Table 6 illustrates the means and standard deviations of the three sub-dimensions of burnout according to the level of education and training attendance.

**Table 6**

*Professional Burnout by Level of Education and Training*

Sub-dimension	EE		DP		PA	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Level of Education</b>						
BA	22.43	11.91	9.33	6.26	15.67	10.31
MA	16.64	9.71	3.57	3.27	14.31	10.20
<b>Training</b>						
Yes	17.02	8.25	3.98	3.54	12.29	9.04
No	21.67	14.28	8.52	6.65	19.71	10.71

#### 4.4 Burnout and Work-Related Aspects

RQ4: Is there a relationship between work-related aspects (workload, relationship with the administration, relationship with colleagues) and the level of burnout?

#### ***4.4.1 Burnout, Relationship with Administration, Relationship with Colleagues, and Perceived Levels of Workload***

In response to the fourth research question, we first explored the possible correlations between the teachers' reported levels of burnout and their relationship with their administration and colleagues. Table 7 presents the correlations of each of the subdimensions of burnout with teachers' relationships with their administration and colleagues. The results of the Spearman correlation showed that there was a significant negative correlation between the level of emotional exhaustion and the relationship with colleagues,  $r_s(63) = -.32, p = .012$ . However, no significant correlations were found between teacher's relationship with colleagues and their reported levels of DP and PA ( $r_s(63) = -.20, p = .110$  and  $r_s(63) = -.18, p = .164$ ). As shown in Table 7, no significant correlations were found between the relationship with administration and any of the sub-dimensions of burnout. Furthermore, the examination of the possible correlations between the teachers' reported levels of burnout and their perceived level of workload did not show any significant relationship between the degrees of EE, DP, and PA and the perceived levels of workload.

**Table 7**

*Summary of Intercorrelations between Burnout Sub-dimensions, Relationship with Administration, Relationship with Colleagues, and Perceived Levels of Workload*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Emotional exhaustion	-				
2. Depersonalization	.43**				
3. Personal accomplishment	.02	.15			
4. Relationship with administration	-.14	-.17	-.18		
5. Relationship with colleagues	-.32*	-.20	-.18	.60**	
6. Perceived workload	-.18	.03	.04	-.12	.05

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

#### 4.5 The Major Causes of Burnout

RQ5: What are the perceived causes of burnout among English teachers?

To answer the fifth research question, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. First, quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire item that consisted of 9 sub-items about the potential causes of burnout taken from the literature. The item explored the participants' perceived effect of several factors on their level of burnout. The participants were also asked to mention other factors that may contribute to their level of burnout in an open-ended question. After the analysis of this quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted to expand our knowledge regarding the causes of burnout and to complement the quantitative findings. Percentages were used to analyze the quantitative data while thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data.

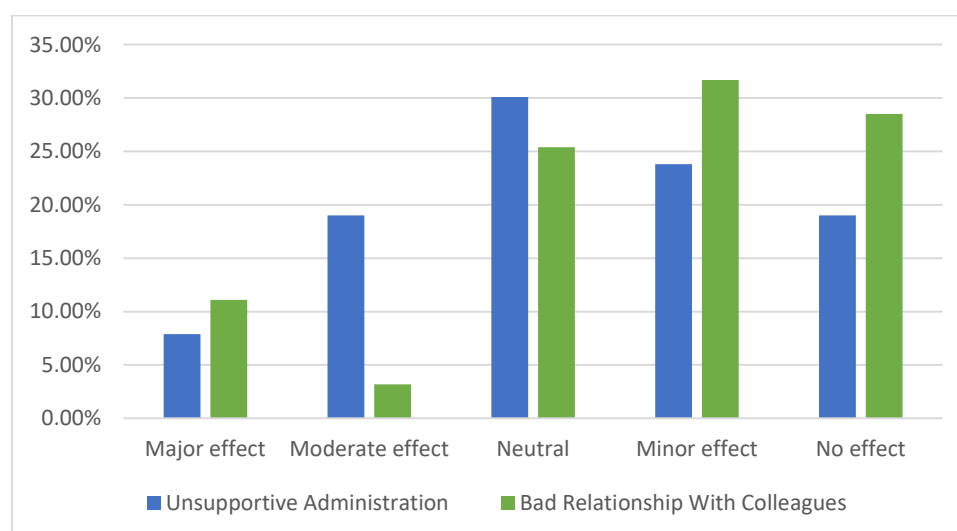
Based on the survey, 27% of the participants claimed that having to deal with unsupportive administration had a major/moderate effect on their burnout levels. This was confirmed in interviews when some of the participants argued that they often have to deal with unsupportive administrations at work. One of the participants, who was dealing with high levels of emotional exhaustion, mentioned that she had to quit her previous job because the administration did not agree to give her a couple of days off. Others expressed that the administrators did not understand that they work in other places after school and they were constantly asking them to work for unpaid extra hours from home or even stay at school. One of the participants mentioned that the administrators are unaware of the stress that teachers have to deal with which creates a problem.

On the other hand, only 14.28% of the participants expressed that having bad relationships with colleagues had a major/moderate effect on their burnout levels. This problem

was identified as one of the causes of burnout by one of the participants in the interviews when she expressed that having to deal with unsupportive colleagues, being unable to rely on someone or ask for a favor can be extremely stressful sometimes. However, she attributed the teachers' unsupportive behavior to the possibility of having high levels of burnout as she believed that most teachers around her suffer from many symptoms of high burnout. Figure 2 demonstrates the percentages of the perceived effect of unsupportive administration and bad relationships with colleagues on teacher burnout.

**Figure 2**

*Unsupportive Administration, Bad Relationship with Colleagues, and Burnout*



As for the effect of the level of workload, around 49% of the participants expressed that their workload level had a major/moderate effect on their burnout levels. During the interviews, teachers claimed that their responsibilities include many tasks other than teaching, which can become extremely time-consuming and stressful. Having to stay after school for regular meetings that they consider “unimportant” was one of the reasons of increased workload. Preparing tests, checking students' assignments, responding to dialogue journals, preparing for group projects, communicating with parents, having to upload students' grades on online

teaching platforms, having to continue working for school from home, having to teach for many hours per day, and many other tasks and responsibilities were considered excessive workload by teachers.

The problem of dealing with high levels of workload was associated with the salary according to some of the teachers; one teacher said that she would have tolerated the amount of workload she was dealing with if her salary was higher. Others also mentioned that they would not have to work in many places other than the school and could tolerate a higher workload if the salary was appropriate.

Furthermore, 63% of the participants expressed that receiving inadequate salaries has a major/moderate effect on their level of burnout. This factor was also mentioned as one of the main causes of teacher burnout during the interviews. The term “*funny salary*” was used by one of the teachers to express the unreasonable amount of money she makes from working at school. She said that she never feels burned out while working at a language training center because the pay is higher. Another teacher said that she often hears teachers struggling because of the inadequate salaries and that the amount of work a teacher is expected to do is not equivalent to the amount of money they get in return. As mentioned earlier, it was found that this problem was driving teachers to work many jobs to earn a respectful living, which was increasing their workload, and thus increasing their burnout level. This showed that the two factors intertwine with each other. One of the teachers wrote:

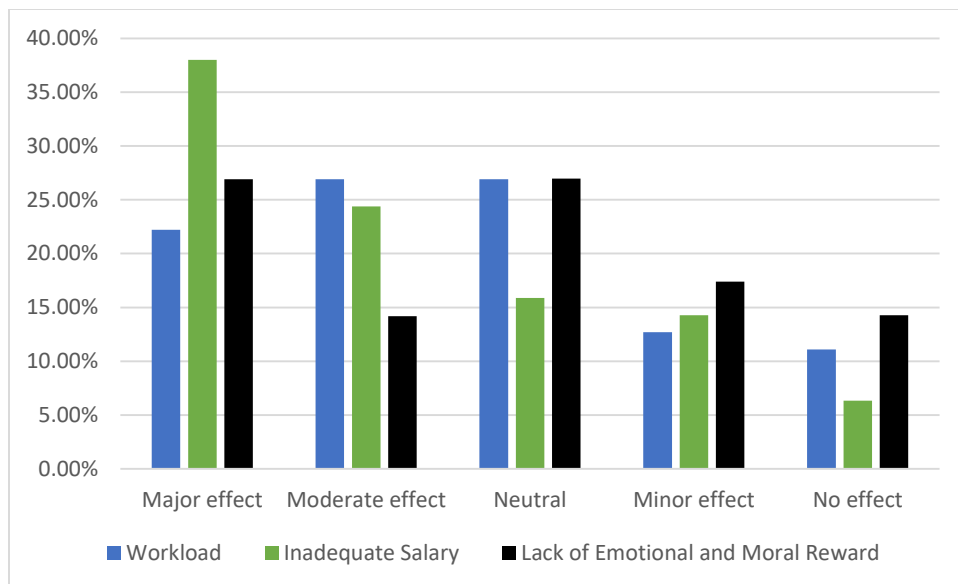
*“Filling in report cards or other papers which takes hours, and still work for school from home. Having after classes meetings and sessions that are mostly waste of time. If you are a teacher in Armenia, you have to work at least at 2 places and have individual classes to earn for living. This is so heartbreaking.”*

Additionally, two out of the three teachers who participated in the interviews stated that they were thinking about quitting their jobs at the school and continuing to work for language training centers only because the latter is more profitable and does not require tolerating the same amount of workload. One of the teachers believed that the new generation of teachers is more aware of this problem and that this is why the number of young English teachers at schools is decreasing.

Also, around 41% of the participants reported that the lack of moral and emotional reward has a major/moderate effect on teachers' burnout levels. This problem was also mentioned by the teachers who participated in the interviews. Some of the participants expressed that the lack of appreciation from the administration can negatively affect burnout levels. However, the source of this problem was not only the school administration. Teachers explained that the lack of appreciation may come from students' parents as well. Figure 3 illustrates the detailed percentages of the effect of workload, inadequate salaries, and the lack of emotional and moral reward on teachers' burnout.

### **Figure 3**

*Workload, Inadequate Salaries, Lack of Emotional and Moral Reward and Burnout*



According to the survey, almost 48% of the participants stated that the problem of dealing with overcrowded classrooms has a major/moderate effect on their levels of burnout. This factor was also mentioned by one of the interview participants as one of the main causes of burnout. The teacher stated that dealing with overcrowded classrooms is a problem in public schools where the teacher has to deal with up to 40 students in class. She mentioned that she often hears other teachers suffering from this as well. In her opinion, teachers believe that dealing with a large number of students in the class leads to some students being neglected. According to the interviewee, students were also suffering from the bad effects of overcrowded classrooms as they often expressed that the teacher does not even have time to notice them in class, which was encouraging the students to go to classes unprepared and not even speak once during class time. Moreover, students who were dealing with shyness were the most to suffer as their shyness increased instead of decreasing according to the teacher.

Other parent-related problems were also mentioned during the interviews such as the angeriness in case the child is not performing well in classes and blaming the teacher for the child's difficulties. One of the teachers mentioned that many parents do not allocate time to help

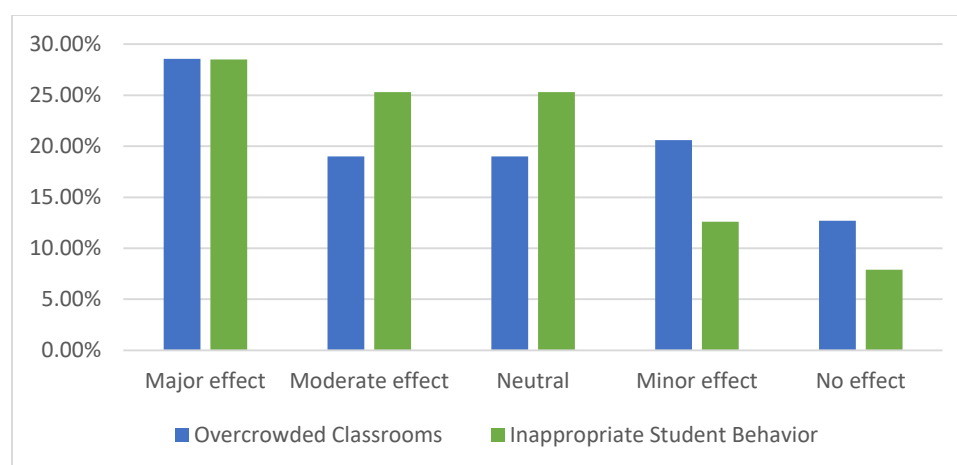


their children in group projects that might require the help of an adult. Another teacher said that being forbidden to directly communicate with the children’s parents can create problems and complicate the situation. All these parent-related problems were causes of burnout according to teachers.

Moreover, around 54% of the participants found that dealing with inappropriate student behavior has a major/moderate effect on their burnout levels. In the questionnaire, one of the teachers mentioned that dealing with “*spoiled children with no manners*” every day increases their levels of burnout. The results of the interviews confirmed these findings as teachers mentioned that dealing with bad student behavior can be very stressful. In addition to that, dealing with students who have low motivation, no interest in learning, no commitment, and low levels of concentration, can also increase teachers’ burnout levels. One teacher stated: “*It is so hard to motivate students, especially teenagers.*” Figure 4 demonstrates the percentages of the effect of overcrowded classrooms and inappropriate student behavior on teacher burnout.

**Figure 4**

*Overcrowded Classrooms, Inappropriate Student Behavior, and Burnout*



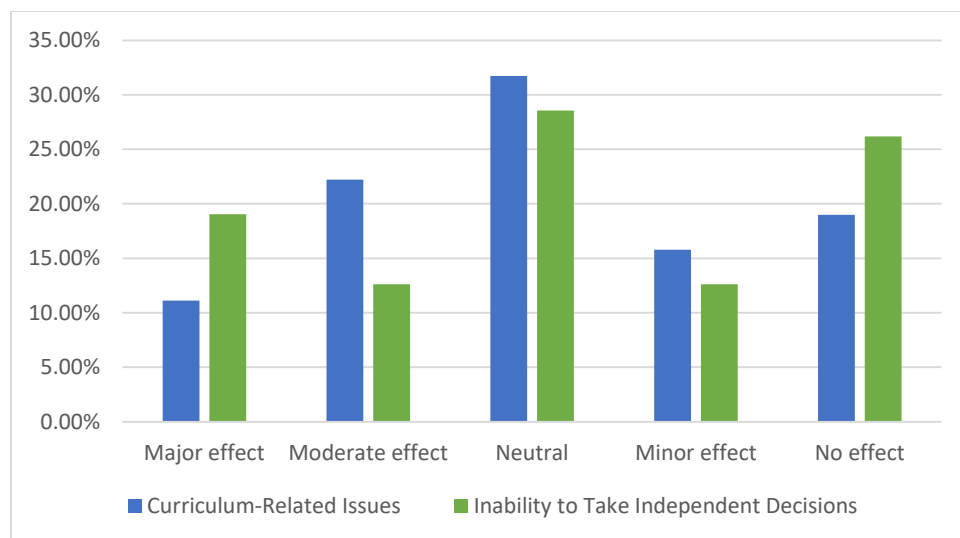
Based on the survey results, 33% of the participants expressed that curriculum-related issues had a major/moderate effect on their burnout levels. This was explained in one of the

interviews when a teacher identified this problem as one of the causes of burnout. According to this teacher, the curriculum which they are required to teach is unsuitable for the timeline. She believed that some units in the textbook are long and impossible to finish on time. Therefore, the teacher was constantly dealing with anxiety about whether she would be able to finish the required units on time or not. For this reason, the teacher had to reduce the amount of time allocated for practice and increase the number of home assignments. This was often reflected in students' learning and it hindered the teacher from achieving the learning objectives. Figure 5 shows the percentages of the effect of curriculum-related issues on burnout.

According to the survey results, around 31% of the participants expressed that being unable to make independent decisions at work has a major/moderate effect on burnout levels. This was confirmed through the interviews when one of the teachers expressed that the lack of control over the activities that she was allowed to use in the classroom greatly affected her burnout levels. The teacher mentioned that the administration of the school prevented her from using games while teaching elementary-level students, which was a problem in her opinion. Figure 5 demonstrates the percentages of the effect of curriculum-related issues and the inability to take independent decisions on teacher burnout.

### **Figure 5**

*Curriculum-Related Issues, Inability to Take Independent Decisions, and Burnout*



Another factor that was identified as one of the main causes of burnout by teachers who participated in interviews was “routine”. Teachers expressed that teaching the same materials over and over again can become extremely boring after a while. Moreover, they expressed that they were constantly searching for new things to do such as incorporating new activities or games just to avoid the routine, which was described using the term "*catastrophic*” by one of the teachers. Other causes of burnout were also mentioned in the interviews and in the open-ended question such as having to teach online classes, fear of COVID-19, family issues, lack of career growth, and having to deal with multiple proficiency level classes.

In the interviews, teachers were asked to make suggestions for possible solutions that can mitigate the effects of these causes. Teachers suggested increasing teachers’ salaries, giving more freedom for the teacher to choose the suitable activities, games, and teaching methods, having more breaks during the year, having a trip day or a party day with the students every once in a while instead of teaching regular classes, participating in school competitions, hiring teacher assistants or maybe interns to help the teacher with the paperwork and assessment, and decreasing the number of classes. The teachers also suggested other, person-level solutions to tackle this problem, such as, working on improving personal abilities to become able to deal with

difficult behaviors, and searching for new activities to implement every once in a while.

Alternatively, some teachers suggested that changing the school where they work was a solution.

The participants of the interviews were also asked to describe the strategies they use to cope with their burnout. Teachers mentioned many strategies such as, communicating with colleagues, talking about difficulties with friends or adult students, focusing on the sense of personal achievement that they feel when they see their students succeeding, modifying thinking methods, and understanding that each class is unique and has different characters and abilities.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to estimate the prevalence of professional burnout among Armenian English teachers who work in Yerevan's private and public schools. It also aimed to identify the major causes of teacher burnout, and examine the relationship between some socio-demographic characteristics, work-related aspects, and burnout. This chapter seeks to discuss the main findings of the study. After that, it presents the limitations and delimitations of the study, and it ends with a list of recommendations, future directions, and a conclusion.

### 5.1 Discussion

Regarding the prevalence of burnout among the study population, the results demonstrated that Emotional Exhaustion was the most prevalent sub-dimension of burnout and about 25% of the teachers suffered from high levels of it, whereas only around 6% suffered from high levels of depersonalization and less than 2% suffered from feelings of low personal accomplishment. Studies conducted in other countries and among various study populations found varying results. The prevalence of high emotional exhaustion ranged from 15% among high school teachers in Mexico to 54% in Ethiopia (Amri et al., 2020; Bermejo & Prieto-Ursua, 2005; Gantiva Diaz et al., 2010; García-Carmona et al., 2019; Gracia et al., 2014; Kimsesiz, 2019; Martínez Ramón, 2015; Padilla M et al., 2009; Wulolign et al., 2020). Emotional Exhaustion was the most prevalent of the three sub-dimensions in only two other studies carried out in Colombia (Gantiva Diaz et al., 2010) and Ethiopia (Wulolign et al., 2020). However, neither of these two studies found such a stark difference between the prevalence of emotional exhaustion, and that of depersonalization and low personal accomplishment.

The prevalence of high depersonalization ranged from 9% in Mexico to 71% in Spain (Amri et al., 2020; Bermejo & Prieto-Ursua, 2005; Gantiva Diaz et al., 2010; García-Carmona et

al., 2019; Gracia et al., 2014; Kimsesiz, 2019; Martínez Ramón, 2015; Padilla M et al., 2009; Wulolign et al., 2020), while the prevalence of low levels of personal accomplishment ranged from 17% in primary and secondary school teachers in Colombia to 66% of EFL teachers in Turkey (Amri et al., 2020; Bermejo & Prieto-Ursua, 2005; Gantiva Diaz et al., 2010; García-Carmona et al., 2019; Gracia et al., 2014; Kimsesiz, 2019; Martínez Ramón, 2015; Padilla M et al., 2009; Wulolign et al., 2020). In fact, reduced personal accomplishment was the most prevalent subdimension of burnout in four out of the eight studies that reported prevalence (Amri et al., 2020; Bermejo & Prieto-Ursua, 2005; Gracia et al., 2014; Kimsesiz, 2019). Thus, according to our study, English school teachers in Armenia have an especially high perception of personal accomplishment. To explain this, we have also compared the mean score of the personal accomplishment sub-dimension of our sample to other studies from the literature. We found some studies that found similar scores on the personal accomplishment scale, all of these studies were conducted among teachers of high-income countries such the US, Canada, and the Netherlands, and more importantly, all these studies found equally low prevalence rates of the other burnout sub-dimensions (Boles et al., 2000; Brenninkmeijer et al., 2001; Brown & Roloff, 2011; Doménech Betoret, 2009; Fernet et al., 2012; Loonstra et al., 2009; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Tang & Lau, 1996). Armenian teachers' high sense of personal accomplishment while having higher levels of emotional exhaustion could be attributed to the cultural differences in the presentation of burnout symptoms. As for depersonalization, it is not a highly prevalent sub-dimension in teacher populations and its prevalence is usually higher in male-dominated professions, which is quite the opposite of our study population (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Thus, the low level of depersonalization in our sample can be considered natural.

This study demonstrated that teachers of public and private schools were not significantly different in terms of burnout levels. This result contradicts several previous studies that were conducted in different settings. While many of these studies showed that public school teachers have higher levels of burnout (Ferreira & Martinez, 2012; Genç, 2016; Kroupis et al., 2017; Li et al., 2020), one study found the opposite (Bahrami & Moradkhani, 2019).

According to this study, age does not affect burnout levels significantly. This result is similar to another study conducted in Iran which did not find any significant relationship between age and burnout either (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014). However, the results of this study contradict the majority of the studies that found a negative relationship between the level of burnout and age (Gold, 1985; Helou et al., 2016; Koruklu et al., 2012; Li et al., 2020; Luk et al., 2010; Manassero Mas et al., 2006; Maslach et al., 2001; Sezer, 2012; Tymbota et al., 2017; Wulolign et al., 2020).

Prior teaching experience significantly affects burnout levels in terms of emotional exhaustion, particularly, teachers who had less teaching experience had higher levels of emotional exhaustion. This result is similar to a study that was conducted by Luk et al. (2010) who found that teachers with less than 10 years of experience had higher levels of emotional exhaustion compared with the ones that had more than 20 years of experience. Other studies also found similar results (Çağlar, 2011; Helou et al., 2016; Lau et al., 2005). On the other hand, the results of Atashpanjeh et al. (2020), and Sadeghi and Khezrlou, (2016) contradict this study's findings.

Regarding the level of education, the results of this study showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the degrees of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. However, the teachers holding a BA degree reported higher scores on the scale

of depersonalization compared with those who have an MA degree. No other study found a similar result with a solo correlation between BA holders and the scores of DP. However, this result can be considered in line with the finding of a study conducted by Sadeghi and Khezrlou (2014) who concluded that BA holders reported higher levels of burnout compared with MA and PhD holders. It is worth noting that the mentioned study provided only a general score for burnout without specifying the scores for EE, DP, and PA. On the other hand, the findings related to the levels of EE and PA are similar to many studies that did not find a significant difference between the level of education and the sub-dimensions of burnout (Akyüz & Kaya, 2014; Alloh et al., 2019; Wulolign et al., 2020) and as such do not support the claim of Maslach et al. (2001) that the higher the employee's education the higher their burnout level would be.

This study identified many major causes of burnout. Among these causes is the problem of receiving inadequate salaries. This finding is in line with many other studies (Akbari & Roudi, 2020; Atashpanjeh et al., 2020; Gulzar & Rashid, 2020; Helou et al., 2016; Kroupis et al., 2017; Li et al., 2020; Maslach et al., 2001; Matiang'i et al., 2016; Safari, 2020) which also found that receiving a low salary is a major cause of burnout among teachers. According to the study population, the lack of moral and emotional reward is also a cause of burnout, which ensures Maslach's claim about the importance of receiving emotional reward and appreciation in preventing teacher burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Another cause of burnout according to this study is having to deal with an excessive amount of workload. This finding is similar to the results of many other studies (Akbari & Roudi, 2020; Gulzar & Rashid, 2020; Helou et al., 2016; Kamtsios, 2018; Maslach et al., 2001; Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010) which also stated that having to deal with high levels of workload can be a cause of burnout. Teachers also associated workload with the problem of having a lot of paperwork, which was in line with a study



conducted by Manassero Mas et al. (2006). Moreover, the study found that the problem of dealing with overcrowded classrooms can also be a cause of burnout which is similar to many other studies (Akbari & Roudi, 2020; Gulzar & Rashid, 2020; Helou et al., 2016; Manassero Mas et al., 2006; Melanda et al., 2021; Sezer, 2012). The results also indicated that dealing with inappropriate student behavior can contribute to teachers' level of burnout which in line with the findings of many other studies (Gulzar & Rashid, 2020; Helou et al., 2016; Kamtsios, 2018; Manassero Mas et al., 2006; Melanda et al., 2021; Winding et al., 2022).

## **5.2 Limitations and Delimitations**

This study had many limitations. First, the response rate was low which affected the sample size. Second, snowball and convenience sampling limited the generalizability of the results. Third, social desirability bias might have affected the participants' answers to the survey, which can be a reason for receiving exceptionally perfect scores on the scale of “personal accomplishment” in the MBI-ES. Fourth, response bias might have affected the reliability of the results assuming that many of the teachers who have high levels of burnout were too burned out to participate.

As for the delimitations, the study included only private and public-school teachers, eliminating teachers who work in language training centers or freelancers. Moreover, the study was limited to the capital Yerevan and did not include any participants from the other regions of Armenia.

## **5.3 Future Directions**

Since the current study included only teachers from schools, it would be interesting for future studies to measure the levels of professional burnout among English teachers who work in language training centers, and maybe have a comparison between schools and centers. Future

studies can also focus on measuring the professional burnout level among teachers who work in other regions outside of Yerevan as the situation there might be different. It would also be interesting to conduct purely qualitative studies that use interviews, case studies, observations, and teacher reflections to describe the causes of the problem of professional burnout more thoroughly.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the results of this study, we have made a list of recommendations aiming to improve the well-being of teachers in Armenian schools.

##### Recommendations to policy makers

- Advocate to increase teachers' salaries in public and private schools.
- Raise awareness about the phenomenon of professional burnout among school administrations.
- Increase opportunities for voluntary professional development.

##### Recommendations to school administrations

- Raise awareness about the concept of professional burnout among teachers in regular meetings or training programs.
- Conduct periodic meetings with teachers to discuss their daily problems and concerns and work to find solutions.
- Develop rules to protect teachers from unsupportive or aggressive behaviors from colleagues, students, or parents.
- Decrease the amount of workload especially if the salary is inadequate.
- Give control and freedom to the teachers to prepare lesson plans and include games and activities according to their choice.

- Decrease the number of after-school meetings and have them within working hours.

Finally, we suggest adding the topic of teacher burnout to one of the MA-TEFL courses, possibly the Leadership and Management course, to better equip future teachers and language teaching organization managers about the importance of teachers' psychological well-being.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This study shows that one in four English teachers in Yerevan's schools suffers from high levels of emotional exhaustion, which was the most prevalent subdimension of burnout in this population. This high level of emotional exhaustion is especially present among those who have less teaching experience and poorer relationships with colleagues. On the other hand, this study demonstrates that Armenian English teachers who actively seek professional development through attending training programs had a greater feeling of personal accomplishment. This study identified high workload, inadequate salaries, overcrowded classrooms, and inappropriate student behavior as the main causes of burnout. It highlights the need for improving teachers' salaries, improving the administrations' attitudes toward teachers, increasing the number of school breaks, and decreasing the amount of workload.

English teachers in Armenia suffer from many unvoiced concerns that require the attention of their community and national policymakers. As English remains the number one international language in so many key areas of life, it is important for Armenia to care for the well-being of those who teach it to ensure a proper education for our children.

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## Appendix A

### Questionnaire

Dear Reader,

I am inviting you to participate in my research by completing this survey. The study aims to investigate the prevalence of professional burnout among English teachers in Yerevan and examine the correlation between socio-demographic characteristics, work-related aspects, and burnout. Please note that you are not obliged to answer this survey in any way. However, doing so would help a lot in completing this research and enhancing our understanding of this field. The survey will not take more than 5 minutes of your time, the collected data will remain confidential and will only be used for scientific purposes.

- 1) Please indicate your gender.      Female      Male
  
- 2) Please indicate your age. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 3) Please indicate your education level.  
  
 Bachelor's degree  
  
 Master's degree  
  
 PhD
  
- 4) Please indicate the type of school you teach in.      Public      Private
  
- 5) Please indicate the grade/grades that you teach. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 6) Please indicate how many years of experience you have in teaching. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 7) Do you usually participate in trainings other than the ones required by the ministry of education?      Yes      No
  
- 8) How much is your salary?  
  
 Less than 100,000 AMD  
  
 Between 100,000 AMD and 200,000 AMD  
  
 Between 200,000 AMD and 300,000 AMD  
  
 More than 300,000 AMD

9) How would you describe the level of your workload?

- High
- Moderate
- Low

10) How would you describe your relationship with the school administration?

- Negative
- Neutral
- Positive

11) How would you describe your relationship with your colleagues?

- Negative
- Neutral
- Positive

12) Please indicate how often these statements are true.

	Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day
1- I feel emotionally drained from my work.							
2- I feel used up at the end of the workday.							
3- I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.							
4- I can easily understand how my students feel about things.							
5- I feel I treat some students as if they were impersonal objects.							
6- Working with people all day is really a strain for me.							
7- I deal very effectively with the problems of my students.							

8- I feel burned out from my work.							
9- I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work.							
10- I've become more callous toward people since I took this job.							
11- I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally.							
12- I feel very energetic.							
13- I feel frustrated by my job.							
14- I feel I'm working too hard on my job.							
15- I don't really care what happens to some students.							
16- Working with people directly puts too much stress on me.							
17- I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my students.							
18- I feel exhilarated after working closely with my students.							
19- I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.							
20- I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.							
21- In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly.							
22- I feel students blame me for some of their problems.							

13) Please indicate how each of these options affects your level of burnout.

	No effect	Minor effect	Neutral	Moderate effect	Major effect
1- Unsupportive administration					
2- Bad relationships with colleagues					
3- Workload					
4- Overcrowded classrooms					
5- Inadequate salary					
6- Lack of moral and emotional reward					
7- Inappropriate student behavior					
8- Curriculum- related issues					
9- Inability to take independent decisions regarding the lessons					

14) If there is another factor that contributes to your burnout, please specify what it is.

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15) Please write your contact number if you wish to have an interview with the researcher to talk more about teacher burnout. This will enrich our knowledge of the problem and provide an in-depth view.

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## **Appendix B**

### **Semi-structured Interview Guide**

1. What are the major causes of burnout for you?
2. What are your suggestions to make improvements to mitigate the effect of these causes?
3. What are the things that you do to cope with your burnout?