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DETERMINANTS OF OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN NORTHERN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: *Occupational burnout among teachers has become a growing concern as it affects teachers' well-being, job performance, and teaching effectiveness. In Malaysia, primary school teachers face various workplace challenges, including high workload, insufficient support, emotional demands, and difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities. Although teacher burnout has been widely studied, further research is needed to understand its contributing factors, particularly among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia. This study examines the relationship between workload, lack of support, emotional, self-efficacy, and work-family conflict with occupational burnout among primary school teachers. Using a quantitative correlational research design, data will be collected through structured questionnaires distributed to teachers in Kedah, Perak, Pulau Pinang, and Perlis. The findings are expected to provide insights into the key determinants of teacher burnout and support schools and educational authorities in developing effective strategies to enhance teachers' well-being and create a supportive work environment.*

Keywords: *Teachers' Burnout, Workload, Lack of Support, Emotional, Self-Efficacy, Work-Family Conflict, Primary School Teachers*

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Introduction

Occupational burnout has become an increasing concern in many professions, particularly in the education sector. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) defines burnout as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Burnout has been recognized as a serious occupational issue because it negatively affects employees' mental health, job performance, and overall well-being. In Southeast Asia, approximately 62.91% of working adults across different industries reported experiencing burnout symptoms, indicating that burnout is a widespread problem affecting various occupations (Abdul Aziz and Ong, 2024). Among these professions, teachers are considered one of the groups most vulnerable to burnout due to the increasing demands of their work.

Teacher burnout has become a global issue that affects both educators and the quality of education. Previous studies reported that the prevalence of moderate to severe teacher burnout ranges from 25% to 74% across different countries (Agyapong et al., 2022), while a meta-analysis found an overall prevalence of 52% among teachers worldwide (Ozamiz et al., 2023). In Malaysia, teacher burnout has also become an increasing concern. Teachers experience burnout due to continuous job stress, students' misbehavior, limited parental support, and inadequate organizational support, which reduce their motivation and intention to remain in the profession (Amzat et al., 2021; Munusamy et al., 2024). In Northern Malaysia, particularly in rural schools, teachers often face additional challenges such as limited resources, isolation, and increased responsibilities, making them more vulnerable to burnout (Murphy et al., 2025; Fan and Fang, 2025).

Although previous studies have identified several factors related to teacher burnout, many have examined these factors separately or in different educational contexts. Limited research has investigated organizational factors, such as workload and lack of support, together with personal factors, including emotional, self-efficacy, and work-family conflict, within a single framework among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia. Examining these factors together is important because teacher burnout is influenced by both workplace conditions and individual psychological resources. A better understanding of these determinants may provide more comprehensive evidence to support teacher well-being and burnout prevention.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the determinants of occupational burnout among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia by focusing on workload, lack of support, emotional, self-efficacy, and work-family conflict. By integrating these organizational and personal factors into a single research framework, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher burnout. The findings are expected to contribute to the existing literature and provide useful insights for the Ministry of Education, school administrators, and policymakers in developing effective strategies to reduce burnout and improve teachers' well-being and teaching performance.

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Literature Review

Teachers' Burnout

According to Carroll et al. (2022), teacher burnout refers to a psychological condition caused by prolonged exposure to occupational stress, resulting in emotional exhaustion, reduced teaching effectiveness, and lower job satisfaction. It involves several dimensions, including emotional exhaustion, reduced professional accomplishment, and decreased motivation toward teaching responsibilities (Carroll et al., 2022). Teacher burnout has emerged as a significant concern as educators increasingly experience higher workloads, administrative demands, and changing educational environments. Several factors contribute to teacher burnout, including excessive workload, lack of workplace support, emotional demands, and difficulties in adapting to technological changes (Bedir, 2023; Thomas & Reyes, 2024). The issue has become more prominent during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as teachers faced additional pressure from remote teaching requirements and increased work responsibilities (Agyapong et al., 2024; Barratt et al., 2022). Empirical studies indicate that teacher burnout remains widespread, with moderate-to-severe burnout rates ranging from 25.12% to 74% among teachers across different contexts (Agyapong et al., 2024). Similarly, Mijakoski et al. (2022) reported that approximately 30% to 50% of teachers experience persistent burnout over time. These findings highlight the importance of addressing contributing factors through effective organizational support, workload management, and well-being interventions to improve teachers' psychological health and professional performance.

Workload and Teachers' Burnout

Workload refers to job demands that occur when the amount, complexity, and time pressure of tasks exceed an individual's capacity, leading to stress, strain, and difficulties in performing work effectively (Fadli et al., 2024). In the teaching profession, workload includes various responsibilities such as classroom teaching, lesson preparation, student assessment, administrative duties, meetings, and other school-related tasks. Saraih et al. (2024) described teacher workload as a multidimensional construct involving both the quantity and intensity of job demands, indicating that burnout may arise not only from excessive tasks but also from the pressure and complexity associated with these responsibilities.

Previous research has consistently identified workload as a significant predictor of burnout among educators and other professionals. Abdul Aziz and Ong (2024), based on a large sample of public health and educational workers, found that workload had a strong positive relationship with burnout, supporting the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory, where excessive job demands with insufficient resources contribute to emotional exhaustion. Similarly, Saraih et al. (2024) found that work overload significantly influenced burnout among Malaysian secondary school teachers, with workload explaining 44.7% of the variance in burnout. Supporting these findings, Nassar et al. (2020) reported that increased workload was associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation among academic clinicians, suggesting that demanding work conditions may contribute to burnout across different professions. Furthermore, Portelada et al. (2025) found that workload-related factors influenced emotional exhaustion among teachers across various educational levels.

Overall, existing literature demonstrates that high workload is a critical determinant of occupational burnout. Excessive job demands, time constraints, and multiple responsibilities may negatively affect teachers' psychological well-being and increase their vulnerability to burnout. Therefore, workload remains an important factor to be examined in understanding

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occupational burnout among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia.

Lack of Support and Teachers' Burnout

Lack of support refers to the insufficient availability of social, emotional, and organizational resources needed to help teachers manage workplace demands. In the educational context, it occurs when teachers receive inadequate guidance, assistance, recognition, and resources from administrators, colleagues, or institutions. Gao and Wang (2026) stated that low perceived social and organizational support may reduce teachers' ability to cope with workplace challenges, while Sohail et al. (2023) highlighted that inadequate leadership and institutional support can negatively affect teachers' professional functioning and well-being.

Previous studies have identified lack of support as a significant contributor to teacher burnout. Carroll et al. (2022) found that teachers with lower support from colleagues and administrators experienced higher levels of stress and emotional exhaustion. Similarly, Sohail et al. (2023) reported that poor school climate and limited leadership support were among the common factors associated with burnout. Bedir (2025) further revealed that insufficient administrative support and professional collaboration contributed to teachers' burnout, while Saleem et al. (2020) found that inadequate support increased difficulties among inexperienced teachers in managing classroom challenges.

The role of support became more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, as limited institutional assistance and resources increased teachers' stress levels. Vargas Rubilar and Oris (2021) found that insufficient support was associated with higher stress and burnout among teachers, while Pressley (2021) highlighted that inadequate resources and administrative guidance during remote teaching intensified burnout risk. Evidence from other occupational settings also supports this relationship, as Liu et al. (2021) and Tang and Li (2021) found that low perceived social support was associated with higher emotional exhaustion and burnout. Therefore, existing literature suggests that lack of support is an important predictor of teacher burnout, as insufficient workplace support may reduce teachers' ability to cope with professional demands.

Emotional and Teachers' Burnout

Emotion is a complex response that involves feelings, behaviours, and physiological reactions to meaningful situations or events (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018). It also refers to the psychological and physical changes that occur when individuals respond to situations that are important to them (Scherer and Moors, 2019). In the teaching profession, emotions play an important role because teachers interact with students, parents, and colleagues every day. Teachers' ability to understand and manage their emotions influences both their teaching performance and students' learning outcomes (Zhao, 2021). Teaching is recognized as one of the most emotionally demanding professions, requiring teachers to regulate their emotions and maintain a positive classroom environment (Lozano-Peña et al., 2021). Teachers often perform emotional labour by expressing positive emotions even when they feel stressed or frustrated. This emotional labour involves surface acting, where emotions are hidden or faked, and deep acting, where teachers genuinely regulate their emotions (Chang, 2020; Jaikla and Piyakun, 2025; Kendrick, 2020).

Previous studies have consistently shown that emotional factors are associated with teacher burnout. Teachers who frequently engage in surface acting are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion and burnout because continuously suppressing emotions requires

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considerable emotional effort (Chang, 2020; Kariou et al., 2021). In contrast, deep acting has been associated with lower burnout because teachers regulate their emotions more genuinely (Li, 2023). Similarly, poor emotional regulation has been linked to lower well-being and higher levels of burnout among teachers (Ma and Liu, 2024; Brandão et al., 2025). Supporting this finding, Li et al. (2020) reported that 53.2% of preschool teachers in China experienced burnout, with many reporting moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion. However, the study was limited by its cross-sectional design and focused only on preschool teachers in Tianjin.

The relationship between emotional factors and burnout is also evident in other helping professions. Studies reported that approximately 30% to 60% of workers in helping professions experience emotional burnout (Kovbuz, 2025). Nurses and police officers frequently regulate their emotions while caring for patients or dealing with emergencies and traumatic situations, making them more vulnerable to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Hoffmann and Shinky, 2024). In schools, negative interactions with students, colleagues, and administrators can further increase teachers' emotional strain and contribute to burnout (Martinez et al., 2020). Therefore, emotional factors can be considered an important predictor of occupational burnout among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia.

Self-Efficacy and Teachers' Burnout

Self-efficacy means that an individual's faith and confidence in their ability to perform tasks and manage challenges effectively. Teachers' self-efficacy has been related to their confidence in classroom management, lesson delivery, student engagement, and work-related stress management in the teaching profession. According to Li (2023), teachers with higher self-efficacy are more likely to manage job demands effectively and maintain better emotional well-being. Similarly, Chen (2023) found that self-efficacy allows teachers to adjust to the stressful work environment and enhance their response to workplace problems, he said. Thus, self-efficacy is believed to be one of the psychological factors that have correlations with teachers' burnout.

In previous studies, self-efficacy has been shown to be significantly related to teachers' burnout. Teachers' low self-efficacy is related to their feelings of being overwhelmed, emotionally exhausted, and less capable of dealing with excessive workload. High self-efficacy teachers, on the other hand, appear to be more at ease in teaching and stressful situations. According to Yang and Du (2024), they believed that self-efficacy will decrease emotional exhaustion and assist teachers to better cope with challenging teaching situations, particularly in digital learning. This finding is consistent with Zhang et al. (2022), who reported that self-efficacy has a strong negative relationship with burnout among teachers across different educational contexts.

Among the many international studies that have been conducted on the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout, there is still a lack of studies among primary school teachers in Malaysia, especially in the northern region. Most research studies to this point have concentrated on factors such as stress and workload, with less attention paid to teachers' self-confidence and their ability to manage workplace challenges. Therefore, more studies need to be conducted to better understand the role of self-efficacy in influencing burnout amongst primary school teachers in the North of Malaysia.

Work-Family Conflict and Teachers' Burnout

Teacher burnout is a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. Work-family conflict

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has been widely recognized as one of the major factors contributing to teacher burnout because professional and family responsibilities become unbalanced, making it difficult for individuals to manage both roles effectively (Li et al., 2024). Teachers who experience heavy workloads, mental distress, and limited time for family responsibilities are more vulnerable to burnout, emotional fatigue, and stress (E. Kotowski et al., 2021). Li et al. (2024) found that work-family conflict was significantly associated with burnout among primary and secondary school teachers in China, while E. Kotowski et al. (2022) reported that teachers experienced high levels of school-related stress, burnout, and difficulty maintaining work-family balance. Similarly, Junca-Silva and Freire (2022) found that a supportive working environment reduced work-family conflict and burnout, although excessive work involvement could worsen the conflict.

Work-family conflict is also experienced across other occupations. Wen et al. (2023) found that primary medical staff with higher work-family conflict were more likely to experience emotional exhaustion and occupational burnout, while police officers also experienced cognitive strain and burnout due to conflicts between work and family responsibilities (Cahyono, 2025). Likewise, employees in the corporate and service industries experienced greater burnout when work demands interfered with family responsibilities (Allen et al., 2020). These findings indicate that work-family conflict is a common occupational issue and an important contributor to burnout across various professions, including teaching.

In Malaysia, Wijayanuddin and Zulkifly (2021) confirmed that work-family conflict is a significant predictor of burnout among female public-school teachers, particularly strain-based conflict, with younger and less experienced teachers being more vulnerable to burnout. However, work-family conflict remains underexplored in teacher burnout studies compared with other factors such as stress, job satisfaction, and confidence (Yao and Abdullah, 2025). Yao and Abdullah (2025) also highlighted the limited attention given to work-family conflict and the lack of large-scale, longitudinal studies in this area. Therefore, further research is needed to examine the influence of work-family conflict on burnout among primary school teachers, particularly in the Malaysian context.

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Methodology

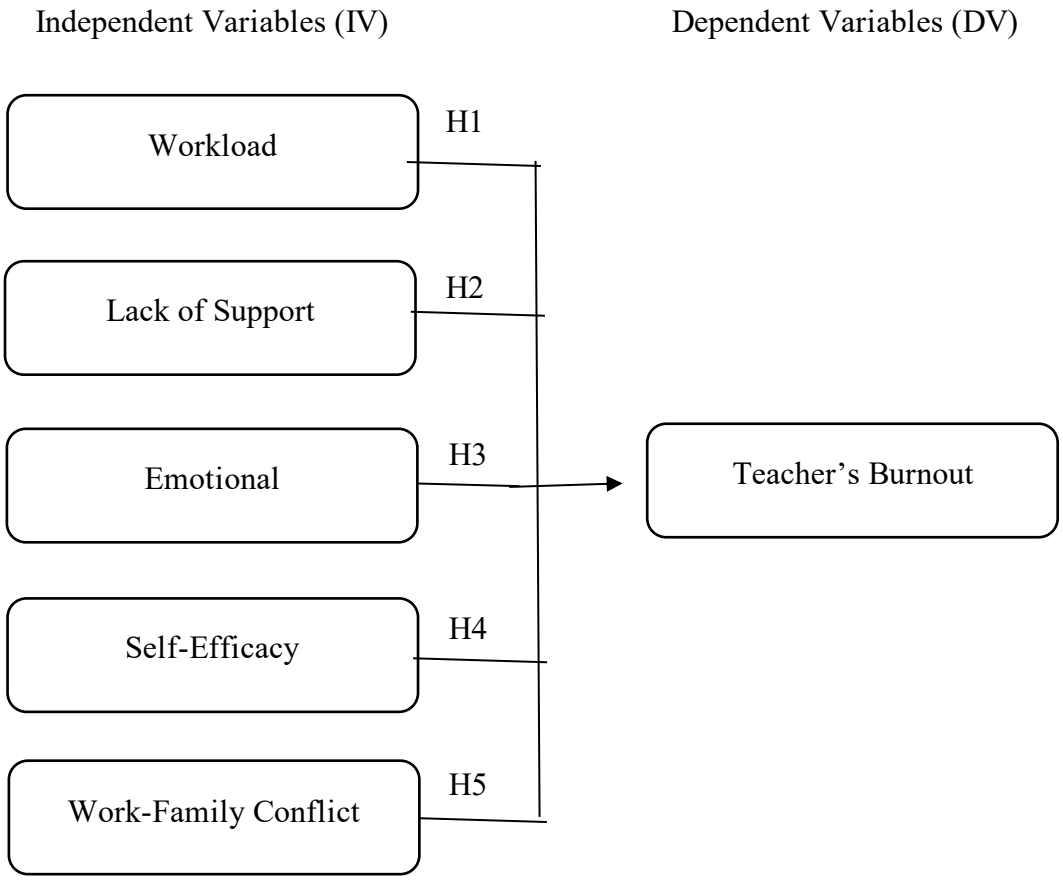


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Relationship Between Independent Variables and Teacher's Burnout

H1: There is a positive significant relationship between workload and teacher's burnout among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia.

H2: There is a positive significant relationship between lack of support and teacher's burnout among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia.

H3: There is a positive significant relationship between emotional and teacher's burnout among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia.

H4: There is a positive significant relationship between self-efficacy and teacher's burnout among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia.

H5: There is a positive significant relationship work-family conflict and teacher's burnout among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia.

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Discussion and Conclusion

This study examines the determinants of occupational burnout among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia by focusing on workload, lack of support, emotional, self-efficacy, and work-family conflict. Based on previous empirical studies and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory, workload, lack of support, emotional, and work-family conflict are expected to have positive relationships with occupational burnout, while self-efficacy is expected to have a negative relationship. These relationships suggest that teacher burnout is influenced by both organizational and personal factors, highlighting the importance of addressing both aspects to improve teachers' well-being.

This study contributes to the existing literature by integrating five determinants of occupational burnout into a single research framework. While previous studies have commonly examined these factors separately or in different educational settings, this study focuses specifically on primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia. By combining organizational factors, namely workload and lack of support, with personal factors, including emotional factors, self-efficacy, and work-family conflict, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teacher burnout in the Malaysian education context.

From a practical perspective, the findings may provide useful guidance for the Ministry of Education, school administrators, and policymakers in developing strategies to reduce occupational burnout among teachers. Schools are encouraged to improve workload management, strengthen organizational support, promote teachers' emotional well-being, enhance self-efficacy through continuous professional development, and introduce initiatives that support work-family balance. These efforts may improve teachers' well-being, job satisfaction, and teaching performance while creating a healthier and more supportive school environment.

Overall, this study is expected to provide valuable insights into the determinants of occupational burnout among primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia. By improving the understanding of both organizational and personal factors associated with burnout, the study may serve as a useful reference for future research and educational practices. It is hoped that the findings will contribute to the development of effective interventions that promote teachers' well-being, improve the quality of education, and support the long-term sustainability of the teaching profession in Malaysia.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the study focuses only on primary school teachers in Northern Malaysia, specifically Kedah, Perak, Pulau Pinang, and Perlis, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other regions or educational levels with different working environments. Second, this study only examines five determinants of burnout, which are workload, lack of support, emotional factors, self-efficacy, and work-family conflict. Other potential factors, such as leadership style, organizational culture, and coping strategies, are not included. Additionally, the use of a quantitative survey may limit deeper understanding of teachers' personal experiences related to burnout.

Future research should consider expanding the study scope by including teachers from different regions, educational levels, and school settings. Researchers may also incorporate additional organizational and personal factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher burnout. Furthermore, qualitative, mixed-method, or longitudinal approaches are recommended to explore teachers' experiences in greater depth and examine how burnout develops over time.

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