

# Burnout in Thai EFL Teachers: Examining Key Dimensions and Contributing Factors in Primary and Secondary Education

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**Abstract**—The study investigates burnout in Thai EFL teachers in Thai basic education settings. Data were collected through the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Exhaustion Scale (MBI-ES) and semi-structured interviews to understand the three dimensions of burnout. The participants were 120 English teachers in primary and secondary schools in Northeastern Thailand. The findings showed that emotional exhaustion recorded the highest levels of individual burnout, followed by depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment. Respondents who had experienced burnout were more likely to be prone to the emotional burdens of their teaching role, highlighting the emotional toll their position can take. Higher levels of burnout were also observed in teachers who were married, and had a high level of education and less teaching experience. The qualitative analysis also indicated that non-instructional workload, hostile work environment, student misbehaviour and limited administrative support were crucial contributors to burnout. This occupational stress led to emotional exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction, which affected the teachers' general well-being. The results suggest that burnout may be remedied through interventions specifically focused on workload and the work environment, as well as strengthening the administrative support teachers receive in their roles.

**Index Terms**—teacher burnout, emotional exhaustion, Thai EFL teachers, burnout factors, Thai basic education

## I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher burnout is a psychological syndrome characterised by mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion (Meidani et al., 2021). It impacts teacher well-being, teaching effectiveness, student achievement, student motivation, and the overall functioning of the school (Mahmoodi-Shahrehabaki, 2019). Foreign or second language (L2) teachers are especially vulnerable to burnout as they face unique emotional challenges within the teacher-student relationship and face innovative cultural barriers related to language education. Several contributors to burnout have been noted among foreign language educators, such as a lack of administrative support (Blase et al., 2008), pedagogical difficulties, workload, job dissatisfaction, and difficulty working across multiple stakeholders (Domenech & Gomez, 2010). In L2 contexts, extensive research has indicated that teacher burnout hurts not only teachers' well-being and psychology (Han & Yin, 2016) but also student motivation, teaching practices, the quality of teaching, and learning outcomes. Despite these negative impacts, teacher burnout is often ignored or mischaracterised, as its signs can be mistaken for shirking responsibility or a desire to lessen workloads.

Teacher burnout has been reported by many countries around the world, especially in Iran and Europe. For example, Roohani and Dayeri (2019) studied burnout levels among Iranian EFL teachers to identify the key factors contributing to teacher burnout. The findings revealed work conflicts, lack of support and security, excessive workload, demotivation, student behaviour issues, and insufficient autonomy as the major contributors to burnout among teachers. The data also revealed another concerning finding: teachers who faced burnout would become emotionally and mentally distant from their students, leading to ineffective pedagogies and a significant decrease in their students' overall performance (Roohani & Dayeri, 2019). Other studies have also supported the perspective that the work environment has an underlying influence on worsening burnout among teachers (Meidani et al., 2021; Smetackova et al., 2019). In short, burnout can rob teachers

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of their desires, self-assurance, and efficacy to teach, as well as their concern and esteem for students and colleagues (Shen et al., 2015).

As burnout becomes increasingly recognised as a global problem and is referred to as one of the most common job-related impairments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Aloe et al., 2014), it has become necessary to determine its causes and consequences. Only a handful of studies have examined teacher burnout in the context of Thai EFL (Puranitee et al., 2019). The current study addresses the dimensions of burnout experienced by Thai EFL teachers and the factors leading to burnout within primary and secondary education contexts in Thailand. The results from this study will be beneficial for practitioners, administrators, and policymakers who seek to minimise teacher burnout. This study also proposes strategies to mitigate burnout among Thai EFL teachers. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Thai EFL teachers experience the core dimensions of burnout in primary and secondary education?
2. What are the factors contributing to burnout among Thai EFL teachers in primary and secondary education?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Burnout Theory

The term burnout was initially coined in 1974 by Freudenberger, who described burnout as a state of physical and emotional exhaustion caused by conditions at a workplace. The World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2019) categorises burnout as an occupational phenomenon involving a syndrome that results from chronic occupational stress that has not been effectively managed. The WHO has also characterised burnout into three dimensions: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, an increase in mental distance, feelings of cynicism or negativism related to one's job, and reduced professional efficacy. The teaching profession may be susceptible to burnout as it can involve long-term occupational stress and is service-oriented (Brown & Roloff, 2011). Indeed, teachers may be at risk of burnout due to high work demands and numerous responsibilities, including dealing with the various personal and social needs of students and other stakeholders.

According to Maslach's Multidimensional Burnout Theory (1993), burnout is characterised by three main dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. When applied to teaching, emotional exhaustion refers to a worn-out feeling, chronic fatigue, and a loss of energy to perform a task resulting from feeling overwhelmed and depleted by social interactions with others, especially students. Emotional exhaustion is a key characteristic of burnout and is the most common symptom (Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014). Depersonalisation is a response to excessive emotional exhaustion. During a state of depersonalisation, teachers are likely to develop negative and impersonal perceptions towards their students and those with whom they work closely due to cognitive disengagement and a cynical attitude towards their profession (Howes et al., 2015). The last dimension is reduced personal accomplishment, including a reduced sense of, and a decrease in, professional achievement and effectiveness. Reduced personal accomplishment results from negative self-evaluations, which leads to a decline in productivity and effort to perform (Maslach et al., 1996). Moreover, it has been found that reduced personal accomplishment is related to job dissatisfaction.

Maslach et al. (2001) developed a model to predict burnout by considering the "job-person mismatch" in six areas of work-life. The six areas of work-life include workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. The greater the mismatch between the individual and their job environment, the greater the likelihood of burnout. Moreover, mismatches in these six areas are correlated with the three dimensions of professional burnout.

### B. Factors Affecting Teacher Burnout

Gender is one factor that can influence teacher burnout (Bayani et al., 2013; Fernet et al., 2012). Bayani et al. (2013) investigated burnout among 290 teachers and found that female teachers showed higher levels of emotional exhaustion than male teachers. Similarly, Mousavy and Nimehchisalem (2014) conducted a burnout study among 315 English language teachers in Malaysia and found that female teachers suffered a higher level of emotional exhaustion than male teachers. Age can also predict teacher burnout, with younger teachers have a significantly higher burnout level than their older colleagues (Feyzioglu et al., 2015). Teaching experience has also been studied as a demographic factor contributing to teacher burnout. In a Turkish EFL context, Demirel and Cephe (2015) found that less experienced EFL instructors had higher emotional exhaustion scores than those with more years of experience. This correlation between teaching experience and burnout was also supported by Reichl et al. (2014), who found that new teachers felt the effects of burnout more strongly than those with many years of teaching experience. The educational level of teachers has also been shown to be significantly related to teacher burnout. Specifically, teachers with a higher educational degree tend to experience burnout more than those with a lower educational degree (Irandoost et al., 2021; Sabarirajan & Girija, 2020). Moreover, marital status is a common demographic factor studied in teacher burnout. The results, however, have been inconsistent as some have reported that marital status influenced teacher burnout (Akman et al., 2010; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019), while others found no significant relationship between marital status and teacher burnout (Mousavy & Nimehchisalem, 2014). Indeed, it has been shown that married teachers suffer less burnout than non-married teachers (Bakker et al., 2005).

Yet, others have reported that married teachers had a higher risk of experiencing emotional exhaustion (Akman et al., 2010).

Work stressors, such as disruptive student behaviour, work overload, lack of administrative support, poor work environment, and bad relationships with superiors and/or colleagues, are critical work stressors that affect the mental health of teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Klassen et al., 2013). Excessive workload significantly predicts teacher burnout (Fernet et al., 2012). With a high workload and little time to complete tasks, teachers become more stressed while their emotional and physical exhaustion increases (Buchanan, 2010). Their workload also encompasses high levels of interpersonal involvement, leading to emotional exhaustion (Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). Work overload is also often associated with a lack of administrative support since administrators assign the teachers' workload and apply pressure on the teachers (McLean & Connor, 2015).

Student misbehaviour is another stressor that influences teacher burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). When students express unpleasant behaviours, the teachers may interpret such behaviours as a personal failure to control a classroom, leading to burnout and feeling a lack of self-efficacy for teaching. Kazimlar and Dollar (2015) explored the relationship between burnout levels and organisational context among Turkish university EFL instructors and found that low student motivation and/or student behaviour are significant factors contributing to exhaustion in these instructors. Similarly, Fattash (2013) found that poor motivation in EFL students created a sense of burnout, frustration, and apathy in teachers, mainly when the teachers felt helpless.

Several studies have also shown that the work environment can predict teacher burnout (Khani & Mirzaee, 2015; Plantiveau et al., 2018). A negative work environment caused by interpersonal conflicts with students, parents, or colleagues makes teachers more prone to burnout (McCarthy et al., 2016; Puranitee et al., 2019). On the other hand, teachers who work in a school with a trusting and collaborative work environment are less likely to experience burnout (Ford et al., 2019). Indeed, low-burnout teachers perceived their teaching environment as nurturing, while teachers experiencing high burnout perceived their teaching environment as hostile and constrained (Richards et al., 2018).

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were 120 Thai EFL teachers, consisting of 26 males and 94 females aged between 23 and 60. The teachers worked in primary and secondary schools in Northeastern Thailand. Fifty-five participants worked in primary schools, and 65 worked in secondary schools. Teachers were chosen for the study via convenience sampling. Their teaching experience was between 1 and 30 years, and their academic degree was between a bachelor's and doctorate. The wide range of participants have enabled the examination of burnout among Thai EFL teachers who represent different age groups, levels of experience in their profession, and educational backgrounds.

In the qualitative data collection stage, a semi-structured interview was performed with 10 participants with the highest score on the Maslach Burnout Inventory Exhaustion Scale (MBI-ES) who were willing to participate in the interviews. To maintain anonymity, all interviewees were assigned pseudonyms, and data protection measures were put in place to safeguard the identity of interviewees within the study. The interviews also offered insight into the lived experiences and causes behind burnout among Thai EFL teachers. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 10 interviewees.

TABLE 1  
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE 10 INTERVIEWEES

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Level Taught	Teaching Experience (Years)
Alan	M	30	Bachelor of Education in English	Primary	4
Ashley	F	26	Bachelor of Education in English	Primary	3
Bailey	F	33	Bachelor of Education in English	Secondary	5
Cara	F	26	Bachelor of Education in English	Secondary	3
Helen	F	28	Bachelor of Arts in English	Secondary	3
Katelyn	F	26	Bachelor of Arts in English	Primary	2
Lauren	F	31	Bachelor of Arts in English	Secondary	2
Owen	M	28	Bachelor of Education in English	Secondary	3
Steve	M	32	Bachelor of Arts in English	Primary	4
Tracey	F	25	Bachelor of Education in English	Primary	2

#### B. Research Instruments

##### (a). Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES)

The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) is a 22-self-assessment questionnaire developed by Maslach and colleagues (1996) to assess burnout among educators across three primary domains: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and personal accomplishment. The survey is completed within 10-15 minutes, and respondents are required to score every item from 0 (Never) to 6 (Every day) using a seven-point Likert scale. The interpretation of the burnout dimensions will differ depending on the specific score ranges for each respective dimension.

For emotional exhaustion, scores of 27+ are high, 17 to 26 are moderate, and 0 to 16 are low. Depersonalisation is considered high if the score is 13 or more, moderate if between 7 and 12 and low if from 0 to 6. Personal accomplishment is rated high (39 or above), moderate (32 to 38) and low (31 or below). A higher score on emotional exhaustion (EE) and depersonalisation (DP) subscales indicates a more intense degree of burnout. In contrast, a lower score in personal accomplishment (PA) demonstrates a higher level of burnout. The MBI-ES is a reliable and valid instrument with high-reliability coefficients, scoring 0.93 for emotional exhaustion, 0.81 for depersonalisation, and 0.75 for personal accomplishment.

#### (b). *Semi-Structured Interviews*

The current study used semi-structured interviews to collect in-depth qualitative data. This data was expected to provide more detailed information on the perspectives of Thai EFL teachers' burnout for further narrative analyses. The semi-structured interviews were guided by five questions: (1) Why did you become an EFL teacher? (2) Do you have the same perspectives towards your teaching profession as when you started your career, and why? (3) Have you often experienced burnout or exhaustion as an English teacher? And how does the condition affect your work? (4) What are the factors that influence the feelings of burnout? (5) What can be done to prevent or reduce burnout in EFL teachers? While these questions were used to structure the interview, other questions also emerged during the interview.

#### C. *Data Collection Procedures*

First, primary and secondary schools in Northeastern Thailand were contacted to acquire permission for data collection from the EFL teachers. The demographic surveys and Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Surveys (MBI-ES) were then sent to 150 Thai EFL teachers across 16 provinces in Northeastern Thailand, and 120 of the demographic surveys and MBI-ES were returned. In addition, the five primary and secondary school teachers with the highest scores on the MBI-ES were purposively selected as case studies and participated in the semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was audio-taped. All interviews were conducted over one week. The participants were given a pseudonym to conceal their identity.

#### D. *Data Analysis*

For the quantitative analysis, the data collected from the demographic questionnaire was analysed using a t-test and an ANOVA to explore the possible demographic factors influencing EFL teacher burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) was analysed using the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) program to investigate levels of burnout dimensions among the 120 Thai EFL teachers. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed and coded for qualitative data analysis to reveal the participants' perspectives on Thai EFL teacher burnout. After coding and transcription, the data were categorised into themes for further content analysis.

## IV. RESULTS

### A. *Thai EFL Teachers' Burnout*

As seen in Table 2, the findings of MB-ES revealed that 27.5% of the participants experienced a high level of emotional exhaustion, while another 27.5% experienced moderate emotional exhaustion. That is, more than half of the participants (55%) suffered from moderate-to-high emotional exhaustion, while 45% of the participants had a low level of emotional exhaustion. By contrast, most participants experienced a low level of depersonalisation (72.5%), with only 20% and 7.5% of participants experiencing moderate and high levels of depersonalisation, respectively. Interestingly, all participants reported a low level of reduced personal accomplishment.

TABLE 2  
LEVELS OF BURNOUT DIMENSIONS

Burnout Dimensions	Burnout Levels					
	High		Moderate		Low	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Emotional exhaustion	33	27.5	33	27.5	54	45
Depersonalisation	9	7.5	24	20	87	72.5
Reduced personal accomplishment	0	0	0	0	120	100

As displayed in Table 3, the results from the t-tests indicated that there were no significant differences between genders on any of the burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion ( $t = 1.181$ ,  $p = .239$ ), depersonalisation ( $t = 1.223$ ,  $p = .224$ ), and reduced personal accomplishment ( $t = .137$ ,  $p = .891$ ).

TABLE 3  
GENDER AND BURNOUT DIMENSIONS

Burnout Dimensions	Male (n=26)		Female (n=94)		Value	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	t	p
Emotional exhaustion	2.17	1.65	2.34	1.27	1.181	.239
Depersonalisation	1.25	1.50	.87	.95	1.223	.224
Reduced personal accomplishment	1.32	.85	1.29	.88	.137	.891

Table 4 shows that the participants' emotional exhaustion differed across age groups ( $F=5.388$ ). It appears that English teachers aged between 31-40 years old experience a higher level of emotional exhaustion compared to other age groups, followed by teachers who are 30 years old or less. By contrast, the experience of depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment did not statistically differ between age groups ( $p = 0.054$  and  $0.538$ , respectively). However, the  $p$ -value ( $0.054$ ) was very close to significance for the dimension of depersonalisation, and a post hoc test indicated that Thai EFL teachers aged between 51-60 years old suffered less emotional exhaustion than the other age groups.

TABLE 4  
AGE AND BURNOUT DIMENSIONS

Burnout Dimensions	30 years or less (n=71)		31-40 years (n=22)		41-50 years (n=17)		51-60 years (n=10)		Value	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	F	p
Emotional exhaustion	2.47	1.24	2.52	1.59	2.11	1.47	1.03	.63	5.388	0.002*
Depersonalisation	.93	1.11	1.37	1.31	.88	.80	.36	.50	2.623	.054
Reduced personal accomplishment	1.35	.85	1.17	.08	1.39	.95	1.10	.55	1.037	.538

The results shown in Table 5 indicate that the level of emotional exhaustion experienced differed among the marital status groups ( $F=6.100$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Specifically, single Thai EFL teachers experienced higher emotional exhaustion than the other groups. However, there was no significant difference among marital status groups on depersonalisation ( $F= 2.102$ ,  $p = .104$ ) or reduced personal accomplishment dimensions ( $F= .846$ ,  $p = .471$ ). Moreover, the post hoc test indicated that single EFL teachers suffered from emotional exhaustion more than married EFL teachers at a statistical significance level. Also, single EFL teachers had higher emotional exhaustion than widowed EFL teachers, with a statistical significance of  $0.037$ , while there were no statistical differences found among other marital status groups.

TABLE 5  
MARITAL STATUS OF BURNOUT DIMENSIONS

Burnout Dimensions	Single (n=89)		Married (n=26)		Divorced (n=3)		Widow (n=2)		Value	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	F	p
Emotional exhaustion	2.55	1.32	1.59	1.23	2.44	1.58	.77	.00	6.100	.001*
Depersonalisation	1.01	1.18	.73	1.71	1.93	1.14	.10	.14	2.102	.104
Reduced personal accomplishment	1.34	.83	1.18	.98	1.04	1.30	1.43	1.33	.846	.471

Table 6 illustrates that the level of emotional exhaustion was also significantly different between the participants from various educational backgrounds ( $p = .011$ ). Inspection of the mean values suggests that Thai EFL teachers with a doctoral degree experienced higher emotional exhaustion than those with a bachelor's or master's degree. Post hoc tests indicated a significant difference in emotional exhaustion between EFL teachers with a bachelor's degree and those with a master's degree and between the master's degree holders and the doctoral degree holders. Furthermore, it was revealed through the post hoc test that bachelor's degree holders experienced emotional exhaustion more than those with a master's degree ( $p = .022$ ). However, depersonalisation ( $F= .786$ ,  $p=.458$ ) and reduced personal accomplishment ( $F = 1.699$ ,  $p=.187$ ) did not differ among teachers with Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees.

TABLE 6  
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF BURNOUT DIMENSIONS

Burnout Dimensions	Bachelor's Degree (n=93)		Master's Degree (n=25)		Doctoral Degree (n=2)		Value	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	F	p
Emotional exhaustion	2.39	1.31	1.84	1.40	4.33	.79	4.659	.011*
Depersonalisation	.99	1.14	.78	.90	1.60	1.70	.786	.458
Reduced personal accomplishment	1.36	.83	1.08	1.00	1.00	1.06	1.699	.187

Table 7 shows that teachers' levels of emotional exhaustion differed based on their teaching experience ( $F=2.815$ ). It appears that teachers with less than five years of teaching experience suffered a higher level of emotional exhaustion than those with more experience. Indeed, EFL teachers with 16-20 years of experience appeared to suffer the least from emotional exhaustion. There were no significant differences between teaching experience on the other two burnout dimensions: depersonalisation ( $F=.303$ ,  $p= .875$ ) and reduced personal accomplishment ( $F=2.294$ ,  $p=.064$ ).

Furthermore, the post hoc analysis indicated that the EFL teachers with less than five years of teaching experience suffered more from emotional exhaustion than those with more than 20 years of experience. However, no statistically significant differences were found between those with less than five years of experience and other groups (5-10 years, 11-15 years, and 16-20 years of teaching experience).

TABLE 7  
TEACHING EXPERIENCE OF BURNOUT DIMENSIONS

Burnout Dimensions	Less than 5 years (n=70)		5-10 years (n=22)		11-15 years (n=10)		16-20 years (n=2)		More than 20 years (n=16)		Value	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	F	p
Emotional exhaustion	2.57	1.25	2.10	1.28	2.08	1.68	1.55	.94	1.69	1.57	2.815	.022*
Depersonalisation	.98	1.03	.89	1.13	.96	.86	1.00	.85	.92	.55	.303	.875
Reduced personal accomplishment	1.41	.82	1.28	.92	.71	.66	1.31	.44	1.21	1.06	2.294	.064

### B. Factors Affecting Teacher Burnout

The qualitative data gathered through the interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis, which was used to identify, analyse, and report the themes that emerged from the data (Ibrahim, 2012). Symptoms linked to teacher burnout were flagged in the data for further investigation. Other related burnout factors that emerged as recurring themes include the non-instructional workload, the negative work environment, student behaviour, and the lack of administrative support.

#### (a). Non-Instructional Workload

Many participants reported that their non-instructional workload, such as assessments, grading, and participation in other school projects, often cut into their teaching time, causing stress and emotional depletion. The pandemic response efforts resulted in extra responsibilities that negatively impacted their ability to teach well and students' ability to learn well, as they did not have enough time to prepare adequately for lessons and teach well. This made teachers more stressed, which added to their burnout. The following excerpts from the interviews support these claims:

*"There are a lot of assessments I have to deal with. I think it is too much for me. There are other works besides teaching that I am assigned to do. They drain so much energy out of me. We barely have time to teach our students. I feel very burned out and depressed being an English teacher."* (Bailey)

*"I have to be responsible for other work and school projects. I have to leave my teaching behind a lot of time because I have to do things my superior wants me to do, including meetings and preparing for other projects with nothing to do with teaching. It stresses and worries me about my students' academic achievement."* (Tracey)

*"Assessments are stressful. They make me feel exhausted to do other things and have no energy to teach because I am constantly worried about the paperwork for the assessments."* (Katelyn)

The rigid expectations and widespread non-instructional work increased their stress and burnout, cluttering the workload and threatening work-life balance. The participants constantly stressed how the non-instructional workload not only contributed to negative feelings and exhaustion but also that the non-instructional workload is a major contributor to teacher burnout in the context of Thai EFL teachers.

#### (b). Negative Work Environment

The interviews indicated that a negative working environment was also a major contributor to burnout among Thai EFL teachers, and conflict with colleagues was the primary reason. When these contentious situations got worse, the work environment became even more poisonous, causing teachers to become alienated and disembodied from their jobs. In such an environment, individuals stated that the absence of membership and a collaborative spirit worsened their stressors and reduced their pleasure in the job.

Interpersonal conflicts were mentioned, as was the seniority system in place in a number of schools, among other sources of tension. Many participants described the hierarchical structure of the workplace as creating feelings of inequality and frustration, which bred isolation and burnout. These statements emphasize how a hostile work environment negatively impacts teachers' well-being and contributes to burnout. As noted by the participants, a toxic work environment has a significant debilitating effect on motivation, collaboration, and overall job satisfaction, which results in burnout:

*"Another thing that makes me feel tired and exhausted is toxic colleagues. The seniority system is terrible for the teacher society and the school system. Many senior teachers at my school do not have any emotional maturity. It is challenging to work with them. Those senior teachers use their seniority to take advantage of the younger teachers. I think it is not fair."* (Bailey)

*"In my opinion, burnout is caused by too much workload and negative environment at work that can easily cause stress and emotional exhaustion. My bad relationship with my colleagues makes me not want to go to work. The environment at work is somewhat gloomy to me."* (Helen)

*"I think my toxic work environment is the main reason (for burnout). Many conflicts are going on, even with the school director. I see no cooperation but a group of people who do not like each other and are ready to blame one another. The senior teachers always use the younger ones to do things for themselves, and the younger ones are afraid to say no."* (Owen)

These statements indicate that a negative work environment is a major factor in burnout for English teachers. These inconsistent working conditions left participants with emotional fatigue and increased stress, which in turn lowered their desire to go to work. Conflict with colleagues was the most frequently mentioned problem in such settings and consistently a central factor contributing to the worsening of burnout.

(c). *Student Misbehaviour*

Disruptive and disrespectful student behaviours were consistently identified as a significant contributor to teacher burnout. Some participants said such misbehaviours made teaching challenging not only because it was disruptive but because it reduced their energy and enthusiasm for the profession. Common underlying themes were a pervasive sense of feeling overwhelmed and burned out by the demands of these challenging behaviours on top of the stress of dealing with these behaviours on a daily basis. Participants attested that effective teaching and student engagement were undermined by the emotional toll of dealing with these disruptions. The following comments demonstrate that student misbehaviour is a major contributor to teacher burnout:

*“I think disruptive student behaviours make me burn out because they make me feel unmotivated to teach. They do not partake in anything. They act disrespectfully, which makes me want to leave the class. I sometimes ignore my students because they are intolerable. Sometimes I think it’s my fault because I’m not good enough to be able to deal with classroom issues.”* (Lauren)

*“They play and talk sometimes while I am teaching. Having that many distractions makes it very hard to teach. I wish I could have control over my class, but sometimes it can fail. That feels very stressful to me. When this occurs, I feel disheartened to teach. Thinking about such rude behaviours makes me feel burnt out.”* (Katelyn)

*“For me, the main reason for burnout is student behaviours. Students behave aggressively, not respecting or caring for teachers. They usually talk over me and do not listen to me or even understand what I teach. This affects their learning achievement. It reflects that my instruction is not effective. These problems make me extremely exhausted.”* (Cara)

As illustrated in the above statements, the tasks of handling students’ disruptive behaviour caused Thai EFL teachers to suffer from emotional exhaustion and increased stress. These reflections illustrate the significant role that student misbehaviour plays in contributing to the burnout of English teachers.

(d). *Lack of Administrative Support*

During the semi-structured interviews, many participants were frustrated with the lack of administrative support for dealing with stressful situations and problem-solving work-related issues. Several teachers acknowledged the stress compounded by high expectations and heavy workloads set by their superiors. The overwhelming feeling and confusion about managing their responsibilities left participants wanting more support from their administration, which is better equipped to help them navigate these processes. A lack of proper support resulted in many Thai EFL teachers suffering from increased stress and burnout. The following statements highlight the relationship between lack of administrative support and teacher burnout:

*“We barely get any support from the administrative. This makes things even harder working at a school. The administrators do not care about the burden on teachers. The administrator should be more understanding and put the priority on teachers and students, not the worthless awards and projects.”* (Bailey)

*“I am also tired of the administration of my school. The administration and the administrators lack the vision of the school administration. They do not focus on the students in the school but on other works. The administrators should listen to the teachers more to solve the issues together.”* (Steve)

*“The administration does not provide enough support for the teachers. The authority needs to support the teachers by giving them time to focus on their teaching and reducing unnecessary workloads and assessments. The administration needs to provide a friendly and cooperative environment.”* (Katelyn)

*“The administration should at least find a way to compromise the issues and look at the problem right before them. As teachers, we need their support to make a school a better place to work and learn.”* (Owen)

Many participants reported feeling stressed and experiencing difficulties in their teaching duties due to a lack of support from their administration. Many teachers noted that they did not have sufficient support from their administration to deal with work-related issues. Moreover, several participants wanted the administration to support or create a positive work environment, as they believed this would help reduce stress and minimise burnout.

## V. DISCUSSION

### A. *Core Dimensions of Burnout Among Thai EFL Teachers*

The current results indicate that Thai EFL teachers experience emotional exhaustion, the most prominent dimension of burnout. Emotional exhaustion is often associated with high levels of chronic fatigue, debilitating feelings, and “worn-out” feelings due to professional responsibilities. Significantly, more than half of the participants indicated emotional exhaustion within moderate to high levels, suggesting emotional exhaustion is a critical issue among Thai EFL teachers. These results underscore the seriousness of occupational distress among teachers and the emotional impact of this work, suggesting teachers are being placed under considerable pressure.

The results from the semi-structured interviews further revealed that work-related stressors are behind this emotional exhaustion, including work overload, lack of administrative support and student classroom behaviour. These stressors drain the teachers’ energy levels and their capacity to cope with the demands of their profession. Teachers reported feeling mentally and physically exhausted, which made them feel more emotionally drained. High levels of emotional exhaustion

have long been associated with workplace stress, prompting calls for systemic reforms to better manage and support teacher workloads; a need that may be unmet in many schools across Thailand.

Previous studies that indicated that depersonalisation tends to be an early response to emotional exhaustion (Howes et al., 2015). However, interestingly, in the current study, emotional fatigue was not related to increased levels of depersonalisation. Although emotional exhaustion often manifests in a negative, detached attitude towards students, most Thai EFL teachers in this study were found to have low levels of depersonalisation. Thus, even in the presence of high levels of emotional exhaustion, the teachers appeared not to have formed negative perceptions toward their students nor disconnected from their role. Indeed, the results suggest that, even when they were burned out, most teachers still cared deeply about their students' learning. This result highlights teachers' ability to support their students even amid significant stress.

Finally, the results showed that the participants were not suffering from a reduced feeling of personal achievement. None of the participants reported reduced personal accomplishment, which is usually described as a feeling of ineffective teaching and decreased professional accomplishment. That is, despite emotional exhaustion, Thai EFL teachers did not believe their professional role was less effective, nor did they feel that their professional competence significantly declined (Maslach et al., 1996). It also indicates that even if teachers are burnt out and feeling overwhelmed, they retain a sense of professional esteem and are not entirely in despair about their work.

Even though emotional exhaustion is a critical dimension of the burnout syndrome, the complex nature of the burnout reveals that depersonalisation and personal accomplishment dimensions are less visible in Thai EFL teachers' burnout. These findings highlight the importance of designing interventions tailored to the emotional demands of the teaching profession while acknowledging the resilience and professionalism of educators who continue to work diligently under challenging circumstances. Moreover, the findings suggest the need for enhancing specific support systems for teachers to alleviate their emotional burden and help sustain their commitment to the profession.

## *B. Factors Contributing to Thai EFL Teachers' Burnout*

### *(a). Demographic Factors*

The quantitative findings showed that age, marital status, educational background, and teaching experience contributed to emotional exhaustion, but not depersonalisation or reduced personal achievement, in Thai EFL teachers. Specifically, EFL teachers aged 20-40 experienced a higher level of emotional exhaustion than teachers aged 40 and above. This finding is supported by previous studies, which found that younger teachers have a significantly higher level of burnout than older teachers (Feyzioglu et al., 2015; Koruklu et al., 2012). Indeed, Koruklu et al. (2012) also reported that teachers aged 20 to 40 experienced higher emotional exhaustion than those above 40.

Marital status was also found to be a factor that influenced emotional exhaustion. Thai EFL teachers who were single suffered a higher level of emotional exhaustion than those in other groups. Previous studies have reported mixed results on whether marital status contributes to burnout. While some have found no relationship between marital status and the dimensions of burnout (Mousavy & Nimehchisalem, 2014), others have shown that married teachers were more prone to emotional exhaustion than single teachers (Akman et al., 2010). Therefore, it remains unclear whether marital status is a factor that contributes to teacher burnout. Nevertheless, in the Thai EFL context, the current study showed that marital status affected emotional exhaustion, with single teachers suffering more emotional exhaustion than married, divorced, or widowed teachers.

Furthermore, the present study found that teachers' educational level was significantly related to emotional exhaustion. Teachers with a doctoral degree were found to experience higher emotional exhaustion than those with a Bachelor's or Master's degree. This finding is consistent with prior studies (Irandoost et al., 2021; Sabarirajan & Girija, 2020), showing a positive relationship between a teacher's level of education and burnout. This may be because the teachers with a doctoral degree have higher expectations for their teaching outcomes. Indeed, Irandoost et al. (2021) argued that if one has high expectations of their work, if these expectations are not met, feelings of failure could precipitate burnout.

Finally, the present study reported that Thai EFL teachers with five years of experience or less suffered higher emotional exhaustion than those with more teaching experience. This result is consistent with other studies, showing that new EFL teachers scored higher on emotional exhaustion than experienced teachers (Demirel & Cephe, 2015; Reichl et al., 2014). Together, this suggests that new or less experienced EFL teachers have not yet developed coping mechanisms to manage stressful situations, while those with many years of experience may be more resilient to stress and burnout.

### *(b). Non-Instructional Workload*

The qualitative data analysis indicated that non-instructional workload led to burnout among Thai EFL teachers in primary and secondary schools. Participants reported that non-instructional workloads, such as school projects and assessments, made them feel stressed and exhausted. Similarly, previous studies have also found that work overload is one of the key predictors of teacher burnout (Fernet et al., 2012; Roohani & Dayeri, 2019). Moreover, based on the Job-Fit Person Theory of Maslach et al. (2001), a mismatch between actual and expected workload was associated with emotional exhaustion because a heavy workload can cause an individual to become highly exhausted to the point where they cannot recover from excessive work demands or restore balance. Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) also noted that non-

teaching-related workload directly affected emotional exhaustion. These results demonstrate that non-instructional workload is a key factor in emotional exhaustion among Thai EFL learners.

*(c). Negative Work Environment*

As reported in prior studies (Iancu et al., 2018; Stewart, 2015), Thai EFL teachers reported that negative work environments contribute to burnout. Most participants stated that conflicts with their colleagues and a lack of social support created a negative atmosphere, which caused them to experience burnout. The Six Areas of Work-Life hypothesis (Leiter & Maslach, 1999) also predicts that the greater the mismatch between the individual and their job environment, the greater the likelihood of burnout. Indeed, poor relationships with colleagues may make Thai EFL teachers feel undervalued and develop low self-efficacy, which is associated with burnout. Other studies have also shown that a hostile work environment is one of the most significant factors contributing to teacher burnout (Puranitee et al., 2019).

*(d). Student Misbehaviour*

According to the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews, student misbehaviour contributed to burnout in Thai EFL teachers. Previous studies have shown that student misbehaviour can cause teachers to feel burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). When students show signs of disruptive behaviours, English teachers are more likely to become stressed and emotionally exhausted as they work closely and directly with students every day. In the current study, many participants mentioned that disrespectful behaviours made them feel emotional, exhausted and burnt out. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) also found that students' behavioural and emotional difficulties, including impulsive and anti-social behaviour, led teachers to feel burnout. In the Thai EFL context, teachers reported that student misbehaviours left them feeling unmotivated to teach. They also reported disappointment and frustration as they could not successfully control their classroom, leading to a sense of failure.

*(e). Lack of Administrative Support*

Finally, the participants noted that a lack of administrative support contributed to teacher burnout, especially emotional exhaustion. The participants stated that they needed support from the administration to help them deal with work-related stressors and reduce the excessive workload, but "the administrators do not care about the burden of teaching (Bailey)". An excessive workload and little time to focus on teaching and preparing their classes made the Thai EFL teachers feel stressed and burnt out. Previous research has shown that high work demands were related to a lack of understanding and support from the administration (McLean & Connor, 2015). Furthermore, a poor or hostile work environment may result from a lack of administrative support. Indeed, the participants explained that they needed support from the administration to create a positive work environment that could reduce stress.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The current study investigated the levels at which Thai EFL teachers experience the three main dimensions of teacher burnout and ascertain what factors contribute to burnout in the context of primary and secondary education in Thailand. The findings indicate that emotional exhaustion is the most significant and prevalent dimension of burnout experienced by Thai EFL teachers in primary and secondary education. Over half of the participants reported moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion, highlighting the substantial emotional toll of their teaching responsibilities. In contrast, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment were less prominent, with most participants experiencing low levels of depersonalisation and none reporting concerns related to reduced personal accomplishment. These results underscore the importance of specifically addressing emotional exhaustion when designing tools to reduce burnout and support the well-being of Thai EFL teachers.

The study also identified factors that contribute to burnout, including demographic characteristics and teaching experience. These factors were disproportionately associated with emotional exhaustion, highlighting the multifaceted nature of burnout and how it can manifest in different types of teachers. Based on the semi-structured interviews, we found that non-instructional workload, negative working environment, student misbehaviour, and insufficient administrative support were other important factors leading to burnout in Thai EFL teachers. These occupational stressors increase emotional exhaustion, lower job satisfaction, and affect the overall well-being of teachers.

The results of this study reveal the extent of the burnout experienced by Thai EFL teachers, which is predominated driven by the most salient feature of burnout: emotional exhaustion. Given the high levels of emotional exhaustion experienced by the teachers, it is crucial that teachers improve coping strategies to deal with stress and to eliminate and/or lessen the effects of burnout. Teachers need time to recuperate, engage in de-stressing behaviours, and establish boundaries between home and work. In addition, mechanisms for coping with hostile environments, such as dealing with conflicts amongst coworkers or students' behavioural issues, should also be developed to help prevent emotional fatigue from becoming overwhelming.

School leaders, at an organisational level, also play a vital role in reducing burnout by providing a positive, collaborative work environment. Administrators must provide support to teachers, especially in the moments when burnout-inducing situations occur. This may involve providing professional development opportunities, allowing for

adjusted workloads and ensuring teachers have the resources needed to do their jobs. The establishment of collective values and goals that emphasize the purpose of the organisation can build a supportive school culture.

Despite its contributions to our understanding of Thai EFL teachers' burnout, the study has some limitations. First, the study used convenience sampling and thus the generalisability of the findings may be limited as the sample is derived from specific regions in Northeastern Thailand. Furthermore, assessing burnout using self-reported data from the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Exhaustion Scale (MBI-ES) and semi-structured interviews may be biased and, importantly, standard clinical interviews of burnout may not adequately account for contextual or organisational factors of burnout.

Future research may focus on replicating this study with more teachers across Thailand and regionally in Southeast Asia to ensure that regional and culture-specific influences are better understood. Longitudinal studies could also follow burnout over time to assess the effectiveness of coping strategies and organisational interventions. In addition, studying the impact of school policies, administrative support or professional development programs on reducing burnout would also be an important avenue for future research. This could include examining the influence of teacher-student bonding, peer support, work-life balance on stress, and other initiatives to prevent burnout. Finally, more data from the administrator, student, and parent perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that may cause burnout, which will allow the development of more effective strategies to support teachers.

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