

Examining the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Professional Burnout Development by Applying a Cluster Analysis

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Abstract: Burnout is a work-related phenomenon common in almost all professions, especially in the helping ones and is linked with undesirable consequences in employees. For this reason, it is essential to prevent it. The purpose of the present paper is to analyze the relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout among secondary teachers. The study is situated in the Spanish context where these kinds of investigations are needed. A cross-sectional survey-based study is conducted. The main results show that teacher with emotional intelligence abilities suffer less burnout hence the important role played by emotional intelligence in preventing teacher burnout. The implications for educational processes and teacher training are discussed in the conclusion.

Key words: Emotional intelligence, burnout, teachers, secondary education, professions, implications

INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, burnout within the occupational setting has turned out to be an important investigation focus (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2009). Researchers have investigated burnout in many fields for example, health professionals (Imai *et al.*, 2004; Peterson *et al.*, 2008; Guo *et al.*, 2016), financial workers; Tsai and Chan, workforce Laba *et al.*, 2005; Jansson-Frojmark and Lindblom, 2010; Paris and Hoge, 2010) and educators (Hakanen *et al.*, 2006; Asgari, 2012; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014).

In relation to the educational environment, it is said that due to the deep demographic and social changes as well as the approved educative reforms, schools have undergone several transformations. According to Borg *et al.* (1991), teachers feel themselves overworked mainly by these three school reform issues: the increase in teacher's responsibilities, changes in the curriculum and the implementation of a teacher assessment model. Okeke and Dlamini (2013) note that teachers often experience high demands in the teaching environment, including heavy workload and time pressures, role conflict and ambiguity, complicated school relationships and pressure and criticism from parents and society. This can result in negative feelings such as exhaustion and professional dissatisfaction.

Traditionally, in the field of education, knowledge comes first and then the emotions (Bach and Darder, 2002). Nevertheless, each time it is demanded an

education which integrates not only academic aspects but also emotional ones. Society does not understand the total education of a student as an objective but as a necessity to face pupils and teachers real problems (Fernandez-Berrocal and Ruiz, 2008), making necessary the cooperation between knowledge and emotions.

This idea about how to manage the emotions allow us to resolve different problems which come out in class as a consequence of the social changes and due to the new role of the teachers, a role that in the majority of times they have not been prepared to, finding themselves without resources for their day to day work. One of these problems is burnout at the workplace. Thus, the present study aims at exploring the relationship between emotional intelligence and professional burnout among secondary teachers.

Emotional intelligence: The emotions have a great influence on each aspect of the human life. Hence, we observe persons in society who having more than what previous generations would have imagine are unhappy. So, remarkable is the role of the emotions in the decisions, the mental state and motivation in person that the term "emotional intelligence" is established, intelligence related to the feeling remarked by Goleman (1995) who states that we have two brains and two different types of intelligence: the logical intelligence and the emotional intelligence and that our vital functioning is determined by both.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) propose a theoretic model where the emotional intelligence is defined from four basic abilities: emotions perception; emotional fostering; emotional understanding and emotions management. In this way, emotional intelligence can be defined as the ability which allows processing, understanding and managing the emotions. Thus, this relation is almost necessary to face all these emotions, consequences and management.

One of the main objectives of the university is preparing future professionals in terms of skills acquisition, abilities, competences, values, etc. At this respect, numerous researcher have reached to the conclusion that the emotional intelligence and personality factors are part of the complex framework of the competences that are required by the persons to develop with success their professional task (Mayer and Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 2001; Gayathri and Meenakshi, 2015).

Weare and Gray (2003) recommend explicitly developing the social and emotional competences not only at school but also at the institutions directed to teacher training, beginning with the idea that it is not possible to teach a competence without being acquired before. By the same way, it is not possible to teach with quality in the absence of the teacher wellness as it is shown by studies that confirm the existent relation between the teacher labor health and the teaching quality (Schwab *et al.*, 1986).

In the most of jobs professional abilities are considered to be more important than interpersonal, however, for the human services professionals they are crucial because, apart from working with persons they have to carry out their work in a team (Lorente *et al.*, 2007), producing an impact on organizational behavior as in the teaching centers where personal and organizational interests are mixed up.

The teaching labor, therefore, generates many emotions, mainly due to its narrow and occasionally conflictive relation with the educative agents.

Parents: Teachers try to be their allied, trying in occasions to dismantle a preconceived negative idea they have about them.

Students: They usually consider the teacher as an enemy and they sometimes show a lack of respect.

Colleagues: With them untrusty and competitive relations take place when this could really help by meeting with their peers and talk about the problems they face at the classroom. Thinking about them, sharing, finding solutions could help them and in conclusion a higher approach to the development of social abilities.

The school management: This is understood from an inequality point of view and as executer and pursuer agent.

Attending to these circumstances, the development of emotional intelligence allows a control of feelings and an understanding capacity (Cozar and Moya, 2013) with the ability to help teachers to strive problems that take place day to day at their working places as well as making them capable to transmit and teach this type of intelligence, so important and needed for current student body that is immersed in a stressed and competitive multicultural society. By this way, Yusof *et al.* (2016) note that emotional intelligence has a positive effect on student's attitude. Also, it is found that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and educational performance (Charmehini and Makvandi, 2016). Bisquerra (2005) advise us that teachers can suffer from an emotional discordance when they experience an emotion which does not fit with their role as teachers, something which principally current problems seem to show because they find themselves doing entrusted tasks or doing such tasks in disruptive contexts more appropriate to a psychologist or to a security guard than to those of a teacher.

Several investigations show that high levels of emotional intelligence in teachers are associated with higher levels of satisfaction with their life (Augusto *et al.*, 2011; Pena *et al.*, 2012). In the same way, other researchers claim the relation between the emotional intelligence and burnout syndrome (Extremera *et al.*, 2010; Chan, 2006; Brackett *et al.*, 2010).

Burnout: Harrison (1999) gives the definition as a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion produced by a long term implication in situations which are emotionally demanded. The more accepted conception by the scientific community is the one by Maslach and Jackson (1981) which distinguishes three dimensions.

Emotional exhaustion: It describes the feelings of an emotionally exhausted person as consequence of working demands.

Depersonalization: It describes a cold emotional response towards peers.

Personal accomplishment: It evaluates competence feelings and success in the place of work and also the accomplishment of personal objectives.

More precisely, burnout appears in professionals with a high level of exhaustion and a high depersonalization and a low personal realization within the

job (Leiter and Maslach, 1988). While most of the studies have followed the original three factor model (Kokkinos, 2006; Asgari, 2012; Arvidsson *et al.*, 2016; Heydari *et al.*, 2016; Ruiz-Calzado, 2016) others have incorporated changes such as reformulate, eliminate or add some items and allowing correlation between the factors (Schaufeli *et al.*, 1994; Aluja *et al.*, 2005). Lee and Ashforth (1996) carried out a meta-analytic examination of the correlates of the three dimensions of job burnout; specifically they examined how demand and resource correlates and behavioral and attitudinal correlates were related to each of the three dimensions of job burnout. Both the demand and resource correlates were more strongly related to emotional exhaustion than to either depersonalization or personal accomplishment.

Also, Worley *et al.* (2008) conducted a meta-analysis including 45 exploratory and confirmatory factor-analytic studies and showed substantial support for the correlated three-factor model.

More recently, some studies have examined the validation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory. For example, Tomas *et al.* (2016) offer evidence on the psychometric properties of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey. Several competing models have been proved in order to test the dimensionality of the scale. The confirmatory analyses have shown that the original three-factor structure has a superior fit. Furthermore, Szigeti *et al.* (2016) validated the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey on a sample of 211 elementary and secondary teachers. To test factorial validity they ran a series of confirmatory analysis with eight models. The best fitting model was the bifactor model with general burnout and the three specific factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

As Dadkhah *et al.* (2016) state, job burnout causes physical and mental effects and performance degradation. In the teaching environment, this is projected in the working place at a personal level related to the interrelation of the teacher together with the educative community and also at a labor level because undesirable situations take place such as more teacher's rotation, personnel cuts, a higher absenteeism rate, organization problems or corporative image deterioration.

Some decades ago the World Health Organization (WHO) already affirmed that the mood states disorders were a common cause of absenteeism, retirement due to labor inability and furthermore, it was predicted that in a near future depression would be one of the most frequent results of illness.

Influence of emotional intelligence on burnout: Teacher burnout has been found to be associated with

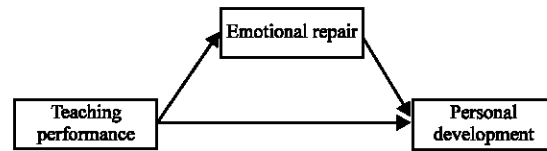


Fig. 1: Relationship between teaching performance and personal development

many factors. Regarding the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), both high job demands (e.g., workload) and low job resources (e.g., social support) are related to burnout. Also, burnout is related to teacher's personal resources such as personality characteristics or self-efficacy (Kokkinos, 2007; Yu *et al.*, 2015). However, it exists few empiric studies that relate emotional intelligence and burnout.

Emotional thinking methods help us managing our emotions and negative feelings like fear that makes us fight or attack, run away or stay freeze (Bisquerra, 2005). Many times teacher feel fear and in other occasions they put barriers to defend themselves and then this does not allow them to progress, appearing syndromes like burnout.

According to Ilaja and Reyes (2016), Fig. 1 shows the relation between teaching performance and one of the burnout dimensions, personal development, through the emotional component.

From all that has been stated above comes out the possible influence of the emotional component on burnout among teachers, hence the purpose of the present paper is to study how emotional intelligence affects work-related burnout.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design: This study used a descriptive, cross-sectional research design.

Sample: A total of 230 secondary Education teachers took part in this research. The participants were teachers from 10 educative centers in Ceuta, Spain. The majority of them were women (54%) and they were over 40 years old (69%).

Most of the survey respondents had an experience of 10 years or more (70%). About 69% of the sample had a permanent job while about 31% had an eventual contract.

Data collection instrument: An ad hoc questionnaire was used after revising the scientific literature in respect (Maslach and Jackson, 1981; Salovey *et al.*, 1995; Moreno *et al.*, 2000; Mayer *et al.*, 2004). The questionnaire was composed of three parts: the first part

contained questions regarding socio-demographic characteristics of the sample; the second part was composed by forty one items aimed to register the teachers interviewed burnout level and the possible consequences and the third part contained 45 items dealing with the teacher's level of emotional intelligence. On the one hand in this study, the dimensions considered for the burnout segment were four:

- Physical repercussions: 13 items
- Emotional exhaustion: 10 items
- Depersonalization: 7 items
- Personal accomplishment: 11 items

On the other hand, the dimensions that were taken into account for the emotional intelligence segment were five:

- Self-knowledge: 8 items
- Self-control: 6 items
- Empathy: 14 items
- Self-motivation: 7 items
- Social skills: 10 items

The questionnaire used a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). It was previously tested for reliability and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.935 was obtained.

Procedure: We first presented the study to the school principals, showing the investigation objectives and the type of collaboration requested to the institution. After receiving approval from the schools, we invited all the teachers to fill in the printed questionnaire which contained an introduction outlining the main objective of the study and emphasizing anonymity and data confidentiality.

Analyses: After data collection, they were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21.0 for windows for data analysis.

First of all, descriptive statistics were obtained to examine the emotional intelligence level and the burnout of the interviewed teachers taking into account the dimensions considered.

Secondly, with the aim of knowing the existent relation between the variables referred to the emotional intelligence and the burnout syndrome, multivariate statistical techniques were used, more precisely, cluster analysis, gathering the persons interviewed taking into consideration their similarities what makes possible to define teachers profile according to their emotional abilities and their suffering of the syndrome.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis: Table 1 shows the mean scores and percentage of sample as distributed to the burnout scale. Analyzing the obtained results, we determine that the lowest scores correspond to the emotional exhaustion dimensions (1.46) and depersonalization (1.47) while the highest ones are related to personal accomplishment (1.83) and physical repercussions (1.63).

Going deeper in the descriptive statistics for each of the items considered in this part, we check that those reaching a higher average value are: "In my school teachers are not encouraged to find new and creative solutions for existent problems" ($\bar{x} = 2.52$, $SD = 0.96$); "I miss support services to resolve the problems teacher can have" ($\bar{x} = 2.18$, $SD = 0.91$) and "I consider that my working environment is uneasy" ($\bar{x} = 2.11$, $SD = 0.95$). By the other side, the lowest average values are found in items like: "At the beginning of the academic year, I smoke, drink and eat more" ($\bar{x} = 1.20$, $SD = 0.53$), "I am unhappy as a consequence of my job" ($\bar{x} = 1.28$, $SD = 0.56$) and "I feel socially useless" ($\bar{x} = 1.29$, $SD = 0.67$).

Therefore, it must be said that according to the burnout segment, some teachers show inability feeling and/or lack of motivation and reveal the physical consequences produced by dissatisfaction feelings in their job; however, the burnout levels of the persons interviewed are low. Specifically, the items described are related to teachers' interaction with the members of the educative institution and the problems around them.

Furthermore, Table 2 shows the average and the standard deviation of the different dimensions with respect to the emotional intelligence.

From the results, we observe that the lowest average value corresponds to the self-control dimension (2.46) meanwhile the highest corresponds to the self-knowledge dimension (3.12).

Considering the values obtained for each of the items of the questionnaire referred to emotional intelligence, the highest averages are reached by the statements "I am grateful with the favors or details" ($\bar{x} = 3.60$, $SD = 0.69$) and "When someone excuses and I feel they are sincere, I just accept them" ($\bar{x} = 3.58$, $SD = 0.66$). These two items present a low standard deviation, what means a high grade of agreement in the answer choice.

By the other side, the statements with a smaller average are "I think I am the best in what I do" ($\bar{x} = 1.84$, $SD = 0.90$), "My honesty causes that some people consider me as being insolent, even though that is not my intention" ($\bar{x} = 1.90$, $SD = 0.88$) and "When arguing,

Table1: Percentage, central tendency and dispersion measures of sample by burnout dimension

Variables	Physical repercussions mean (SD)	Emotional exhaustion mean (SD)	Depersonalization mean (SD)	Personal accomplishment mean (SD)
In total (n = 230)	1.63(0.94)	1.46(0.68)	1.47(0.72)	1.83(0.81)
Low	54.9%	69.3%	67.7%	36.6%
Moderate	36.9%	24.9%	25.8%	58.4%
High	8.2%	5.8%	6.5%	5%

Low, moderate and high scores are based on cut-off scores

Table 2: Descriptive statistics from the emotional intelligence dimensions

Variables	Mean	SD
Self-knowledge	3.12	0.78
Self-control	2.46	0.81
Empathy	2.82	0.82
Self-motivation	2.85	0.81
Social skills	3.05	0.75

Table 3: Conglomerate centers in each dimension

Variables/Dimension	Cluster 1	Cluster 2
Burnout		
Physical repercussions	1.00	3.00
Emotional exhaustion	1.00	3.10
Depersonalization	1.00	2.86
Personal accomplishment	1.20	2.72
Emotional intelligence		
Self-knowledge	4.00	1.38
Self-control	3.60	2.60
Empathy	3.57	2.00
Self-motivation	3.80	1.80
Social skills	3.78	1.89

people tell me that I go too far defending my point of view" ($\bar{x} = 1.92$, $SD = 0.84$). So, in relation to the segment referred to emotional intelligence, we find emotionally competent teachers who show empathy and social abilities.

Cluster analysis: By conducting a K-means cluster analysis, two clusters were identified, one composed by 163 subjects and the other one by 61 subjects (6 missing values). The conglomerate centers are shown in Table 3.

Attending to the results obtained, we distinguish one cluster in which the predominant answer in the burnout segment is 1 (never), meanwhile in the emotional intelligence segment the most frequent answer is 4 (always). And for the second cluster, the most chosen option in the items related to burnout is 3 (often) while in those related to emotional intelligence is 1 (never). Thus, the basic characteristics of the two clusters are the following:

Cluster 1: This is the largest cluster (73% of the teachers) and is characterized by a high level of abilities development which formed the emotional intelligence (they feel confident they know how to recognize the emotions generated from other persons they find easy to put themselves in other people's situation, etc.) and by the absence of symptoms or factors referred to the

professional exhaustion syndrome (what they do professionally does not negatively affect to their health, they do not feel anxiety in their job they are not bothered if someone talks about working, etc.).

Cluster 2: This cluster is composed by the 27% of teachers, who have less fostered those skills related to the emotional intelligence (it is not easy for them to control their rage, friendships and relationships are also difficult for them to maintain, they do not care about what happens to the rest of people, etc.) and they present high burnout levels (they feel bad emotionally due to their job they recognize that the job is affecting their personal relationships they consider that their job environment is uneasy).

CONCLUSION

With this research, we have pretended to show the importance of developing and acquiring emotional skills in teachers training aiming to act as burnout protector factor which nowadays is one of the main problems in the teaching field (Rudow, 1999). It is a problem which has consequences not only in the individual but also in the educative institution.

It exists a vast number of studies about the contribution of emotional intelligence to the level of happiness or personal well-being (Zeidner *et al.*, 2012; Nikmanesh, 2014; Vesely *et al.*, 2014). Evidence on the relationship of emotional intelligence and burnout is still scarce. In this regard in this study, we explore how they are related.

Results reveal that the development of emotional intelligence connects with the burnout syndrome. By this way two groups of teachers have been clearly identified. In one way we find a group of teachers with emotional intelligence skills and who they do not feel identified with those premises referred to the suffering of any of the syndrome dimensions. And in another way, a group of teachers with less emotional intelligence skills and who they feel closer with this sense of being burnout.

Due to the results obtained and to the literature review at this respect, we find that the teaching practice is where it is more favorable to deal with this type of emotional competences. This is in line with what is stated

by Lopez-Haugen (2004). Moreover, it is notorious that there are deficiencies in teaching training which make the practice being inadequate, considering that if a teacher has not got certain competences he cannot transmit them to the pupils during the educational process. This situation can produce high levels of burnout which can even become a risk for the teacher's health. Therefore, it is essential to provide teachers with an adequate initial and continuous training according to reality and educative practice which is presently carried out in educative institutions to prevent burnout.

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