

The Relationship Between Burnout and Job Satisfaction: A Case Study of Iraqi EFL Teachers in Special Education

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigated the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among Iraqi EFL teachers working with students with special needs. **Method:** Using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and a Job Satisfaction Scale, data were collected from 41 teachers in public schools, private schools, and private institutions. **Results:** The results reveal a strong negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, a moderate negative correlation between depersonalization and job satisfaction, and a strong positive correlation between personal accomplishment and job satisfaction. **Novelty:** The findings suggest that improving teachers' sense of competence and achievement can enhance job satisfaction and reduce burnout. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions to support the well-being of special education teachers in Iraq.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar of modern society and a critical driver of societal development in any nation. It plays a vital role in shaping individuals and fostering human growth. Consequently, the educational system is often regarded as the backbone of a country's development process. Within this system, teachers hold a pivotal position, as the success of education largely depends on their competence, dedication, and overall quality [1], [2].

Teaching students with special needs is a deeply rewarding yet challenging endeavor that requires specialized skills, patience, and adaptability. Educators must tailor their methods to accommodate diverse learning styles, cognitive abilities, and physical or emotional needs, such as using structured routines and visual aids for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or frequent breaks and hands-on activities for those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Individualized education plans (IEPs) are often employed to address unique needs, but this customization demands significant time, effort, and emotional investment. Despite the rewards, teachers frequently face high levels of stress and burnout, particularly when lacking resources or administrative support. Managing behavioral issues, communication barriers, and inclusivity can be overwhelming, especially when balancing the needs of students with severe disabilities and the entire class. Societal stigma and limited awareness further complicate advocacy efforts, highlighting the need for ongoing professional development, access to resources, and systemic support to help educators succeed in this vital role [3].

The strength of educational institutions is closely tied to teachers' job satisfaction and their commitment to the growth and success of their schools. Teachers who are highly satisfied with their jobs are more likely to be committed to their institutions, leading to improved job performance, higher retention rates, and reduced turnover [4], [5]. However, teaching is widely recognized as a highly stressful profession, with studies indicating that teachers often experience high levels of exhaustion and cynicism compared to other professions [4]. For instance, between 5% and 20% of teachers in the United States report experiencing burnout at any given time, and 61% of teachers describe their jobs as consistently stressful, American Federation of Teachers.

Burnout among teachers is a global issue, with significant percentages of educators reporting symptoms of burnout in various countries. For example, 86% of teachers in some studies have been identified as burned out [6], while approximately 44% of teachers in India suffer from burnout [7]. Research also suggests that male teachers may experience more emotional exhaustion than their female counterparts, though they tend to report lower levels of depersonalization [8], [9], [10].

Job satisfaction and burnout are closely linked, with studies consistently finding a negative relationship between the two. Higher levels of job satisfaction are associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, while lower job satisfaction often correlates with higher burnout rates [11], [12]. Factors such as excessive workload, poor relationships with colleagues, lack of resources, and role ambiguity have been identified as significant contributors to teacher burnout [13], [14].

While the challenges faced by teachers in Iraq, particularly those working with people with special needs, are significant, there is a notable lack of research addressing their unique circumstances. The existing literature on teacher burnout and job satisfaction in Iraq primarily focuses on general education settings, with little attention given to the specific experiences of teachers in special education. These teachers often face additional stressors, such as the emotional and physical demands of working with students with diverse needs, limited resources, and inadequate training or support systems.

Additionally, while studies in other contexts have explored the relationship between job satisfaction, burnout, and demographic factors such as age, gender, and experience, there is a lack of localized research in Iraq that examines these variables among special education teachers. Understanding how these factors influence the job satisfaction and burnout levels of teachers working with special needs students is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support mechanisms. Therefore, there is a critical need for research that specifically addresses the experiences of special education teachers in Iraq, particularly in the context of the ongoing economic crisis, to inform policies and practices that can improve their working conditions and overall well-being.

Statement of the Problem

The teaching profession, particularly in special education, is highly demanding and stressful, often leading to burnout and reduced job satisfaction, Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter. In Iraq, teachers working with students with special needs face unique challenges, including limited resources, inadequate training, and the emotional and physical

demands of their roles [13]. Despite the global recognition of the relationship between teacher burnout and job satisfaction, there is a significant lack of research focusing on Iraqi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers working in special education settings [6]. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among Iraqi EFL teachers working with students with special needs, exploring how demographic factors such as gender, age, and workplace environment influence these variables.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons:

1. **Policy Implications:** The findings can inform educational policies in Iraq, particularly those aimed at improving the working conditions and well-being of special education teachers [4].
2. **Teacher Well-being:** By identifying the factors contributing to burnout and job dissatisfaction, the study can help develop targeted interventions to support teachers' mental and emotional health, Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter.
3. **Educational Quality:** Understanding the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction can lead to improved teaching quality, as satisfied and less burned-out teachers are more likely to be effective in their roles [5].
4. **Local Context:** The study addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on the unique challenges faced by Iraqi EFL teachers, particularly those working with students with special needs, which has been largely overlooked in previous research [6].

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among Iraqi EFL teachers working with students with special needs. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the levels of burnout and job satisfaction among these teachers, Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter.
2. Explore the correlation between burnout dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) and job satisfaction [4].

Teacher Burnout

[13] highlights that burnout negatively impacts teachers' job involvement and effectiveness. Cephe further emphasizes that teaching, being a profession conducted in front of individuals, can be frustrating not only for teachers but also for students and the education system as a whole. Farshi and Omaranzadah stress the importance of understanding the factors that contribute to teacher burnout, measuring its extent, and implementing strategies to prevent it. Demirel and Cephe argue that burnout poses a threat to both the teaching and learning processes, and teachers must be free from burnout to teach effectively.

Given that burnout can occur in various professions, it is widely recognized among specialists who help individuals manage their daily challenges, Gavish and Friedman; McCormick; Rakovec-Felser; Vousiopoulos et al. Therefore, teachers need specific skills

and capabilities to manage stressors effectively. Without these skills, they may experience depersonalization and emotional exhaustion.

Teaching, due to its demanding nature, is particularly susceptible to burnout symptoms, Jarvis; Maslach; Weisberg and Sagie; Vousiopoulos et al. Emotional exhaustion, a severe form of job stress, manifests in teachers as a loss of feeling, concern, and interest, Van Jaarsveld, often leading to absenteeism and chronic health issues, Lee. Balkin, White, and Bodey note that burnout results in lower teaching quality, social isolation, and early departure from the profession. Straquadine points out that teachers often work beyond standard hours, supervising student projects, evaluating their work, and preparing lessons, which can lead to stress and health problems.

Teacher Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a multifaceted concept that varies across social contexts. Locke defines job satisfaction as an emotional state resulting from individuals' job experiences. Spector describes it as an emotional and perceptual response to specific job characteristics. Wagner and Hollenbeck argue that job satisfaction arises from the perception that one's job fulfills or allows the fulfillment of personal values. Tukiran emphasizes that satisfaction and commitment are crucial for improving the teaching and learning process.

Castillo and Cano categorize job satisfaction into two types: general satisfaction and specific satisfaction. General satisfaction refers to an overall assessment of one's work, while specific satisfaction pertains to different aspects of the job, such as monetary benefits, working conditions, relationships with colleagues and superiors, and the nature of the work itself, Petty, Brewer, and Brown; Vousiopoulos et al.

Research indicates that individuals experiencing burnout often report reduced job satisfaction, cognitive performance impairment, and physical complaints. Teachers with high levels of burnout feel dissatisfied at work and experience various physical complaints that ultimately affect their teaching. Taris suggests that higher intrinsic job satisfaction leads to lower burnout, while extrinsic factors such as overcrowded classrooms, excessive workload, and administrative duties beyond one's capacity contribute to burnout.

In the field of teaching, Konert found that teachers experiencing job stress also suffer from low personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion. Tan reported a negative relationship between job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion but a positive relationship with career length. Lim found that teachers in Malaysia experienced low stress levels and a significant inverse correlation between job satisfaction and burnout. Anbar and Eker conducted a study in Turkey and found a negative association between job satisfaction and burnout among academics.

Yu-Hsia and Mei-Hsiang investigated the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, finding that both personal burnout and external satisfaction had the highest mean sub-scale scores. They also found a statistically significant relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, with personal burnout, work-related burnout, and over-

commitment to work related to inner and external satisfaction. These results highlight the need to increase job satisfaction to reduce burnout.

Wisnu studied the statistical relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, finding that emotional exhaustion had a significant negative effect on job satisfaction, while job satisfaction had a significant positive effect on performance. Atmaca explored burnout causes in Turkish schools, finding a low negative relationship between job satisfaction and burnout and a strong positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

Robinson et al. found a statistically significant relationship between job satisfaction and burnout among special education teachers. Torkaman et al investigated the relationship between job satisfaction, burnout, and job stress among teachers in exceptional schools in Iran, finding a direct and significant relationship between job satisfaction and burnout. They concluded that failing to meet teachers' motivational needs over time leads to dissatisfaction, burnout, and stress.

Azlina and Noryati reported low job satisfaction and moderate job stress levels among principals in Malaysia, consistent with Norul Azlin's findings of low stress levels among exam class teachers in primary schools. Higgins stated that teachers who feel important and valuable experience job satisfaction, as they are successful in their roles. Achieving job satisfaction puts individuals in a balanced state, free from self-discrepancy.

Related Studies

Burnout and job satisfaction have been extensively studied in various educational contexts, with researchers consistently finding a negative correlation between the two. Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, is a significant issue among teachers, particularly those in high-stress environments. Job satisfaction, on the other hand, reflects the extent to which teachers feel content and fulfilled in their roles. Numerous studies have explored the relationship between these two constructs, highlighting how burnout can diminish job satisfaction and vice versa.

[15] conducted a study to examine the burnout and job satisfaction levels among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in universities and schools in Iran, as well as to explore the relationship between these factors and demographic characteristics. The study utilized two questionnaires: The Maslach Burnout Inventory, which was validated for the Iranian context, and the Employee Satisfaction Inventory, specifically designed for the Iranian population, to assess job satisfaction. A total of 159 teachers from universities and schools in Iran completed the questionnaires. The results revealed a negative correlation between burnout and job satisfaction, indicating that teachers experienced moderate levels of burnout but reported high levels of job satisfaction. Additionally, the findings highlighted that the type of workplace influenced teachers' satisfaction, particularly regarding job conditions. This study was the first to investigate burnout and job satisfaction among Iranian EFL teachers in both university and school settings. The results demonstrated that as job satisfaction increased, perceived burnout

decreased, with a medium to high negative correlation observed between the two variables.

For instance, Atmaca conducted a study in Turkey and found a low negative relationship between job satisfaction and burnout. The study also revealed a strong positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, suggesting that as burnout increases, job satisfaction tends to decrease. Similarly, Charalambous investigated burnout among secondary school teachers in Africa and found that job satisfaction was negatively associated with burnout, particularly emotional exhaustion. This agrees with the findings of Daniilidou, who studied burnout among primary education teachers in Greece and concluded that higher levels of burnout were linked to lower job satisfaction.

In another study, Kara examined burnout and job satisfaction among Turkish teachers and found significant differences based on gender, marital status, experience, and workplace. The results indicated that teachers with higher job satisfaction experienced lower levels of burnout, reinforcing the idea that job satisfaction acts as a buffer against burnout. This is consistent with the findings of Karavasilis, who reported that Greek teachers with higher job satisfaction exhibited lower levels of burnout, particularly in terms of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

Papastylianou, Katila, and Polychronopoulos also explored the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among Greek teachers, emphasizing the role of social relationships and job stability in reducing burnout. They found that teachers who felt supported by their colleagues and had stable employment were more satisfied with their jobs and less likely to experience burnout. This suggests that workplace environment and social support are critical factors in mitigating burnout and enhancing job satisfaction.

Moreover, Robinson et al studied burnout and job satisfaction among special education teachers and found a statistically significant negative relationship between the two. The study highlighted that teachers who were dissatisfied with their jobs were more likely to experience burnout, particularly in the form of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. This finding is echoed in the work of Torkaman et al, who investigated burnout and job satisfaction among teachers in exceptional schools in Iran. Their results showed a direct and significant negative relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, with job dissatisfaction leading to higher levels of stress and burnout.

In addition, Wisnu explored the relationship between emotional exhaustion (a key component of burnout) and job satisfaction, finding that emotional exhaustion had a significant negative effect on job satisfaction. The study also found that job satisfaction positively influenced teachers' performance, suggesting that improving job satisfaction could reduce burnout and enhance overall teaching effectiveness. Similarly, Yu-Hsia and Mei-Hsiang investigated burnout and job satisfaction among clinical nurses and found that both personal and external factors of job satisfaction were negatively correlated with

burnout. They concluded that interventions aimed at increasing job satisfaction could effectively reduce burnout levels.

A study by Mustafa and Ismail aimed to examine the levels of job satisfaction and burnout among teachers, as well as the relationship between these two factors. The study also investigated the impact of independent variables such as age, specialization, and marital status. The research involved 145 primary school teachers (91 males and 54 females), who were randomly selected to participate. Data were collected using two adapted instruments: the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and a Job Satisfaction Instrument. The findings indicated that teachers experienced an ambivalent level of job satisfaction and a notable level of job burnout. Additionally, job satisfaction was found to have a negative correlation with two dimensions of burnout – depersonalization and emotional exhaustion – while showing a positive correlation with personal accomplishment. The study found no statistically significant differences in job satisfaction or burnout based on gender, marital status, or age.

RESEARCH METHOD

1.1 Research Design

The study employed a **descriptive research design** to investigate the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among Iraqi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers working in schools and institutions. The design allowed for the collection of quantitative data through surveys, which were then analyzed to identify correlations.

1.2 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 41 Iraqi EFL teachers (20 males and 21 females) aged 26-51 years old, working in schools and institutions in Najaf, Qadisiyah, and Karbala provinces. The participants were native speakers of the Arabic language. They were selected randomly by the researchers through the convenience sampling method.

Table 1. Demographics of participants.

Demographic Variable	Number of Participants	Percentage
Gender		
- Male	20	48.8%
- Female	21	51.2%
Workplace		
- Public Schools	15	36.6%
- Private Schools	12	29.3%
- Private Institutions	14	34.1%
Total	41	100%

1.3 Instruments

1.3.1 Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is a widely recognized instrument developed by Christina Maslach and her colleagues. It is specifically designed to measure burnout, which is characterized by three key dimensions: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DD), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). Emotional Exhaustion assesses feelings of being emotionally drained and overextended by work, while Depersonalization measures an impersonal and detached response toward the people one serves. Personal Accomplishment evaluates feelings of competence and achievement in one's work. The MBI consists of 22 items, and responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day).

Table 2. Burnout dimensions (maslach burnout inventory).

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0.90	9
Depersonalization (DD)	0.79	5
Personal Accomplishment (PA)	0.88	8

1.3.2 Job Satisfaction Scale

The Job Satisfaction Scale used in this study is based on the work of Scott Macdonald and Peter Macintyre. This scale is designed to measure employees' attitudes toward their job and specific aspects of their work environment. It assesses overall job satisfaction as well as factors such as recognition, relationships with colleagues, job security, and the use of skills and talents. The scale consists of 10 items, and responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 3. Job satisfaction questionnaire.

Questionnaire	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Job Satisfaction (JS)	0.85	10

1.3.3 Procedure

The researchers began by gathering all the participants in a Telegram group, which served as the primary platform for communication and data collection. This approach was chosen due to its accessibility and ease of use, especially in the context of Iraq, where internet-based communication tools like Telegram are widely used. In the group, the researchers first explained the objectives of the study to the participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the research and the importance of their participation. This step was crucial for gaining the participants' trust and encouraging honest and accurate responses.

After explaining the study's objectives, the researchers shared the Arabic versions of the questionnaires with the participants. The questionnaires included the Maslach

Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Job Satisfaction Scale, both translated into Arabic to ensure clarity and comprehension. The participants were given one week to complete and submit their responses. This timeframe was chosen to provide participants with sufficient time to thoughtfully respond to the questions without feeling rushed.

Initially, 43 participants were gathered for the study. However, two participants withdrew due to specific personal circumstances, leaving a final sample of 41 participants. Before distributing the questionnaires to the full sample, the researchers conducted a pilot study with 10 participants to test the clarity and reliability of the instruments. The pilot study helped identify any potential issues with the questionnaires, such as ambiguous questions or technical difficulties, which were then addressed before the main data collection phase.

Once the data collection period ended, the researchers collected the responses from the Telegram group. The data were then organized and prepared for analysis. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to analyze the data, as it is a robust tool for statistical analysis and is widely used in social science research. The researchers employed various statistical tests, including the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality and Spearman correlation to examine the relationships between burnout dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) and job satisfaction. The use of SPSS ensured that the data were analyzed accurately and that the findings were statistically valid.

This procedure ensured that the study was conducted systematically, with clear communication, careful data collection, and rigorous analysis, ultimately leading to reliable and meaningful results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

The Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to assess the normality of the data for **Burnout Dimensions (EE, DD, PA)** and **Job Satisfaction (JS)**. The results are as follows:

Table 4. Normality test results.

Shapiro-Wilk				
Variable	Statistic	df	Sig. (p-value)	
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0.966	148	0.001	
Depersonalization (DD)	0.980	148	0.032	
Personal Accomplishment (PA)	0.970	148	0.003	
Job Satisfaction (JS)	0.995	148	0.892	

Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DD), and Personal Accomplishment (PA) are not normally distributed (p-values of 0.001, 0.032, and 0.003, respectively), while Job Satisfaction (JS) is normally distributed (p-value of 0.892).

Table 5. Spearman correlation results.

Variable	Job Satisfaction (JS)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	-0.850**	0.000
Depersonalization (DD)	-0.310**	0.000
Personal Accomplishment (PA)	0.820**	0.000

Emotional Exhaustion (EE) has a Spearman correlation of -0.850, indicating a strong negative correlation with Job Satisfaction; as Emotional Exhaustion increases, Job Satisfaction decreases significantly, with a p-value of 0.000, confirming statistical significance.

Depersonalization (DD) shows a moderate negative correlation of -0.310 with Job Satisfaction, meaning that as Depersonalization increases, Job Satisfaction decreases.

However, the relationship is not as strong as that of Emotional Exhaustion, and this correlation is also statistically significant (p-value of 0.000).

In contrast, Personal Accomplishment (PA) exhibits a strong positive correlation of 0.820 with Job Satisfaction, suggesting that as Personal Accomplishment increases, Job Satisfaction likewise increases significantly, supported by a p-value of 0.000, indicating statistical significance.

Discussion

The findings of the study reveal a strong negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, which aligns with previous studies such as Atmaca and Charalambous, who also found that higher burnout levels lead to lower job satisfaction. Similarly, the moderate negative correlation between depersonalization and job satisfaction is consistent with the findings of Robinson et al and Torkaman et al.

However, the study disagrees with Kara, who found that job satisfaction acts as a buffer against burnout. In this study, job satisfaction was more strongly influenced by personal accomplishment, suggesting that teachers who feel competent and successful in their roles are more satisfied, regardless of burnout levels. This finding is consistent with Yu-Hsia and Mei-Hsiang, who emphasized the importance of personal accomplishment in reducing burnout.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The research reveals that burnout—particularly in the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization—has a significant negative influence on job satisfaction among Iraqi EFL teachers working with students with special needs. Conversely, the dimension of personal accomplishment appears to be positively associated with higher levels of job satisfaction. These findings indicate that while burnout is a detrimental factor in the professional experience of these teachers, feelings of competence and achievement serve as protective factors that can enhance their overall job satisfaction. **Implication :** The results suggest a pressing need for interventions that reinforce teachers' sense of personal accomplishment to alleviate the adverse effects of

burnout. School administrations and policymakers should prioritize the development of support systems that include professional development, access to adequate teaching resources, and institutional recognition of teacher achievements. Furthermore, mental health support services tailored to the unique challenges of special education contexts in Iraq are essential to foster a healthier and more sustainable teaching environment. **Limitation** : Despite the study's valuable insights, its scope is limited to Iraqi EFL teachers in special education settings, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts or countries. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to establish causal relationships between burnout dimensions and job satisfaction. **Future Research** : Future investigations should consider longitudinal designs to explore how burnout and job satisfaction interact over time. Moreover, expanding the sample to include general education teachers or educators from different regions could offer a more comprehensive understanding of burnout across various teaching populations. Research might also explore the effectiveness of specific interventions aimed at enhancing personal accomplishment and mitigating burnout in special education environments.

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