Disruptive student behavior and its relation with teacher burnout

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Abstract: One of the major issues facing many educators is the problem of teacher burnout. The question of whether disruptive student behavior is responsible for this continues to attract the attention of many education experts and researchers alike. This article reviews the literature on teacher burnout, student disruptive behavior and concludes with a discussion of the relationship that exists between these two variables. Teacher burnout can encompass the symptom of depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and reduced personal accomplishment resulting from of chronic job-related stress. In addition, several researchers have documented different influencing factors that contribute to teacher burnout. Among the plethora of factors, the focus in this article was on disruptive student behavior. Concerning the relationship between teacher burnout and disruptive student behavior, sample research findings revealed that disruptive student behavior jeopardize effective classroom management, thereby leading many teachers to fall prey to burnout.

***Keywords*:** teacher burnout, disruptive behavior, depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, stress.

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Introduction:

It is widely acknowledged that good classroom discipline seems to be the glue that binds effective teaching and quality learning. Accordingly, teachers in general and English teachers in particular are entrusted with the task of ensuring positive discipline among students which could pave the way for them to smoothly direct their classes and instruct without any disruptions. The increasingly disruptive student behavior in everyday classroom setting, however, can undermine the accomplishment of this task. Recently, several researchers (Brouwers &Tomic, 2000; Krecar et al., 2016) contend that the issue of student disruptive behavior becomes an ubiquitous feature in many educational settings around the world and they deem it as a source of challenges to the teaching process mainly, whereby the nature of instruction is lost in a poorly managed classroom, leading many teachers to experience intense levels of stress and in a long run to fall victim to burnout.

1- Background on Teacher Burnout:

Throughout the twentieth century, an increasing attention has been paid to the phenomenon of burnout, particularly in professions related to human services. The term "burnout" was first used in the 1970s by the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberg to depict the de-motivating feeling and the emotional depletion that result from the high stress experienced by individuals working in "helping" professions, such as doctors and nurses (Duncan, 2017). Since the state of burnout recently becomes prevalent in almost all professions, the term of burnout then, was generalized to comprise all the individuals who work in human services occupations, such as education, social work, and police. In recent decades, burnout in the teaching profession particularly seems to be a universal epidemic which leads many teachers to leave the domain of education in rates much higher compared to other professions. In this regard, Lanza (2020:1) contends that: **"Turnover in the profession is higher now than it has ever been, with as many as 40-50% of teachers leaving by the end of their fifth year".** Hence, every year, a huge number of teachers tend to retire earlier or alter the profession due to the stress that stems from the spectrum of responsibilities falling on teachers' shoulders (Ingersoll, 2012), especially with regard to classroom management (Lanza, 2020).

2- Definition of Teacher Burnout:

The rapid escalation of professional burnout syndrome in the 21st century has led many researchers to seek for defining the term burnout. According to Gupta & Rani (2014:3-4) **"Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when one feels overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demand"**. Considering the aforementioned definition, one can say that burnout is a state of chronic job fatigue and stress that persist over time and place an employee under extreme pressure, leading him/her to develop a feeling of inability to cope, somatic exhaustion, cognitive and psychological depletion. In an effort to relate burnout with the field of education mainly, many researchers provided a definition to teacher burnout in particular. In this regard, Good (1959) claims that teacher burnout is characterized

by somatic, emotional and attitudinal depletion that starts with a feeling of discomfort as the pleasure of teaching begins to gradually disappear (cited inGirija & Sabarirajan, 2020).

3- Some Symptoms of Burnout:

Burnout as a kind of work-related stress can be accompanied by a variety of symptoms. The myriad of literature (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Brouwers &Tomic, 2000; Gupta & Rani, 2014) revealed that these symptoms could be clustered into three categories which are: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP) and Personal Accomplishment (PA)

a- Emotional exhaustion:

When people experience emotional exhaustion, they can feel chronically tired as their emotional energy becomes depleted (Brouwers &Tomic, 2000). Emotional exhaustion is often viewed as the central type of burnout and it has been garnered a lot of attention from several researchers in the educational setting (See for instance Tsouloupas et al., 2010; Keller et al., 2014) because **"Emotions are thought to be predictors of teacher behavior in class, in terms of effective instructional practices, as well as student behavior and outcomes"** (Keller et al., 2014:1). Hence, if they are affected, classroom dynamics would be also affected. It is important to highlight that an emotionally tired teachers may display disinterest in the lesson under the forms of shying away from interacting actively with their students, absenteeism, showing no eagerness in promoting the relationship with their students; thereby, creating an invisible barrier between them and their learners.

b- Depersonalization:

Depersonalization is characterized by distancing oneself from interacting with people, including family members, colleagues, and clients (Gupta & Rani, 2014; Kerry-Henkel, 2017). Depersonalization has been known as a strategy to deal with the stress. For instance, within the classroom context, teachers can display depersonalization by disconnecting from interacting with students and holding a negative attitudes toward them (Benita, 2018).

c- Reduced personal accomplishment:

As teachers are subject to excessive levels of emotional exhaustion, it contributes to affecting their own feelings of personal accomplishments (Scott, 2019). Burned-out people have the tendency to feel less productive and unconfident with regard to the ability to complete successfully the work demands

Emotional Exhaustion

Depersonalization

Reduced Personal Accomplishment
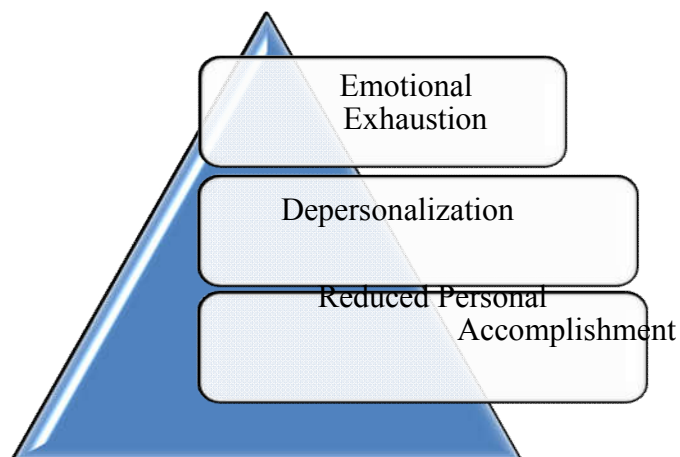
and to perform well at work (Gupta& Rani, 2014). Individuals, including teachers who feel less capable of accomplishing anything worthwhile at work, they may have low self-esteem where their inner voice becomes a painful critic, depreciating one's achievements and thus leading to the loss of enthusiasm for work.

Fig. 1: Symptoms of Teacher Burnout (Gupta & Rani, 2014)

4- Some Factors Triggering Teacher Burnout:

Most of the literature related to teacher burnout gave emphasis to the different stressors, which can trigger burnout maybe because knowing the causes of any issue will help more in finding the solution for it. So, it is necessary to highlight some of the major factors that can contribute to teacher burnout.

a- Workload:

Teachers working within the domain of education seem to be prone more to symptoms of emotional burnout and depersonalization because of the increased amount of time spent working with their students (Nuri et al., 2017). Accordingly, after long hours of work, it is natural for teachers to return home tired where their primary concern become eating and sleeping only for getting back the energy they lost from work. This is evident in the response of one of the participants who was surveyed by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers in March 2004. He stated that:

"I often don't know what my finishing time will be, as sometimes at short notice I am expected to teach the under-14 rugby team after school, as the school's PE teacher is employed only on a part-time basis. This results in me not getting home until mid-evening. By then, I don't have the time and energy to do any non-work-related activities other than eating and sleeping" (ATL, 2004 cited in Bubb, & Earley, 2004:8)

From the comment; it can be said that teachers may dedicate too much for their life of work to the point that they fail sometimes to pull their weight on the domestic front as working for long hours can eviscerate the opportunities to hanging out with friends, and family members on a regular basis and to engaging in different hobbies.

b- Inadequate administrative support:

Inadequate administrative support may contribute to the risks of intensifying stress and pressure at work. For instance, the shortage of material availability is a thorny issue that teachers face in many schools as it can make it challenging for them to appropriately teach all of what should be covered(Scott, 2019). Owing to the lack of materials, in many cases, teachers find no alternative other than spending the money out of their pocket *to buy the necessary supplies* and sustain the productivity of the classroom. When school doesn't have supplies, the message is that teachers are the only responsible for the students' learning and no one cares about them or their students despite the efforts made by them. This discouraging feeling that no one is standing by your side creates a risk of teacher burn out

(Bataineh &Alsagheer, 2012). Another related point to consider is that teachers are more likely to experience burnout when they are not offered with a share of responsibility in the processes of decision-making. For instance, in many cases, the administration sets meetings on specific dates without informing the teacher beforehand or taking into account their opinion, and it forces them to attend even if they are have insufficient time to do so. Teachers often believe that their views do not matter and **"this lack of say in their careers can have negative effects on their emotional wellbeing."** (Scott, 2019:12)

c- Large Classes:

Large classes are found to be among the environmental factors that impinge directly on the teaching and learning process, thereby leading to teacher burnout (Kucukoglu, 2014). Large-sized classes are physically weary as teachers of such classes face many challenges, including discipline issues and disturbing noise that disrupt the teaching and learning process. To deal with these issues, many teachers tend to raise the level of their voice beyond their capabilities, which may affect them physically, leading later to vocal cord disorders (Gilavand & Jamshidnezhad, 2016). *Besides, teachers* of large classes often struggle *with* their *workload* due to multiple responsibilities in the teaching career, such as lesson planning, preparing for exams, and attending workshops. According to merzegui (2015), excessive marking load mainly is the duty that is regarded as a chronic stressor for teachers because when students passed the exams, it is natural for the pile of exam papers to accumulate on the teachers' desk. This in turn, places an undue burden on many teachers in a sense that they start hurrying up to mark the papers before the deadline, which inevitably put pressure on them, thereby contributing to their burnout.

d- Disruptive Student Behavior:

Disruptive Student behavior is a thorny issue that many teachers today face in their classes and it impinges directly on the teaching and learning process. Student misbehavior can have a detrimental effect on a critical teaching practice, which is the instructional time where many researchers found that the occurrence of classroom disruptions is to a large extent, linked to reduced teaching time. Aloe et al. (2004) claimed that when students exhibit some disruptive behaviors, many teachers find themselves compelled to focus on policing students at the expense of transmitting input and paying to attention to students individually. As a result, these teachers become physically tired since they devote their energy for both controlling students and delivering quality teaching. Furthermore, due to the unruly atmosphere, concentration is made difficult for many students. The ones causing classroom disruptions can diminish their peers' focus in the lesson and impede their capacity to hear the questions asked by the teachers. Accordingly, the level of classroom interaction is more likely to decrease, thereby creating a fertile environment for students' disengagement from learning and participating with their teachers. This often makes teachers feel that they are not competent enough to control the classroom and promote a conductive learning environment, which ultimately contributes to their burnout.

5- Definition of Student Disruptive Behavior:

Student misbehavior is among the challenges that many teachers today face in their classes and it is a critical obstacle to the productivity of the classroom. Sprick (2006: 1) highlights that **"discipline problems in school have always been and continue to be leading frustration for teachers"**. Student disruptive behavior has been given a synonym which is student misbehavior (Ali &Gracey, 2013).The latter can be defined as any behavior that interferes with the effectiveness of the teacher's instructional plan or a student's ability to learn (Fakhruddin, 2019). It can be said that disruptive behavior is **any action or activity done by student which can substantially obstructs with the teaching process and positive learning continuum in the context of a classroom.** In fact, Researchers and teachers from different parts of the world hold varying perceptions with regard to the definition of student disruptive behavior because what determines a student behavior as acceptable or not varies across educational contexts depending on the culture and the principles hold by each society. Sun (2012:1) claimed that **"In the traditional Chinese culture, students who kept on asking questions would be regarded as "troublesome" students whereas students strictly followed teachers' orders were regarded as excellent students"**.

a- Some Types of Disruptive Student Behavior:

The concept student disruptive behavior is voiced repeatedly in the previous paragraph to explain how it differs from one context to another. This section highlights the different types of student disruptive behavior.

Ali and Gracey (2013) divided disruptive student behavior into three types: first, the disruptive behavior that is caused by student individually, such as **"students who come to class late; leave early; speak out inappropriately; call, text, or play games on cell phones; read materials unrelated to the class, such as newspapers or other course texts; or sleep during class"** (Ali and Gracey, 2013:4).

The second type is disruptions that occur by a group of students and which may motivate other students to misbehave elevate the level of disruption by involving other students, such as engaging in side conversation, and cheating on an exam. Third, disruptive behavior can also occur when students interact with their teachers during the lesson, for instance by asking irrelevant questions, confronting, and arguing with the teacher. Considering language teaching and learning mainly, Richards and Renandya (2002), there are three types of disruptive behavior commonly occurring in language class:

1-the back-row distracter: the students who constantly take a seat at the back and disturb their classmates and teachers;

2-the nonparticipants: some students who do not engage in the class activities;

3-the eager beavers student: the students who are intelligent, hyperactive, and dominate most of classroom discussion

b- The link between Teacher Burnout and disruptive behavior:

Among the issues that pertain to classroom environment, disruptive student behavior specifically, seems to be a source of various challenges that precludes many teachers from cultivating a conductive learning atmosphere and contributes significantly to teacher burnout. A plethora of studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between student disruptive behavior and teacher burnout (Collie et al., 2012; Scott, 2019; Mitchell, 2019). Dealing with disruptive behavior on a daily basis stressful classroom environments can jeopardize healthy child development and success in school leads many spend their time trying to make a balance between classroom management and effective instruction, which ultimately drains their energy. This results in teachers experiencing a variety of negative emotions such as frustration and anxiety.

Conclusion:

As inappropriate behavior is repeatedly exhibited; for instance talking at the same time while the teacher talks, the teacher will develop the belief that he is neither liked nor respected (Aldrup,et al, 2018) and his efforts is not valued as well. Accordingly, it is frequent for teachers to feel there is a gap between them and their students which leads them to distance themselves from their students as they start exhibiting lower levels of motivation to interact with them. Furthermore, the teachers' inability to cope with discipline issues engenders a pervasive feeling of low self-efficacy within many of them (Brouwers & Tomic, 1999) as these teachers find themselves less successful in adhering to one of the significant principles of teaching which is fostering a conductive classroom atmosphere. Hence, "**doubts about self-efficacy can in themselves trigger the burnout process**" (Brouwers & Tomic, 1999: 242), particularly with regard to the feeling of low personal accomplishment. It is worth mentioning that student misbehavior seems to be a critical obstacle to developing teacher well-being and teacher-student rapport as there is an evidence which indicates that there is a direct relationship between student misbehavior, teacher well-being and teacher-student relationship. This is clearly manifested in the model proposed by Aldrup, et al (2018) which suggests that disruptive student behaviors seem to be a hindrance to the teacher-student relationship where the teachers who experience high level of classroom disruptions, display negative emotions towards disruptive students since they find it challenging to accept their behaviors and deal with them (e.g., Buyse et al., 2008). Ultimately, the absence of respectful teacher-student relationship can lead to reducing well-being at work.
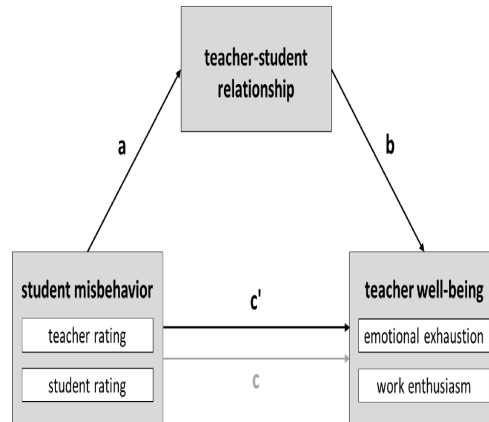
Fig.2. Teacher-student relationship (Aldrup, et al. 2018:127)

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