

DETECTING AGENTS OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AMONG IRANIAN LANGUAGE TEACHERS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF ATTRIBUTION THEORY

Mahmoodi-Shahrehabaki , Masoud
University of Tehran, Iran

Abstract

This study aimed at recognizing sources of emotional problems of nine English language teachers and proposing strategies to obviate the potential contributors. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was administered to 105 language teachers. Among those with very high scores on emotional exhaustion subscale of the inventory, nine were chosen on account of convenience sampling. More than eight hours of unstructured interviews with the participants were recorded and transcribed. First, Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was used to extract the recurring themes. Second, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized to reveal the loci of attribution with emotionally exhausted language teachers. The result indicated that agents of attribution are mainly external to the teachers with underpayment as the top contributor. The linkages of the findings with the related literature are discussed and potential preventive strategies are suggested aligned with the results of this study and others in the literature. This study can help educational policymakers, administrators and teacher training programmers to understand the emotional problems of language teachers in particular and teachers in all disciplines in general and plan to prevent further repercussions.

Keywords: Language Teaching; Teacher Emotions; Attribution Theory; Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis; Teacher Burnout

1. Introduction

1.1. Teachers` Emotional Exhaustion

Teaching has always been an emotional job; however, the nature of instruction is changing aligned with the looming managerial systems that “rely upon fear, embarrassment and teacher guilt to gain improved student performance as demonstrated by rising standardized student test scores” (Bullough, 2009). Consequently, teaching is becoming even more stressful, intense, less personal and the curriculum more inflexible and focused on controlling teachers (Valli & Buese, 2007).

Recent research findings assert that more novice teachers decide to leave their career in hope of finding other more satisfying jobs, a process referred to as *career changing* (Cuddapah, Beaty O’Ferrall, Masci, & Hetrick, 2011). Inadequate salary, lack of respect for the instructor, working conditions, and *politics* of teaching has been cited among the reasons behind teachers` career changing in the Western context (Cuddapah, Beaty O’Ferrall, Masci, & Hetrick, 2011). Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) argue that “inadequate support from administrators,” “inability to balance work with non-work commitments,” and “drop in the status of teaching as a profession,” are the main sources of teaching give-up (p. 21). Examining factors which can affect teachers` psychological well-being cannot gain its end by excluding meticulous probe into larger paradigm of teacher burnout. Burnout is usually defined as tiredness, dullness, demoralization, dissatisfaction, incapability, insensitiveness, decrease in occupational motivation and joy of living, which is experienced personally because of the occupational conditions requiring face to face contact and expecting high performance from the employee (McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Parker-Pope, 2008) . The concept of burnout was first introduced by Freudenbeger in 1974 as wearing down or depleting energy (Freudenburger, 1974). Maslach, one of the pioneering scholars studying burnout, has defined it as a syndrome of physical and emotional exhaustion including the development of negative job attitudes,

poor professional self-concept, and low empathetic concern for clients (Maslach, 1982). Accordingly, she presents the three dimensions of burnout as Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Reduced Personal Accomplishment (Maslach, 1982; Maslach & Pines, 1977). According to Leiter and Maslach's process model of burnout (1988), environmental stressors such as excessive job demands may result in employees' emotional exhaustion. The repercussions of occupational stress can also be of a psychological (cognitive, emotional, behavioral) and/or somatic (fatigue, lethargy, passivity) nature (Schaufeli & Baker, 2004). The emotional and cognitive aspects may affect teachers' psychological well-being. Deficient coping responses to the stressful sources may lead to emotional draining. In order to avoid facing adverse implications of emotional exhaustion, teachers try to evade their professional accountabilities and prefer to concentrate on their personal life in lieu of their occupational life (Farber, 1991). Consequently, detachment from one's job can lead to reduced accomplishment on the job (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and may increase risks of physical problems such as cardiovascular diseases (Melamed, Shirom, Toker, Berliner, & Shapira, 2006).

The emotional state of a teacher dictates the mood of the class. If a teacher is clinically depressed, perturbed, or be suffering from physical problems, he/she will be more prone to retire (Parker, 2008). Because teaching is a "highly emotional and bafflingly chaotic" profession teachers are more exposed to elongated periods of work-related strain (Brookfield, 2006, p. 2). Exhausted teachers normally complain about high unjust workloads, time pressures, problems with students, staff conflicts, and big-size classes plus devaluation of their achievements (Ball & Moselle, 1993; Kokkinos, 2007; Lee & Ashforth, 1996).

Owing to rapid globalization processes, the need to master foreign languages is growing exponentially. English is the most used language for communicative, political, scientific and cultural purposes around the globe, so being proficient in English language is sought actively more than ever (Chen & Goh, 2011). Correspondingly, the work of teachers of English as a second/ foreign language has been paid more attention and the education of teachers for English as a Second/ Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) learners has been taken into consideration more contemplatively (Swaffar, 2003). The prime objective of foreign language teacher education programs is to provide teacher graduates with training in effective approaches to teaching literacy that they can use successfully with their students for the rest of their teaching career (Swaffar, 2003). However, most EFL teachers are not adequately prepared to teach students where English is the not the mother tongue of neither the pupils nor the teachers (Cameron, 2003). The nature of language classrooms, teacher-student interactions and complexity of language teaching and learning have been cited as the major challenges which EFL teachers normally grapple with and may lead to their burnout and even leaving the job (Cavazos, 2009; Cho & Reich, 2008; Grant & Wong, 2003; Harper & de Jong, 2003; Lawes, 2003; Sullivan, 2002). Due to the complexities and difficulties language teachers encounter during their teaching tenure, language teacher burnout must be taken into account seriously as negligence in this matter may result in irreversible consequences for all people working in language teaching and learning arena including teachers, learners and syllabus designers (Monshi, Toussi, & Ghanizadeh, 2012 Piechurska-Kuciel, 2011). Mukundan and Khandehroo (2010) found that excessive workload has a negative impact on language teacher's burnout level. Studies which specifically focus on emotional well-being of language teachers have been scant in the literature. The present study intends to fill the gap in the literature by digging up the sources of language teachers' emotional exhaustion within the framework of interpretive attribution theory using a phenomenological descriptive methodology.

1.2. Attribution Theory

Heider (1958) first proposed the psychological theory of attribution, but later on Jones, Kannouse, Kelley, Nisbett, Valins, and Weiner (1972) introduced a theoretical framework that has been considered a substantial trend for research in socio-psychological studies. Heider (1958) believed that people are like amateur psychologists, trying to interpret other people's behavior by

gathering pertinent information until they reach a reasonable justification or cause; he called this *naïve* or *commonsense* psychology (Harvey & Weary, 1985; Heider, 1958). Attribution theory discusses how society members resort to information around them to arrive at causal explanations for events (Lewis & Daltroy, 1990). It examines what information should be attended plus how it is combined to form a causal judgment (Fiske, & Taylor, 1991). Our attributions are mainly influenced by our emotional and motivational drives (Harvey & Weary, 1985). As Attribution Theory deals with people's causal explanations for events, particularly successes and failures, teachers who are emotionally exhausted tend to attribute their failures to some causal factors (McCormick, & Barnett, 2011). In Attribution Theory, *locus of causality* means whether a person believes the cause of an event is within or outside them (internal source or external source) and *stability* refers to whether or not the cause is expected to alter or remain consistent (Martinko, 1995). Moreover, the cause of the act is characterized by four factors to which one can attribute their success or failure; those are *ability*, *effort*, *task difficulty*, and *chance*, or *luck* (Weiner, 2010). Each factor may be either inherent within the person or residing outside of the person, stable or unstable (Martinko, 1995). Attribution theory has been mainly used to explain the difference in motivation between high and low achievers (Weiner, 1986). According to attribution theory, high achievers accept rather than avoid tasks related to succeeding because they believe success is the result of high ability and effort (Weiner, 1986). On the other hand, failure is attributed to bad luck as a way of shifting the responsibility (Harvey & Weary, 1985). For instance, a teacher may feel that his or her level of effort has been fluctuating due to workload, and environmental factors. The locus of causal responsibility here is internal because the teacher happens to make more or less effort, and it is seen as unstable because it has margins for change over time. Research on Attribution Theory in education have mostly focused on teacher attributions for student behavior, classroom management and students with learning disabilities (Kauppi & Porhola, 2012).

Although many studies have been undertaken to explore the associations of learners' attributions with skills and factors contingent upon effectiveness, teacher attributions, in particular English language teachers' attributions, has remained exclusively unattended needing further explorations. Only recently have educational researchers paid attention to teacher-related attributions. These few studies on teacher attributions (e.g., Ho, 2004; Peacock, 2010) mainly focused on student misbehavior, by case studies, interviews, or researcher-developed learner attribution questionnaires (Ding, Li & Kulm, 2008).

The rationale underpinning this study is twofold: First, most of the related studies conducted so far have been in Western contexts and there is a void of similar investigations in Asian contexts. Second, the few studies which have undertaken to detect sources of burnout among language teachers, have used quantitative/experimental methods to reach their ends. Taking a Descriptive Phenomenological Methodology, this study focuses on the reasons for the phenomenon of language teachers' emotional exhaustion with reference to their own attributions. Answers to the following research question would lead this study: What are the main sources of language teachers' emotional exhaustion?

2. Methodology

2.1. Design

The main motive for using qualitative study is to "discover what people think and how they act; a qualitative study is most useful when there is a need to explore new issues or find meaning that people give to experiences" (Nestor & Schutt, 2012, p. 56). The researcher of the present study aimed to specifically analyze the individual reasons to which language teachers attributed their emotional exhaustion and lack of interest in the profession. As very few studies have probed into this, a qualitative methodology was a fitting choice.

Studies conducted within the framework of qualitative research can take different approaches one of which is phenomenological approach. Research using the phenomenological approach “aims to clarify situations lived through by persons in everyday life; rather than attempting to reduce a phenomenon to a convenient number of identifiable variables, phenomenology aims to remain as faithful as possible to the phenomenon and to the context in which it appears in the world” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, pp. 27-28). Phenomenological approach is mainly used because it uncovers and explains phenomena as they truly are (Gill, 2014).

In other words, the phenomenological methodology is more appropriate to address those issues which are not easily addressed with traditional research methods; i.e., those phenomena that are more subtle, more intangible and more complex (Smith, 2008).

Phenomenological methodology is discovery-oriented rather than hypothesis-testing oriented and this allows the researcher to pose research questions which seeking for their answers may have been uncharted before (Von Knorring & Giorgi, 1998). The main feature that makes phenomenological approach unique compared to other approaches, is that the result of studies conducted using this approach enjoy high *ecological validity* (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). This quality is imperative for research on teacher emotionality as we need materials and setting of the study to be identical to the real-world (here language classroom) that is being explored (Brewer, 2000).

Interpretive phenomenology has emerged from the work of hermeneutic philosophers, most notably Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, who argue for our delving into the world of language and social interactions, and the inescapable historicity of all understanding. “The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in “interpretation itself,” asserts Heidegger (1962, p. 37). Accordingly, Interpretation is not a detached concept: It constitutes an inevitable and pillar structure of our embedment in the real world (Smith, 2007). This study relied upon Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) since it intends to reveal the sources of understudied area of Attribution with emotionally exhausted language teachers.

2.2. Participants

Participants of the present study are nine Iranian English language teachers who were chosen from a sample of 79 teachers with high scores on emotional exhaustion sub-scale of Maslach Burnout Inventory. Their age was between 26 and 43. According to Creswell (2013), the rationale for having small sample sizes in qualitative research is “due to the fact that the purpose is not to generalize the information, but to better illustrate what is the particular/ the specific” (p. 157). Creswell (2013) recommends that normally three to ten subjects are sufficient for a deep phenomenological approach. Correspondingly, Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) hold that IPA may draw on studies on small number of people and, normally, focusing on more than 15 individuals does not prove fruitful. The English teachers’ instruction experience ranged 3 to 11. Accidental or Convenience technique as a non-probability sampling method was used according to which participants were selected given their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. There were six female and three male participants. All of the included participants had scores above 30 on emotional exhaustion sub-scale of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) which is considered as “very emotionally exhausted” (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996, p. 41). Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1996), reported the Alpha Cronbach of 0.93 for the internal consistency of the emotional exhaustion subscale within MBI. This test includes 22 items and intends to measure three elements of burnout: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment and nine items were designated for the emotional exhaustion of subscale.

2.3. Procedure

In IPA, researchers usually collect qualitative data from research participants using techniques such as interview or focus groups (Gill, 2014; Smith, 2008). Typically, researchers dwell

on a position of manageable and unstructured inquiry, and the interviewer adopts a stance which is inquisitive, yet facilitative and avoiding, say, challenging and interrogative postures (Smith, 2007). IPA requires voice-to-voice and/or face-to-face rich and deep personal accounts as it should enable researcher to analyze detailed verbatim transcriptions (Smith, 2008). Being that said, unstructured interviews were the means of data collection for the present study. Punch (1998) defined unstructured interviews as “a way to understand the complex behavior of people without imposing any *a priori* categorization, which might limit the field of inquiry” (p. 4). According to the rationale behind this study and underlying premises of qualitative case studies, no predetermined hypothesis was set prior to this study. The main benefit of an unstructured interview is its conversational and informal nature, which enables the interviewer to be highly responsive to variety of individual differences and situational changes (Patton, 2002; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The interview time were held in English and were set at participants` convenience during the spring of 2014. Participant teachers and the researcher had one face-to-face transactions and all the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews lasted within the range of 50 to 80 minutes.

The purpose was to locate dissuading and afflicting emotional experiences of interviewees to gain an understanding of nature of emotional problems language teachers cope with. The questions asked during the interview and the sequence of questions were mainly based on what Kavale has suggested to be included in unstructured interviews (Inozu, 2011; Kavle, 1996):

1. Introducing questions, such as “How was your experience as a teacher last month/year?”
2. Follow-up questions, such as “what do you exactly mean by that?”
3. Probing questions, such as “How do you consider it to be unpleasant?”
4. Specifying questions, such as “what was your strategy to overcome that problem?”
5. Direct questions, such as “Do you see any of your personal traits part of the problem?”
6. Indirect questions, such as “what are your students`/employer reactions? Are your reactions similar?”
7. Structuring questions, such as “Let`s stop talking about this issue and move on.”
8. Interpreting questions, such as “How do you interpret the way your students, colleagues and employer see you as their teacher?”
9. Silence signaling for “giving time to the interviewee to reflect more”.

All the content of interviews were recorded then transcribed including, false starts, significant pauses, fillers and so forth. Each participant signed a consent form before the commencement of interviews.

2.4 Analysis

Thematic content analysis (TCA) was used for descriptive presentation of the transcripts obtained from the unstructured interviews. Themes are repeated patterns across data sets and are closely related to a specific research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In doing a thematic analysis, a researcher attempts to identify a few number of themes which informatively reflect the underlying patterns of textual content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TCA is the most basic type of qualitative analytic procedures because it informs all the other qualitative methods in some way (Anderson, 2007).

The researcher used the stages provided by Ritchie and Lewis (2003) as the framework for data analysis. First, the interview transcripts were gone through deeply for getting a universal understanding of the textual content. The second stage dealt with determining the thematic framework. Accordingly, rather than clustering the data into predetermined groups, content coding was implemented. The data were coded based on recurring patterns with reference to attribution interpretive view. The predetermined main categories to be explored were the main loci of Attribution Theory causal responsibility, namely, internal and external agents. Further sub-categorization would ensue after a meticulous TCA. The code weighting was based on the procedures

formulated by Kelly-Newton (1980). Each sentence of the transcription was assigned a theme score of one unit and its thematic content elicited according to the incidence of keyword combinations in the keyword-in-context (KWIC) concordance. Where a sentence included several distinguishable themes then the theme score unit was subdivided to ascertain the relative importance of those themes with reference to the transcribed data. No weighting was established between the different themes in any sentence, so that if a sentence comprises four themes, each is accorded theme-score of 0.25. The overall score summed across all sentences accorded any particular theme was taken to be index of its significance within the transcription. Ratio variables were computed for the main sample of transcribed data for each theme based upon:

Theme variable = $\frac{\text{Sum of theme scores}}{\text{Total number of sentences in the statement}}$ to provide an index of the perceived

significance of that theme to the overall content.

2.4.1. Validation.

To ensure the credibility and validity of research findings, the technique of member check or informant feedback was used. Member check simply means submitting research data to respondents for verification and can be conducted after the data have been gathered or during data gathering process (Bryman, 2008; Doyle, 2007). Accordingly, the findings of the study were relayed to the individual interviewees to see whether the researcher had interpreted and construed the materials properly.

2.4.2. Conformability.

For assessing conformability and dependability, inter-coder agreement check was implemented. One of the main requirements of any form of content analysis within the framework of qualitative research is obtaining as high a level of consistency as possible between independent coders (Krippendorff, 2004). The main objective; however, is not to get a standard coefficient as the indication of internal consistency to make the study statistically trustworthy. Rather, the principal concern is the tangible enhancement of coding quality (Neuendorf, 2002). Three other researchers coded two transcripts each to extract the main themes out of content. Attribution Theory code names were decided and coded for beforehand. Complying with Creswell's (2013, p. 253) recommendations, researchers happened to have about 75% agreement on transcripts coding which is convincingly adequate.

2.5. Results

After TCA, the researcher elicited two universal recurring themes, namely, internal and external attributions, and then follow-up sub-themes were identified. The present study took a phenomenological interpretive approach to address this complication, other qualitative methods might be of help, though. The interviews were not meant to only directly address the immediate emotions and feelings of interviewees. Rather, in addition to direct questions, interviewer employed indirect questions to discover the general and particular emotions and feelings of emotionally exhausted teachers towards language instruction, students, working environment and so on. For instance, the evidence is strong in the literature that teacher burnout, stress and anxiety are significantly correlated (see e.g. Howard & Johnson, 2004; Huebner, Gilligan & Cobb, 2002) and many psychological models of how stress results in emotional exhaustion explain how teachers' inability to protect themselves against threats harms their self-esteem and psychological health. (Kyriacou, 2001). One of the noticeable features of the content analysis was that the researcher also tried to extract, from the transcribed data, some of the potential remedies for sources of teachers' emotional problems; remedies suggested, explicitly or implicitly, from the participants themselves. The main sources of language teachers' emotional affliction were identified as follows:

- Excessive workload

- Teaching capabilities
- Poor working conditions
- Demotion of self-esteem and status
- Income
- Personal traits

Participants felt that their efforts go underappreciated, and that their meager salary is a decisive incentive for their feeling lack of reverence. They also complained that no matter how hard they strive to grow professionally, job stressors continue to increase while their incomes remain unchanged. Six of participants were considering leaving the profession at the nearest opportune chance.

2.5.1. Internal Factors.

Internal attributions are those that are person-oriented, i.e. the cause of the success or failure is assigned to the individual's characteristics such as competence or personality. Internal attributions were categorized in terms of teaching capability and personal characteristics affecting emotional health of teachers.

A) Teaching capability: Interviewees voiced during their interviews that the beginning periods of their career teaching was very strenuous; however, their self-management competence gradually increased. They mainly attributed this improvement to resorting to time-management skills, metacognitive strategies and self-reflection. Setbacks were mostly attributed to a lack of self-confidence and knowledge in their methodology such as maintaining classroom discipline and manage classroom time.

For example, one of the interviewees says:

“...At first, I got really nervous from the start of the class and I thought I couldn't handle it, but gradually I came to conclusion that I should consult other resources to cope with my anxiety. I checked the internet and I studied about the benefits of self-reflection.... You, know, I borrowed a self-reflection checklist from one of my colleagues and it worked a lot...”

B) Personal Traits: Among factors cited by the participants, an emerging theme was attribution of emotional problems to personal characteristics. According to trait theory of personality, a trait is regarded as a relatively stable characteristic that causes people to behave in certain ways (Loeber, 2005). Psychologically speaking, unique personality traits may be the main source of emotional problems of people in general, and the participants of this study in particular. Two of participants recount that using some sort of pre-planned lesson plan helped them have better control over classroom proceedings:

“....since childhood, I have been really stressful to meet new challenges and environments. Moreover, I become anxious quite easily for even insignificant matters, not to mention a big step in life! I remember, on the exam nights, I used to take sleeping pills to be able to sleep.....After a while, I began to start using lesson plans which helped me manage the class time more easily”

Another participant says:

“... I have always had problem with speaking in front of people, even small numbers; I begin to sweat and I think my mind goes blank....”

The figure 1 pretends to depict the internal factors contribution to emotional exhaustion.

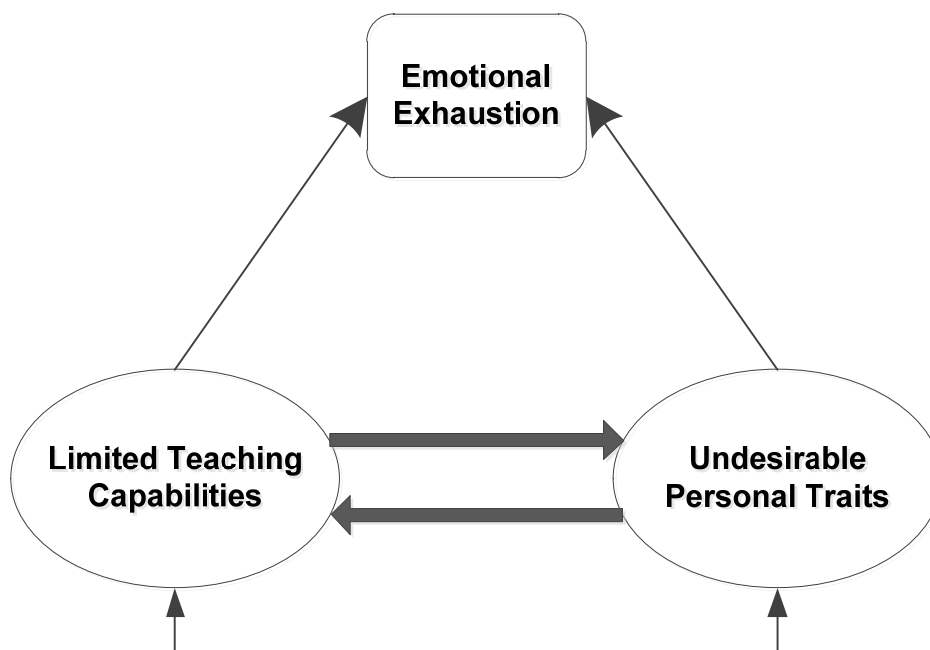


Figure 1: Internal Factors Leading to Language Teachers` Emotional Fatigue

2.5.2. External Attributions.

External attributions include responses from interviewees which assigned sources of emotional difficulties to *situations* wherein they were. External attributions were categorized in terms of excessive workload, poor working condition, insufficient salary and demotion of self-esteem and/or status.

A) Excessive Workload: All the participants complained in their interviews about excessive workload and pressure in addition to time limitations imposed on them by administration or employer. For instance one says:

“it`s strange to me that in public views, teaching is not regarded a difficult job. We all have our own personal problems; however, we should always care about our students and their needs...”

Another one says:

“If the performance of learners is not satisfactory on the final exams, we are only to blame, whether it is from the management or the parents.....so, we should strive to keep both groups satisfied...”

Participants voiced their apprehension about insufficient time and other resources to achieve all the curriculum required objectives and go through all the paperwork they are expected to handle:

“Just consider all the grading of papers, it is really time-consuming.....I have to normally give the pupils writing assignments, so I have to read them carefully and give them constructive feedbacks... I must explain their mistakes in great details preventing them from further similar mistakes....”

A participant suggests:

“ I wish the administrators focus more on our quality of teaching, rather than just focusing on learner`s final scores.....test scores of students are reliant on many factors not only on how we teach.....”

Another comment:

“I think they should lessen the session intervals.... Three to five sessions per week is really burdensome or at least they may extend the length of semesters.....even two or three additional weeks would remove plenty of pressure from me....”

It goes without saying that (language) teachers are like other human beings trapped in a plethora of personal and vocational difficulties. Consequently, there should be a trade-off between the amount of workload and their productivity. Influences of workload on quality of language teaching will be further expanded on in the discussion part below.

B) Poor Working Condition: Working conditions are defined as the physical environment wherein employers are required to do their job. Poor working conditions may result in different negative consequences for educators and the students they instruct, including emotional fatigue. Teachers in this study mainly complained about the physical/environmental shortcomings:

“We don’t access to internet in our classes..... In some classes we do not even have any computers..... In those classes in which there are computers, they are either malfunctioning or very outdated.....so, we always have to bring our own laptops....usually there are no video projectors....language learners need quality video or audio stimuli even in the classrooms.....”

Most of teachers were also irked by their physical problems. An important point should be noted here that many of the factors identified here as sources of hastening emotional exhaustion, are very closely interconnected. Undoubtedly, physical strain has strong linkage to work overload; however, this is the poor administration policy which results in unhealthy working condition, so I decided to consider it more leaning to the working condition external factor:

“We naturally spend a lot of time standing, and this can be hard on our body on long term.....”

Another teacher says:

“We must cope with unruly behavior in our classes; we have stress dealing with large classes or old classes which are run-down and lack many modern facilities....”

C) Demotion of self-esteem and status: Demotion of self-esteem and teaching position was, by the interviewees, perceived to come from community, language institute, school and higher policy administrators.

“No one ever comes to us to thank us.....no one ever come to us to say ‘thank you, you did a great job’ neither students and their parents or our employers (managers)..”

Another one says:

“Who is there to pay gratitude? Who is there to encourage? They treat us like we should try our hardest because it is our duty and we must not expect any encouragement or incentive....”

After all, they expressed their need for more value and respect. They taught their job is not considered as important in the society and their efforts to be successful in what they are doing goes unnoticed.

D) Teachers` Income: The top reason for teachers` frustration, demotivation and lack of interest for the job was their low salary. Their pay was the main recurring theme reiterated in the cycle of all the interviews. Four of the participants explicitly expressed their will to quit the job in the hope of finding a more money-making profession. Three of them preferred to have parallel jobs to help them meet their life needs:

“Though I am not married, the amount of money I get out of this is not fair given all the paperwork and pressure and stress....”

Another teacher adds:

“I really love language teaching.... But the salary is not enough for me to make even a modest living...”

Figure 2 pretends to depict the contribution of external factors to the emotional exhaustion of teachers.



Figure 2: External factors contribution to language teachers` emotional fatigue

3. Discussion

Much of teacher burnout can be explained by emotional exhaustion or what is also referred to as “compassion fatigue” (Chang, 2009, p.194). Compassion fatigue deals with emotions teachers experience in relation to managing their students’ difficulties, leading to feelings of exhaustion, hopelessness, detachment, anxiety, frustration, rage and guilt (Chang, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

This study serves to fill a gap in the existing literature about the emotional problems of language teachers. Since there is growing increase in teacher shortage in many countries, especially developing countries, due to aging populations and teacher turnover, studies like this one must be conducted in order to analyze teachers’ emotional problems and find the prevention strategies as soon as possible (Ingresoll & Smith, 2004). Research must go beyond the *what* of the emotional problems of teachers and focus on the *why* of teachers’ emotional problems (Valli & Buese, 2007). Cano-García and colleagues' (2004) study of 99 teachers at public and private schools in Spain found that a combination of personal and environmental variables significantly influenced scores in the emotional exhaustion. Based on their findings, the best predictors of emotional exhaustion were high levels of neuroticism; a deficient relationship with school administration; lack of advancement opportunities; awareness of little professional prestige; seniority in one's teaching position; and having fewer students (cited in Chang, 2009).

Teachers have a crucial accountability to care for and instruct students, and that responsibility is normally accompanied with plenty of emotional turmoil. The participants of present study worded intense emotions in relation to their language instruction career, such as stress, apprehension, guilt, frustration, demotivation and disappointment. These findings corroborate the conclusions based on the results of studies conducted by Chang (2009), Bullough and Baughman (1997) and Mukundan

and Khandehroo (2010) in relation to sources of teachers' emotional exhaustion. All participants expressed demotivation as an emotion, attributing to both environmental conditions and politics of teaching. With regard to income issues, the findings of this study dovetail the findings of Ramirez (2010) and Mannassero (2006) as they also mentioned low salary as the number one reason for teacher burnout and turnover. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) also concluded that 78.5% of new teachers' job dissatisfaction is attributed to salary. Berryhill, Linney, and Fromewick (2009) found in their study that 35% of teachers mentioned increasing salary as a way to increase the professionalism of the job of teaching. Several other studies in the literature also confirm lack of respect for teaching position as a contributor to burnout and emotional exhaustion (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Ramirez, 2010; Schutz, Crowder, & White, 2001). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) and Santavirta, Solovieva, and Theorell (2007) expressed unhealthy work conditions like time pressure and excessive workload as a source of workplace pressure on teachers. All participants in the study expressed having high demands and little time to fulfill their tasks. This finding is consistent with Mukundan and Khandehroo's (2010) conclusions that emotional exhaustion is controlled by less workload among English language teachers. The causality relationship between current workloads for the present study interviewees and stress is based on the fact that there is a finite amount of time that can be exercised during the day to provide students with a quality language instruction. The participants complained about their current workload with reference to the daily duties, assigned tasks, professional demands, regulations, administration policies, learners' behavior, and the general pressures that come with being an English language teacher.

There might be also other factors which may influence EFL teachers' emotional exhaustion and need further exploration and research. For instance, Javadi (2014) found, in her study on 143 EFL teachers, lack of perceived self-autonomy as the main contributor to emotional exhaustion. Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2006) concluded that emotional exhaustion interrelated negatively with self-rated health as well as work ability among Finnish teachers.

Monshi, Toussi and Ghanizadeh (2012) found a statistically significant relationship between EFL teachers' self-regulation and locus of control for attribution. They concluded that approximately 48 % of the variation in teacher self-regulation can be explained by building on teachers' internal locus of control, Vanheule and Verhaeghe (2004) argue that teachers who attribute their success and failure to external, uncontrollable, and stable factors are more prone to face physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion.

The results of the present study, which revealed that language teachers mostly attribute their emotional problems to external agents, might imply that teachers with external attributions that are less controllable and more stable (consistent) are more liable to building on negative attitudes toward students, their parents, administration and their profession as a whole.

This conclusion can also be explained with reference to the *learned helplessness theory*, which refers to a mental state in which an organism is forced to retain aversive stimuli, or stimuli that are painful or otherwise unpleasant, becomes incapable or reluctant to avoid subsequent encounters with those stimuli, even if they are *avoidable*, since it has learned that it cannot manage the situation (Sharma, 2005). Some experts in the field state that the learned helplessness phenomenon occurs when one repeatedly attributes failure to uncontrollable, stable causes, and this in turn causes feelings of despair, inefficiency, and apprehension (Dweck, 2006). However, this finding of the present study contradicts Bibou-Nakou et al.'s (1999) research shows a negative correlation between teachers' external ascriptions and depersonalization and a positive correlation between internal attributions and emotional exhaustion.

Finally, all the participants voiced their confidence in their capability to actually perform the job of language instruction, even if they had a perceived lack of ability in the beginning of their career; most stated that their negative emotions toward the profession is attributed specifically to the external factors of job difficulty and underpayment. In the next section some of the remedies explicated directly or indirectly by the participants are drawn out using TCA.

4. Possible Remedies

Here are some general possible suggestions for either prevention or coping with emotional exhaustion of language instructors put forth by the participants of the study. Although there is no panacea for the cure and control of teachers' emotional problems, these intimations can prove fruitful helping educational policy-makers try to prevent and manage teachers' emotional problems which in turn would lead to decrease in burnout and turnover. Figure 3 depicts the main potential agents for amelioration of language teachers' emotional problems suggested by the participants of this study.

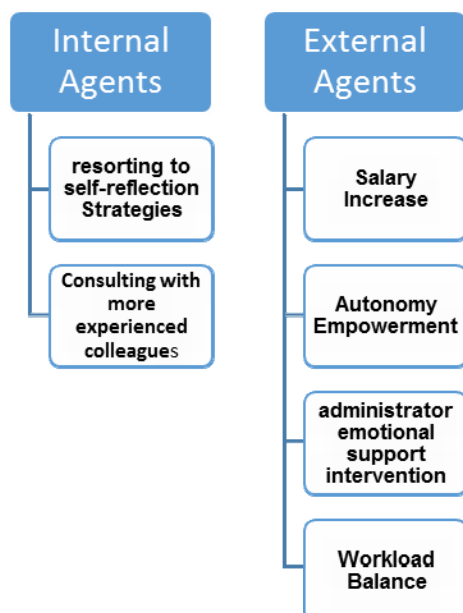


Figure 3: The main potential Agents for Amelioration of Language Teachers' Emotional Problems Suggested by the Participants of this Study

5. Conclusion

Teachers' emotional discomforts not only negatively influences student learning but also causes irreversible mental, psychological, and physical harm to the well-being of language teachers. The findings of this study unravel more corners of complex and multi-dimensional notion of language teachers' emotional problems. The attribution theory was chosen to identify the sources of teachers' emotional problems because "attribution theory must stand at the core of theories given that the subjective reasons to which we attribute our past successes and failures largely shape our motivational disposition underlying future action" (Weiner, 2010, p.31). Taking a phenomenological approach, this study aimed at locating the cause and effect relationship between factors and phenomenon discovery: what factors, or stressors, lead to the phenomenon of language teachers' emotional exhaustion. In the present study, participants mentioned task difficulty and ability most in interviews in terms of Attribution Theory, but external factors like low salary, increased workload, and demotion of self-esteem as the main sources of their negative emotions toward their profession. Findings of this study can alert educational policymakers, administrators and teacher training programmers to understand the emotional problems of language teachers and plan to control and prevent them. This issue becomes even more prominent for teachers in developing countries which normally suffer from shortage of qualified language teachers. Moreover, for optimal thriving of language learners to happen, educational systems need healthy, energized, mentally stable, and creative teachers to be at service.

6. Limitations and Implications for Further Research

The most noticeable limitation of this study is the small size of the sample. Taking an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the interviews` content, necessitated depending on a small sample of nine mainly for the matters of validation and feasibility. Studies with more participants, or more phenomenological studies of this type, can give more insights into the nature of language teachers` emotion. Secondly, relying upon unstructured interviews as the only source of data, it is possible that some information is embroidered or has been ignored. Participants might also have felt pressured to give specific replies due to the nature of the questions, or they may have felt pressured not to say anything too negative so as not to degrade the profession, their learners or employers. Journal diaries and using standard questionnaires for triangulation may add to the reliability and content validity of the results. Finally, due to the nature of the research, no predetermined hypothesis was presumed. Consequently, if any data (valuable) could not be placed within the Attribution Theory framework aligned with the emergent recurring themes extracted by the researcher, it was subject to negligence.

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