

**Stress and Burnout among English Language Teachers as a Foreign Language at the  
Public Universities in Kurdistan: Possible Causes and Recommended Solutions**

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### **Abstract**

Teacher stress and burnout has become an increasingly serious global issue that affects almost all teachers at some point in their teaching careers. Therefore, enormous studies on teacher stress and burnout have examined the seriousness of the matter under discussion and its negative outcomes. Teachers have also faced this problem in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, but the academics have not investigated the issue yet. Thus, this research is the first step to consider the issue in Kurdistan which is of utmost importance to motivate instructors to be leading characters by alleviating the salient factors that are associated with burnout. The study examines stress and burnout among the educators in Iraqi Kurdistan, and points out the root causes of stress and burnout among them. In addition, it investigates the way teacher stress and burnout impact EFL teacher's classroom performance. Finally, it finds and suggests some possible solutions to reduce stress and burnout among EFL teachers at public universities in the region. To achieve these objectives, the research is limited to the EFL lecturers teaching at the public universities of the Kurdistan Region. The situation of the lecturers teaching at the public universities around the region is identical, they all follow the mandates of the Ministry of Higher Education, except for the private universities, which follow their own mandate and have different regulations. The data collection method is based on semi-structured interviews with 13 lecturers from the colleges of Languages and Basic Education, teaching at the public universities in Kurdistan, where the educators teach the English language as a foreign language.

**Keywords:** Stress, burnout, EFL teachers and degenerative performance.

### **Introduction**

As with most of today's types of jobs and careers, teaching has an association with chronic stress levels and impaired psychological well-being. Stress and burnout is a serious matter that affects almost all teachers at some point in their teaching careers, it has affected us and we can notice this also among our colleagues. The seriousness of this issue is at two levels: personal and professional that leads to poor quality education and hence it affects overall learning process.

Stress is linked with emotional and physical tension. Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) define teacher stress as the experience of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression by a teacher which results from aspects of his profession. According to Greenberg et al. (2016: 3), "stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker; job stress can lead to poor health including psychological and physiological symptoms (such as depression, anxiety, poor sleep patterns, etc.) and even injury".

Not only that, but if not dealt with in real time, it might even lead to burnout, impact the teacher's performance in and outside the classroom and eventually result in quitting the job. Burnout is a term originally coined by Freudenberger in 1974 to describe healthcare workers who were physically and psychologically depleted. According to Maslach (1982) burnout is an individual's response to the chronic emotional pressure of dealing extensively with other humans especially when they are in trouble or troublesome. However, the term is now commonly linked to human service professionals such as teachers, nurses, social workers, police officers, physicians, and therapists. Worth mentioning, Freudenberger (1974) was one of the leading investigators who used the term burnout to describe an individual's condition of physical and emotional exhaustion that was caused by excessive demands.

Every year, thousands of stressed and disillusioned teachers quit their jobs due to teacher burnout (Ingersoll, 2012). Nevertheless, Gallup (2014) states that 46% of teachers report high level of stress on a daily basis during a school year. Thus, 40 to 50% of new teachers leave the field of education during the first five years of service (Amos, 2014). Data collected about cases of stress and burnout among teachers indicate that in Western and Eastern countries around 60-70% of teachers show the symptoms of stress and 30% of all teachers show the symptoms of burnout (Rudow, 1999: 38). Investigation of this serious issue is relatively new, and even absent in Kurdistan.

Moreover, McGuire (1979) warned that public school teachers were experiencing a significant degree of burnout. Altogether, this might eventually create an impact on the teacher's performance inside the classroom and negatively influence the students' learning process. Thus, from that time on, various studies have been carried out around the world in order to determine the causes of stress, its related factors, causes and effects on teaching. Our aim is to carry out a similar study on EFL teachers at public universities in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and come up with some possible solutions that can be recommended to decrease, if not eliminate, the levels of stress and prevent burnout for the sake of teachers well-being and even better teaching results. Nevertheless, Payne (2012) states that because of the key role of teachers in the society and their role as the only model that the students have to direct them to be highly qualified individuals understanding and eradicating burnout is necessary. If stress and burnout are not viewed as a serious matter in Kurdistan and not dealt with effectively poor education, lack in proficiency and professional development will impair the merit of teaching and learning. The question at hand is how one determines stress and its signs and what the symptoms of burnout are.

### Related Literature

#### Symptoms of stress and burnout

Burnout and stress are an issue of particular concern in people-oriented jobs in which the relationship between providers and recipients or the employer and the employee is of utmost importance to the occupation. It is important that one can recognize the symptoms of these two conditions and determine their causes. Since stress and burnout are different from each other, it is important that one can differentiate between them and this can be done through identifying the variation in their symptoms. According to Herbert & Warner (2014: 34), "stress is characterized by over engagement and burnout by disengagement, they also state that emotions are overactive with stress and blunted with burnout. Stress produces urgency and some hyperactivity whereas burnout produces helplessness and hopelessness. Stress produces loss of energy and burnout produces loss of motivation, ideas and hope."

Moreover, Segal et al. (2019) state that the cognitive and emotional symptoms of stress include memory problem, inability to concentrate, seeing only the negative, anxious or racing thoughts and constant worrying, loneliness and isolation, depression or general unhappiness and moodiness. They also mention that there are physical symptoms such as: aches and pains, diarrhea or constipation, nausea and dizziness, frequent cold and flu, chest pain and rapid heart rate. Nevertheless, stress can lead to anxiety disorder whereas burnout leads to detachment and depression. Stress's primary focus and damage is physical whereas burnout's primary damage is emotional, stress can be characterized by the inability to find pleasure in activities and burnout would be not being able to enjoy the activity. Also, Parker et al. (2012) explain that the signs of teacher burnout include, but are not limited to, illness, impatience, absenteeism, a lack of commitment, and poor job performance. However, the symptoms of burnout include: feeling irritable and quick to anger, no desire to attend social gatherings, increased complaints, chronic fatigue or exhaustion, chronic insomnia, change in appetite, physical symptoms, brain fog and finally emotional exhaustion that results in career failure. Moreover, these signs and symptoms are caused by factors that can be determined as their causes.

#### Causes of stress and burnout

Stress and burnout are conditions for which external factors are accounted as contributors in their development. There are of course many factors that can cause stress and burnout. However, the main critical factors associated with these conditions which can apply to teacher's stress and burnout are student misbehavior and classroom discipline problems, relationship with colleagues, role conflict and status, lack of autonomy, heavy workload, lack of support, the pressure to conform to legislative requirements, the stress of trying to balance home and work create a heavy burden on educators and finally the salary of the teacher plays also an important role in this phenomenon (Kamenetz, 2015; Martinetz, 2012; Fernet et al. 2012).

### Consequences of stress and burnout

According to Vandenberghe and Huberman (1999) stress and burnout have influence on the following phenomenon which ultimately affect classroom instruction, and hence the whole system of education. They pointed out some negative consequences of stress and burnout. Firstly, sickness rate, that is being sick because of neurotic or psychosomatic disorders caused by stress. Secondly, absence that is high sickness rate causing high a rate of teachers absenteeism be it temporary absence happening in stress situations or permanent absence in burnout stage. Thirdly, early retirement among teachers that can be considered as a significant factor behind the poor teaching system. Fourthly, poor teacher performances as stress and burnt-out teachers perform less well than others. Fifthly, mood swing which is considered to be noticed at first stages of teacher burnout followed by negative feelings such as job dissatisfaction, depressive mood, dullness, lack of drive in the progressive stages. Finally, a change in the social behaviour of the teacher occurs when interpersonal relations are impaired between teacher-student, teacher-teacher, teacher-principle and teacher-parents. Thus, these main symptoms of burnout result in an overall sense of depersonalization between teacher and students which affects learning behaviour, discipline, student's motivation because burnt-out teachers lose teacher charisma, involvement, and strong emotion when they are in contact with students.

### General Research Questions and Aims

The aim behind writing this article is to carry out an investigation into the phenomenon of stress and burnout among public university EFL teachers in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Since this subject is a relatively new one, there is no research that has been conducted in this field in our region so far while the problem is really serious. In our investigation we have tried to answer the following questions. First, do teachers experience stress and burnout in their teaching careers? Second, what factors contribute to teacher's stress and burnout? Third, do stress and burnout impact EFL classroom performance and finally what can be done to reduce stress and burnout among EFL teachers at public universities in Kurdistan?

## Method

### Participants

For the sampling in our research we have chosen the purposive sampling strategy; homogeneous sampling as its sub-category, because we have focused on a group of 13 teachers that share the same characteristic and traits. They are all EFL teachers; most of them are young in their careers, who work at the public universities in Kurdistan, having very similar teaching hours and academic responsibilities. As it is stated by Dhivyadeepa (2015) the sample in purposive sampling is usually small and the main goal is to focus on particular characteristics of the participants that are of interest, which will best enable the research to answer the research questions. Dhivyadeepa (2015: 107) also mentions that the homogeneous sampling strategy is a purposeful sampling strategy "in which the researcher samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics." The participants in our research consist of both male and female, working in different departments from different public universities in Kurdistan, namely: the University of Sulaimani, Salahaddin University-Erbil, University of Zakho, Charmo University and the University of Halabja. The request for subject participation was more, but due to time pressure, spatial limitations and workload in our profession we were only able to conduct interviews with 13 teachers. The age of the teachers varied, but in this study we have focused on teachers from an age range of approximately 30 years to 45 years old. We have selected this age range, due to the fact that stress and burnout is diagnosed in the first 5 years of teaching. If a teacher manages to make it through the first 5 years of the profession without experiencing any of the symptoms of stress and burnout, then he or she is unlikely to suffer from these conditions. As mentioned by Amos (2014), 40 to 50% of new teachers leave the profession after 5 years.

### Instrument and procedure

Since our study is a qualitative research, we have chosen to use recorded semi-structured interview for collecting the data. The interview consisted of twenty-two in-depth questions that were structured according to our research aims. We believe that semi-structured interviews allow us to maintain flexibility and provide us with the chance to ask for explanation or more interpretation if an answer is unclear, and ultimately enables us to understand the nature of the problem in our region. According to Lodico et al. (2010) a semi-structured interview is planned carefully in advance, it includes an interview guide in which the researchers can change the order and wording of questions and even add to or omit questions depending on the flow of the interview. Through applying semi-structured interviews, we have been able to keep sufficient flexibility which has allowed us to ask additional questions and examine answers for more detail. It has also allowed us to give clarifications on the questions in times needed. As is stated by Bell (2005), one major advantage of interviews is adaptability and another advantage is the fact that the way in which a participant makes a response can provide data that a written response could hide. However, there are limitations to interviews. According to Bell (2005) interviews are time-consuming and there is the danger of bias, since it is a subjective technique. Nevertheless, we have tried to maintain objectivity throughout the interviews by not interfering in any response and avoiding asking leading questions. Thus, we have tried to ask the questions in an objective manner.

### Results and Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data, we have chosen to apply a thematic approach, in which we have used codes for identifying the themes in the data from the interviews. For the coding, we have applied numbers; to group similar topics together. Finally, we have organized the codes into categories, which have allowed us to eventually identify different themes that have emerged from the coding process. Hence, we will present a summary of the results, which is according to the different themes that have emerged in the data, to answer each of the research questions in turn.

### Are the participants stressed? If yes, has this led to burnout?

From the answers in the interviews, we can identify three identity profiles: unstressed, stressed, and burnt-out. Among thirteen interviewees twelve of them show the symptoms of stress which can be said that it has led to burnout in ten of them. That is to say one of them is unstressed, two are stressed and ten are burnt-out. The answer of one of the participants indicates that she is not stressed at all but that her job is rather challenging.

Participant (A) belongs to the unstressed category. Her answer varies greatly from the others. She is an assistant lecturer, who is required to teach only 12 hours per week according to the Iraqi higher education system which is reduced by committee membership by two hours at college level and one hour at departmental level, and has no administrative responsibilities, claims that she is not stressed but challenged by her profession. She says "I can say that I am overloaded with marking papers and not with the teaching process itself." The symptoms of stress and teachers burnout could not be identified from her answers when she was asked about them. It can be said that she is not under time pressure since she is only teaching twelve hours per week and has no extra teaching hours. Thus she can easily manage her time as she says "I can manage my time as I have lesson plans and clear teaching objectives and that her work environment is quite academic and professional."

Among the twelve participants two of them belong to the stressed category, they show the signs of temporary stress since they say that they only feel stressed during examination and paper checking period. Although they are stressed, due to their teaching enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation they try to cope with their work related stress. Participant (B) is a lecturer, who is required to teach eight hours per week based on his academic title and he says that he only teaches 8 hours per week for the current academic year due to completing his last degree in the middle of the academic year when the subjects were already distributed among the other lecturers at his department. He shows some signs and symptoms of stress such as, frequent head-aches, chronic musculoskeletal pain and exhaustion. He attributes these symptoms to work environment factors such as big sized classrooms, long commutes to work, lack of support from administrative staff and the low payment.

Moreover, participant (C) who is an assistant lecturer, teaching twenty hours per week at two universities, shows some symptoms of stress such as: feeling overwhelmed, angry and worried, experiencing insomnia, dizziness and tiredness. However, her strong passion and enthusiasm for teaching keeps her motivated, as she said “my inner peace and enthusiasm keeps me going.”

Furthermore, the last group is categorized as burnt-out, since their answers indicate that they have experienced some of the symptoms and signs of the highest level of stress which is called burnout. The answers are considerably identical and show emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms of stress which have been with them for a long time, such as frequently catching a cold because of poor immune system which is related to stress, chronic headache, hormonal imbalance, musculoskeletal pain, hypotension, iron and vitamin D deficiency, colon pain, stomach illness, dizziness, tachycardia, depression, chronic insomnia, memory problem and foggy brain, eating disorder (poor eating habit), sleep disorder as well as emotional detachment which have started to lead to teacher burnout among them. This can be clearly linked with the signs and symptoms of teacher burnout. Despite being intrinsically motivated, the teachers in this group have had experienced anger, irritation, impatience, depersonalization and emotional detachment with their surrounding including their students and colleagues. Also, they have faced illness, poor job performance, thinking about early retirement and even quitting teaching, job dissatisfaction and taking different types of permission of leave due to workload or stress-related sicknesses, such as unpaid leave and sick leave. Most of the participants claim that they try to be good but that they cannot be at their best and this makes them more stressed about their performance inside the classroom.

Furthermore, participant (E) claimed that he did not suffer from physical stress related sicknesses however, he said “I sometimes face psychological sicknesses, like sleeplessness and slight level of depression due to being overloaded ... in the last four years, each year twice, I officially requested leave permission for at least a week, using it for relaxing abroad and overcoming my depression.” Nevertheless, participant (H) stated that she suffers from hypertension, headache, hormonal imbalance and colon pain. The last is also true for participant (K). Also, participant (D) mentioned that she suffered from catching the flu frequently as a result of poor immune system. Another case in point is participant (F) who said “I feel quite dizzy while teaching and sometimes I have tachycardia and I am quite burnt out and depressed because I don't have time to meet my family and friends, I feel that I am detached to the point that I am not in the mood to have a chat with my family and friends because I feel I am exhausted and I need to relax and to sleep most of the time... I am really irritated and annoyed by high pitched sounds and I hate to see the faces of my students and I want to shut the door of my office.”

Finally, most of the teachers in this group despite being highly committed and passionate about their job, are burnt out to the point of thinking about quitting their job and early retirement, only if they get the chance to do so, as a consequence of being completely overloaded. Nevertheless, some of them have asked for leave permission but were rejected by the university due to lack of teaching staff. For instance, participant (I) said that “being so stressed and bored, I took unpaid leave permission for two years and now that my leave permission is over, I am thinking about another way to get away from university.” He also stated that he was a translator before becoming a teacher, but because of his passion for teaching he decided to become a teacher instead saying “I chose to teach because I liked it and that motivated me to continue teaching but now I am not going to teach forever, if I get another opportunity, I will leave my teaching career.” However, participant (J) thought about quitting his job when he wanted to take unpaid leave permission and work in a private sector, but his request was rejected which as he claims, it maximized his stress level in his job. Furthermore, participant (L) mentioned that he wants to quit his job and states “I have a five years contract with the ministry of higher education, I have to finish my time of service then I want to quit my job.”

What factors contribute in causing stress and burnout among the participants?

As mentioned earlier, there are various factors that contribute to stress and burnout. According to the collected data, some of those factors have been detected for causing stress and burn out in our participants. To mention some: workload, the pressure to conform to legislative requirements, underpayment, and working part time which are all interconnected are factors that have caused teacher stress and burnout. Almost all of the samples, except for three suffer from heavy workload due to lack of teaching staff which is caused by lack of employment, such as teaching extra hours in big classes twice or three times as much as they are required to teach, and having other work-related responsibilities like committee membership, meetings, doing research and being actively involved in academic events as a legislative requirement conforming to which

lowers their self-efficacy beliefs, thus in turn increases their stress to the level of burnout.

Furthermore, due to the economic crisis in the Kurdistan region starting from 2014 many teachers have taken unpaid leave permission to work in the private sectors to compensate for their salary cut. As in 2014 public employees were not paid on time on a monthly basis as an austerity measure to solve the financial and political problems the region faced. The situation had become worse in 2016 when the Kurdistan Regional Government announced another austerity measure by reducing their salaries by 70% of its total, and this situation continued until December 2018 which made it absolutely difficult for the employees to cover their basic needs (Nawzad, 2019). As a result, the lecturers were obliged to quit their jobs or work part time in the private sectors to make a living (Mhamad, 2018). For instance, participant (D) is required to teach no less than ten hours per week, instead she is teaching eighteen hours due to lack of staff to fill in the vacancy caused by unemployment and giving unpaid leave permission. Participant (E) and (I) both teach over twenty-four hours while they are only required to teach ten hours per week.

Another factor apart from heavy workload is student misbehavior and classroom discipline problems. Unemployment and economic crisis has not only affected teachers but also students which consequently has resulted in lack of motivation and made them reluctant to actively participate inside the class. This eventually results in inactive classrooms and adds to teachers' stress and demotivation when they see that they cannot achieve their professional and educational goals which are their intrinsic motivators. As participant (F) mentioned that along with other factors, student misbehavior has contributed to her stress and burnout to the point that she does not tolerate seeing them. Also participant (I) said that he encourages those students who are troublemakers to not attend his classes and leave the classroom when they misbehave.

Moreover, the lack of collegial and administrative support is another reason why teachers are burn out. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they feel more stressed when they notice that they are not supported by both their colleagues and the administrative staff. This is evident in the case of participant (H) and (D) when they stated that nothing can give them more stress than working with uncommitted lecturers in a team, leaving their tasks undone, and not being questioned by those in authority due to favoritism or lack of support from above. Consequently, this obliges the committed lecturers to finish the uncommitted teachers' duties. This can also be seen in the case of those who are having or having had administrative responsibilities along with teaching, such as participant (M), (F), and (I). These participants have worked as the heads and head assistants, respectively, at their departments. They all mentioned that lack of support from their colleagues and the deanery made them more stressed while administrating the department.

Furthermore, much of teacher stress and burnout stems from facing difficulty in trying to keep a balance between home and work obligations. The participants mentioned that their work has negatively affected their familial relationships, for example participant (M) said "I feel am very away from my family, my children feel that I don't love them and even my wife does not understand my situation." Also, participant (J) said that he did not have time for his children as most of the time when goes back home, they are already asleep. Similarly, participant (I) mentioned that he cannot fulfill his familial obligations properly, thus his children always complain that he does not give them time. Last but not least, most of the teachers stated that they become utterly upset when they notice that their strong dedication is not appreciated by others; be it students, colleagues, administrative staff or family members.

The consequences of teacher's stress and burnout on their performance in EFL classroom

Teacher stress and burnout can have a tremendous impact on the teacher's performance and the student's language learning outcome (Lei, 2007). In order to understand the impact of teacher stress and burnout on their performance inside EFL classrooms, the EFL teachers were asked some question about their teaching ability and professional development, their performance inside EFL classrooms, and its impact on students' learning outcome. In general, the teachers were not satisfied with their professional development and complained about the fact that they do not have time to update their knowledge in their specialized field and develop their skills and that there are no teacher training courses to achieve this aim. They also believe that this affects their teaching ability. Respondent (H) and (D) and (K) claimed that it is difficult to develop professionally and update their knowledge because there are no training courses, webinars or enough workshops to promote teacher's academic and professional development. Hence, they believe that this affects their performance inside class.

When the teachers were asked about their performance inside the class, most of them considered themselves highly dedicated to their work, however they stated that they cannot perform the way they want in class due to being overloaded with work and not having time to prepare and plan their lessons properly. Also, that they are not able to do any extra curricula activities which in turn affects their performance in class and also the students learning outcome. Participant (F) mentioned that stress and burnout has affected her performance inside class negatively. She claimed that she is drained out of energy and has lost her enthusiasm in teaching; she reported “a burnt out teacher cannot perform well in class... I used to be happy about teaching and I engaged the students even when they were reluctant to participate, but now I am drained out of energy myself I have reduced the amount of activities and assignments in my classes.” Nevertheless, when participant (J) was asked about whether stress and burnout impacted teacher’s performance he said: “Well, it surely does. Since the teacher is like an orchestra conductor in the class, if he/she is stressed their feelings, emotions, behavior will all be affected which will in turn affect the instructions posed by teachers in the class. This will have negative consequences such as: students will feel bored, the plan of the lesson will not flow smoothly, and the students will then become passive listeners.” All in all, the interviewees indicated that they are trying to do their best, but they can do better if their situation changes and when they are under less pressure.

As for the students’ learning ability, the participants feel that their poor performance as a result of being stress and burnt out will partly affect the students’ learning outcome. As participant (C) believes, a teacher is a leader and facilitator and if he/she is not doing well, the learning outcome will be poor because language is an interactive process, so it affects the students’ learning ability. Also, respondent (J), (E), (H) and (D) think that once a teacher is stressed he/she will not perform adequately. This will have the students distracted and as a result, fruitful learning might not happen. This will also affect the atmosphere of the class and the way that the students are engaged. Furthermore, participant (H) claimed that stressed teachers do not care about their students and their teaching. It is obvious that if teachers care about their students, the latter will actively engage in the learning process.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether EFL teachers at the public universities in the Kurdistan region experience stress and burnout and what factors are acting as contributors to this phenomenon. Also, it investigated whether stress and burnout can impact the EFL classroom and finally it aimed at finding and solutions to reduce stress and burnout among EFL teachers. From our investigation, which included 13 samples from different public universities with similar work environment and duties, we have concluded that teachers in general show the signs and symptoms of stress which in most of them has led to burnout. Based on the participants’ answers, it can be said that the factors that result in teacher stress and burnout vary from one to another, but are similar to the studies conducted for examining this phenomenon around the world. However, some of the factors in this study differ from related literature, such as the austerity measure that was employed by the government to deal with the economic crisis that arose in the Kurdistan region since 2014, which is one of the main reasons behind teacher burnout. The answers illustrate that before the economic crisis the participants were temporarily stressed; during certain period of times throughout the academic year (paper checking and examination times, etc.). But the economic crisis and its consequences like the salary cut down, high rate of teacher attrition and taking unpaid leave permission have led to chronic stress and burnout among them, in turn affecting their ability and performance which has also affected students learning outcome in a negative way.

Moreover, based on this study, the results pointed out five connected factors that are recurrent in the interviews which are also stated to have resulted in teacher burnout in the previous studies. Firstly, high unemployment rate and teacher shortage which both directly and indirectly affect the teachers, as it increases their workload. Due to lack of enough teaching staff, teachers are obliged to teach extra hours and different subjects in their specialized area and even from other fields which they are not specialised in. It also indirectly leaves a negative impact on them, since unemployment demotivates students, and as a result they do not value education and do not respect their teachers which incite them to misconduct in class and create class management problems for the teachers. This in turn is another serious reason that generates teacher burnout. In addition, this study found that difficulty to conform to legislative requirements from the ministry of higher education is another critical factor of teacher burnout. As it can be concluded from the interviewee’s answers, there is a sense of low self-efficacy among teachers due to high demands on them to improve the education sector while they are overloaded. Finally, despite the presence of this high demand, the participants sense a lack of motivation and support from the managerial staff; from the departmental level to the ministry level, which has resulted in maximising their stress level to its fullest.

Teacher stress cannot be eliminated as teaching is a stressful profession by nature. However, it can be reduced to decrease and prevent the occurrence of teacher burnout as, according to Brock and Grady (2000), burnout is not a personal issue but it is organisational and it can be corrected and prevented. To do so, serious measures should be taken by the ministry of higher education and those in authority. Brock and Grady (2000) also point out several strategies for implementing, some of which can be effective in reviving the burnt out teachers and eradicate the problem among the EFL teachers in Kurdistan region, based on the causes that have brought about this problem in the region. The most functional and significant one is changing institutional policies and procedures. This can be initiated through making radical reformation in the educational system by changing it to a completely new system clear from corruption, in which workload is fairly distributed among teachers. Another strategy that they mention is decreasing workload which can effectively reduce teacher burnout in a way that they can manage their time well, keep a balance between their personal life and professional life, and allocate time for themselves and fulfil their familial and social obligations that can consequently be an effective stress relief. This can be done by employing new specialized teachers, implementing new research systems and procedures that can provide teachers with research leave, since it is difficult to teach and professionally develop oneself at the same time.

Another strategy is changing administrative behaviour and providing administrative support. Some teachers suffer from administrative dysfunction. Among the samples interviewed in this study, some teachers, especially those who are working as managerial staff, showed more symptoms of burnout due to lack of support from those who are in authority in dealing with uncommitted teachers and misbehaved students who cause stress in them. Thus, fairness and support from those in charge is crucial in building a safe educational environment.

Moreover, changing the teacher's environment is vitally important for a teacher's wellbeing and productive student learning outcome in EFL classes. Most of the interviewees mentioned big class size and having to check piles of papers as stressful. Thus, reducing class size and opening new universities can reduce this problem. Additionally, creating support networks is highly necessary to revive burnt out teachers. This can be done through opening psychological support centres where teachers can get advice from psychologists and psychotherapists who can listen to them in a safe environment.

One more vital strategy is encouraging professional development. This can be done through providing teachers with training courses in their expertise or the related fields. As the world develops rapidly, especially in terms of technological advancement, teachers need to be aware about educational innovations and ways of implementing them which in turn will enhance their teaching abilities and also the students' learning outcome. Nevertheless, teachers also need to be motivated both financially and professionally. From the result of this study, it can be concluded that interviewees are extrinsically motivated, but there are no extrinsic motivators in their workplace. Therefore, they need to be appreciated and motivated through both monetary and non-monetary incentives so as to encourage them to participate in workshops, international conferences or any other academic events. Organising and running webinars, workshops or any other programs related to the development in the field of EFL teaching are also strongly recommended.

Moreover, it is highly suggested that teachers' payment should be raised based on their workload, to a rate which they can afford their living expenses fully. Also, teachers must be paid their financial rights on time to assist them to become innovators in their field rather than being overloaded with working part-time jobs, just to be able to make a living. To conclude, teachers play a crucial role in educating and developing any society and are key figures in shaping the mind-set of the new generation; therefore, they need to be cared for, praised, appreciated and motivated.

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