

# A Study on Job Burnout of English Teachers in Rural Middle Schools in Western China

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## Abstract

In order to explore the job burnout of English teachers in rural middle schools in western China and its mitigation paths, 596 middle school English teachers were surveyed with the Educator Burnout Scale, and Amos 23 and SPSS 22 were used to calculate the data. It was found that the phenomenon of job burnout of middle school English teachers was more common. , The degree is medium, and the low sense of accomplishment is particularly obvious. In addition, the variables of gender, age, teaching age, professional title and the number of students showed significant differences in the three-dimensional degree of job burnout. Based on the theory of self-determination, research suggests that job burnout of English teachers in western middle schools is more affected by external motivations.

**Keywords:** English Teacher, Job Burnout, Self-Determination Theory, Professional Development

## Introduction

Although the teaching profession has received many praises and is considered a satisfactory and highly rewarding profession, compared with many other professions, teachers are under tremendous work pressure [1], especially middle school teachers. The reform of English courses and examinations has caused English teachers to frequently show signs of burnout in terms of knowledge, experience, teaching ability and psychological quality. If job burnout cannot be relieved in a timely and effective manner, the work and physical and mental health of middle school English teachers will be in a precarious situation, which will eventually affect students' English learning.

Looking at the existing research in China, the research on job burnout of middle school English teachers was first conducted in 2007. It mainly focused on rural, urban, and minority middle school English teachers. Current research mainly uses organizational factors and social support as determinants of job burnout to discuss the path to resolution of job burnout, and pays less attention to emotional factors such as individual motivations and human factors. In view of this, based on the theory of self-determination, this article analyzes the individual factors of the job burnout of middle school English teachers, and discusses the way to eliminate job burnout by focusing on the subjective initiative of the individual teachers.

## Theoretical Framework

### Job Burnout Theory

The term job burnout is defined as a psychological syndrome, that is, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low sense of accomplishment [2], which mostly occur in the helping industry. Emotional exhaustion, as a core dimension of job burnout, is characterized by a state, which refers to the feeling of excessive emotional burden and exhaustion of emotional resources; depersonalization is a dimension of interpersonal relationship, which refers to the individual's treatment of work objects. An attitude of alienation, indifference, and carelessness; low sense of accomplishment is directly related to job success and self-confidence, indicating whether an individual is confident in completing the work he is engaged in and discovering the trend of value.

Researchers have studied the job burnout of individuals in different industries and found that job burnout is related to many personal, contextual, and communication factors [3], such as work overload, student misbehavior, introversion, neuroticism [4], and colleagues' poor relationship, improper working conditions [5], time pressure and low self-efficacy, etc. [6]. Teacher burnout has also been extensively studied in English teaching. It is believed to not only induce teachers' teaching pressure, but also lead to incomplete mastery of the teaching content of English as a foreign language (English as a foreign language, hereinafter referred to as EFL). [7]. Researchers believe that EFL teachers' job burnout is positively correlated with anxiety, anger, shame, etc.; it is also significantly negatively correlated with self-regulation strategies [8], emotional labor strategies and emotional regulation [9], which can be achieved through enjoyment, pride and three types of motivation (that is, altruism, internal and external motivation) and other emotional motivation factors to adjust [10].

### Self-Determination Theory, SDT

This theory was proposed by Deci and Ryan in 1985. It is a theory about the motivational process of human self-determination behavior. It is a motivational theory that advocates that people are active organisms with innate potential for psychological growth and development. It divides motivation into two types: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to individuals acting out of interest and the happiness of the activity itself. Extrinsic motivation refers to the individual's action due to the behavior itself accompanied by an additional result [11].

Intrinsic motivation can stimulate more positive behaviors of individuals, such as more commitment and participation in the work environment [12], while extrinsic motivation is more associated with negative results, such as job burnout [13]. Self-determination theory is used in teacher motivation research to answer a series of questions such as "Who can achieve success/experience personal satisfaction in the field of teachers, and what are the reasons?" and "The relationship between teacher motivation and their own teaching behaviors and students' learning motivation" [14]. The concept of motivation may be an important underlying mechanism in the process of job burnout, because, as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) put it, "teachers who lack motivation will suffer from the pressure of teaching work, lack of self-efficacy, and autonomy. Experiences such as inhibition and insufficient professional structure" [15]. Motivation is considered to be the pre-factor of productivity. Under the premise of meeting the basic psychological needs of individuals, it can improve the efficiency of individuals in the workplace and become an influential factor in the education process [16]. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the teaching motivation of English teachers in rural middle schools in the west and meet their psychological needs, so that they can perform well

in the second language class, and ultimately promote the improvement of students' learning motivation. However, in the research on job burnout of English teachers [17], there is little evidence to explore the resolution path of job burnout based on the perspective of motivation theory. Therefore, based on the perspective of self-determination theory, this study explores the status quo of professional burnout of English teachers in western middle schools in the context of Chinese English teaching based on the subjective initiative of individual teachers, and provides a new perspective for alleviating teacher burnout.

## Research Design

### Subject

Participants are middle school English teachers from rural areas in western China, with a total of 596 (106 males and 490 females). These subjects are all rural English teachers who have participated in public welfare teacher training, and they are all members of the WeChat group of the training class. Data collection adopts online questionnaires to collect participant information. Participants were between 21 and 45 years old and taught in rural middle schools in different parts of the western rural areas. The teaching age ranged from 5 to 30 years. Their major is English education or English. More than half of the teachers have a bachelor's degree (about 52%), and the remaining teachers have an associate's degree (about 46%) or a master's degree (about 2%).

## Research Questions

This research first attempts to determine the current situation and degree of job burnout of English teachers in rural middle schools in the west. Secondly, it examines the factors that have a significant predictive effect on teacher burnout. Therefore, this study raises the following questions:

- How about the job burnout degree of English teachers in rural middle schools in western China?.
- Do the demographic characteristics of English teachers in rural middle schools in western China have a significant predictive effect on their job burnout dimensions?''.

## Instrument

The Educator Scale (MBI-ES) developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986) has three subscales: emotional exhaustion (9 items), measuring work fatigue; depersonalization (5 items), reflecting the teacher's objectivity towards students Response; personal sense of accomplishment (8 items), which evaluates the teacher's ability and sense of success.

The scale is rated according to a Likert 5-point system, ranging from 1 point (never) to 5 points (every day). Use SPSS 22 software and AMOS 23 to perform exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and the results support the three-factor structure of the structure..

## Results

A total of 634 questionnaires were distributed this time, and 596 questionnaires were returned after the unqualified questionnaires were eliminated, with an effective rate of 94%. The normal distribution, collinearity and homogeneity of the data were tested, and the items that did not meet the requirements were deleted. Finally, the KMO value of the questionnaire was calculated to reach 0.924, the significance level ( $P=0.000$ ). The questionnaire is very suitable for factor analysis and follow-up research.

Exploratory factor analysis of job burnout (EFA) of English teachers in western rural middle schools

Choose maximum variance method, orthogonal rotation, eigenvalue greater than 1 to extract 3 factors from the data, and the cumulative explained variance is 68.203%. By observing the rotated component matrix (see Table 1), it is found that the data is presented in three dimensions, and the factor loading of all items is greater than 0.6, and the structure validity is good. According to literature reading and data reference, factor 1 is named emotional exhaustion, factor 2 is named depersonalization, and factor 3 is named low accomplishment.

Table 1  
*The rotated component matrix<sup>a</sup>*

Item	1	2	3
t2	0.849		
t1	0.823		
t3	0.791		
t8	0.785		
t7	0.771		
t4	0.742		
t5	0.663		
t6	0.600		
t14		0.820	
t10		0.764	
t13		0.756	
t11		0.744	
t15		0.730	
t12		0.666	
t19			0.844
t20			0.841
t18			0.833
t17			0.832
t21			0.773

Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: maximum variance method. The rotation has converged after 6 iterations.

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested and found that the overall reliability of the questionnaire and the reliability of factor 1, factor 2, and factor 3 were 0.881, 0.938, 0.823, and 0.889, respectively, which were all greater than 0.7, indicating that the reliability of the questionnaire was excellent.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Job Burnout Scale for English Teachers in Western Rural Middle Schools (CFA)

A In order to further confirm the quality of the scale, AMOS software was used for confirmatory factor analysis, and the unqualified items (t1, t2, t16, t19, t21) were deleted to reduce the existence of measurement errors. The results showed (Figure 1) that each measurement index was in three The factor loads on the dimensions all exceed 0.6, and the residuals are independently positive. Except for the medium-to-high correlation between "emotional exhaustion" and "depersonalization" among the three dimensions, the correlation among the other dimensions is moderate , The validity test results are good. Model absolute fit index ( $P=0.000<0.05$ ,  $\chi^2/df=2.542<3$ ,  $AGFI=0.923>0.9$ ,  $GFI=0.901>0.9$ ,

RMSEA=0.078<0.08) and relative fit index (NFI=0.915>0.9, IFI=0.947>0.9, CFI=0.946>0.9) all meet the requirements [18], the model has ideal structural validity, and is suitable for final descriptive statistics and inferential statistics analysis.

The overall situation of job burnout of English teachers in rural middle schools in western China

The mean and standard deviation of English teachers in rural middle school on the three dimensions of job burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low sense of accomplishment) were  $2.765 \pm 0.992$ ;  $2.244 \pm 0.865$  and  $3.56 \pm 0.927$  (median 3). The results of the study show that the two dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in this survey of middle school English teachers are less affected, and the impact is low; and the average value of the "low sense of accomplishment" dimension exceeds 3, indicating the feelings of middle school English teachers at work. The low sense of accomplishment received has a greater impact on their job burnout. Overall, the level of job burnout of middle school English teachers is moderate.

Descriptive statistics of job burnout of middle school English teachers in demographics

Using marital status, whether to have children, monthly income, and academic qualifications as grouping variables, the differences in the three-dimensional degree of job burnout among English teachers in western middle schools are tested, and it is found that there is no significant difference in the three-dimensional degree of job burnout among different grouping variables such as English teachers in western middle schools.

*Gender Test of Various Dimensions of English Teachers' Job Burnout in Western Rural Middle Schools.*

Using gender as the grouping variable, the independent sample T test was used to analyze the differences between men and women in three factors. It was found that there were no significant differences between men and women in the dimension of emotional exhaustion; there were significant differences between men and women in the dimension of depersonalization. The degree of depersonalization of teachers was significantly higher than that of female teachers ( $t=3.621$ ,  $p<0.05$ ); in the dimension of low accomplishment, there were also significant differences between men and women. Male teachers felt significantly more low accomplishment than female teachers ( $t=2.442$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Generally speaking, compared with the degree of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, middle school English teachers have more low sense of accomplishment ( $E=3.74$ ,  $3.76$ , greater than the median value of 3). Compared with female Chinese and English teachers, male teachers have a more alienated and indifferent attitude towards students and colleagues, and have a negative attitude towards whether they have the confidence to complete the teaching work and find the value. This may be related to the male temperament type and the views of others in society. The type of masculinity is mostly classified as bile (straightforward enthusiasm, restlessness, short-tempered, impatient)[19], lacking a certain degree of patience in life or teaching; and in dealing with the profession of teachers, traditional social values consider the salary of male teachers. Low income and social status are not a sign of career success. Therefore, male teachers have a lower sense of professional value and self-identity than female teachers [20].

Table 2

*Descriptive statistics of gender in three dimensions*

	Emotional exhaustion (M±SD)	Depersonalization (M±SD)	Low accomplishment (M±SD)
gender male	2.86±1.10	2.5±1.06	3.74±0.93
female	2.7±0.92	2.08±0.66*	3.46±0.91*

\*P&lt;0.05

*The Age Test of Various Dimensions of English Teachers' Job Burnout in Western Rural Middle Schools.*

Using age as the grouping variable, the survey subjects were divided into 5 groups, namely: the first group (under 25 years old), the second group (26-29 years old), the third group (30-35 years old), and the fourth group (36-39 years old) and the fifth group (over 40 years old). Through the descriptive analysis of the mean and the analysis of variance, it can be seen that only the fifth group (over 40 years old) variables have significant differences in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low sense of accomplishment. Specifically, middle school English teachers over 40 have a higher degree of emotional exhaustion than teachers under 25, and a lower degree of accomplishment than teachers aged 36-39 (see Table 3). The reasons for this may be the following two aspects. First, the constant changes in basic education courses and educational technology have brought great challenges and impacts to middle-aged teachers. Many middle-aged teachers are confused, unsuitable, and exhausted. I am at a loss as to whether I can continue to find value in my job.

Table 3

*Descriptive statistics of age in three dimensions*

	M±SD					LSD
	Under years old	25-29 years old	30-35 years old	36-39 years old	above40 years old	
Emotional exhaustion	2.5±0.85	2.57±0.84	3.1±1.1	2.6±0.98	3.3±1.65*	Group 5 mean> group 1 (mean difference=0.80)
Depersonalization	2.15±0.63	2.01±0.797	2.53±0.95	2.6±0.56	1.92±0.12	
Low accomplishment	3.32±1.03	3.7±0.8	3.49±0.95	3.2±0.99	4.8±0.23*	Group 5 mean> group 4 (mean difference = 1.60)

*The Test of Various Dimensions of Professional Burnout of English Teachers in Western Rural Middle Schools on the working years.*

Using teaching age as a categorical variable, the survey objects are divided into four groups, namely the first group (less than 2 years), the second group (3-5 years), the third group (6-9 years) and the fourth group (10 years) above). Analysis of variance was used to test the differences in the three factors of subjects of different age groups (see Table 4): Middle school English teachers of different teaching ages showed significant differences in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions. This is consistent with the results of Duan Yanting (2016) et al. [21]. Specifically, the emotional exhaustion and the degree of depersonalization of teachers above 10 years of teaching age are significantly higher than those of 3-5 years of teaching age. The results of the study show that the emotional and physiological resources of teachers who have been teaching for more than 10 years have been excessively consumed, and they have a negative and indifferent attitude towards students and other work subjects. This is likely to be related to the teacher's own development stage.

According to Fowler's stage of concern theory [22], teachers with 3-5 years of teaching are still in the stage of survival. At this stage, teachers will pay more attention to the relationship between teachers and students, colleague Communication is an important part of the work at this stage, and it is not easy to appear indifferent in the communication; teachers who have worked for more than 10 years have entered the stage of attention situation, at this time the focus of teachers has turned to problems related to the teaching situation, and they have also begun to serve as class teachers and commitments. More important tasks. However, teachers at this stage have not matured their skills in education and teaching. As the enthusiasm for new jobs fades and the pressure from students, teaching and interpersonal aspects increases, the degree of emotional fatigue and apathy of 10-year-old teachers gradually rise.

Table 4

*Descriptive statistics of working years in three dimensions*

	M±SD				LSD
	Less than 2 years	3-5 years	6-9 years	More than 10 years	
Emotional exhaustion	2.75±0.94	2.54±0.84	3.10±1.17	3.18±1.2*	Group 4 mean > group 2 (mean difference=0.64)
Depersonalization	2.25±0.89	2.05±0.63	2.58±1.1	2.6±0.79*	Group 4 mean > group 2 (mean difference=0.55)
Low accomplishment	3.5±0.87	3.45±0.95	3.84±0.92	3.52±0.92	

*The Test of Various Dimensions of Job Burnout of English Teachers in Western Rural Middle Schools on Job Titles.*

Participants were divided into four groups based on their job title categorical variables, namely the first group (Unrated job title), the second group (tutor), the third group (lecturer) and the fourth group (Associate professor/professor). Analysis of variance was used to analyze each group and found (see Table 5) that the degree of emotional exhaustion of tutor was significantly higher than that of Associate professor/professor teachers, which is consistent with the results of (Shushi, 2019). Specifically, tutor teacher's emotional exhaustion are significantly higher than Associate professor/professor teachers in terms of emotional exhaustion. The results of the study show that the level of emotional, emotional and physical exhaustion of tutor teachers is significantly higher than that of teachers with senior titles. In terms of work, the reason can be attributed to the high requirements and large amount of class hours in the assessment of titles of tutor teachers; in terms of family, The tutor teacher is at the critical stage of establishing a family and raising young children. Therefore, under multiple pressures, tutor teachers increase emotional labor and excessive emotional consumption.



Table 5

*Descriptive statistics of professional titles in three dimensions*

	M±SD				LSD
	Unrated title	job tutor	lecturer	Associate professor/professor	
Emotional exhaustion	2.47±0.79	3.17±1.05	2.92±1.09	1.88±0.27*	Group 2 mean > group 4 (mean difference = 1.29)
Depersonalization	1.99±0.63	2.52±0.99	2.4±0.97	1.95±0.43	
Low accomplishment	3.50±1.01	3.64±0.95	3.61±0.79	3.57±0.42	

*The Test of the Various Dimensions of English Teachers' Job Burnout in the Number of Students in Western Rural Middle Schools.*

The subjects were divided into 4 groups according to the number of students brought: the first group (below 100), the second group (101-200), the third group (201-300), and the fourth group (above 300). Using analysis of variance, it was found that (Table 6) group 4 teachers and other groups of teachers showed significant differences in emotional exhaustion and low sense of accomplishment. Specifically, the degree of emotional exhaustion and low sense of achievement of teachers with more than 300 students is significantly higher than that of teachers with 101-200 students. The results of this study are consistent with the results of Li Donglin (2017) [24]. As an English teacher, the more students he takes, the more teaching hours and the amount of homework corrections, etc., will naturally cause the teacher's emotional exhaustion and physical exhaustion; the repetitiveness of the teaching content of the general course and the students' attitude to the general course. Not paying attention to the teacher's work has a low sense of accomplishment experience, which is a negative assessment of their own work performance.

Table 6

*Descriptive statistics of the number of students in three dimensions*

	M±SD				LSD
	Less than 100 people	101-200 people	201-300 people	More than 300 people	
Emotional exhaustion	2.73±0.93	2.51±0.95	2.71±0.94	3.24±1.04*	Group 4 mean > group 2 (mean difference=0.73)
Depersonalization	2.33±0.67	2.14±0.71	2.19±0.84	2.48±1.09	
Low accomplishment	3.96±1.08	3.15±0.92	3.6±0.90	3.97±0.73*	Group 4 mean > group 2 (mean difference=0.82)

**Conclusion**

Studies have found that job burnout of English teachers in rural middle schools in the west is more common, with a moderate degree of burnout. Using teacher gender, age, teaching age, professional title, and number of students as grouping variables, there are significant differences in the three-dimensional degree of job burnout, while variables such as marital status, whether there are children, monthly income, and education are tested on the three-



dimensional degree of job burnout There was no significant difference in the three-dimensional degree of job burnout . The main findings are shown in the table below.

Table 7

*Major Conclusions*

Subgroup Variables	Burnout Dimensions		Significance
teacher gender	Emotional	exhaustion	Yes
	Depersonalization		
	Low accomplishment		
age	Emotional	exhaustion	Yes
	Depersonalization		
	Low accomplishment		
teaching age	Emotional	exhaustion	Yes
	Depersonalization		
	Low accomplishment		
professional title	Emotional	exhaustion	Yes
	Depersonalization		
	Low accomplishment		
number of students	Emotional	exhaustion	Yes
	Depersonalization		
	Low accomplishment		
marital status	Emotional	exhaustion	No
	Depersonalization		
	Low accomplishment		
whether there are children	Emotional	exhaustion	No
	Depersonalization		
	Low accomplishment		
monthly income	Emotional	exhaustion	No
	Depersonalization		
	Low accomplishment		
education level	Emotional	exhaustion	No
	Depersonalization		
	Low accomplishment		

In conclusion, this study, rooted in the framework of self-determination theory, sheds light on the intricate interplay between motivation and job burnout among English teachers in rural middle schools in western China. The exploration of two distinct types of motivation, external and internal, underscores their differential impact on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes, contingent upon the extent of internalization and integration of these motivations. Importantly, teacher motivation emerges as a pivotal determinant not only shaping teachers' personal experiences and interpersonal interactions but also exerting a profound influence on students' motivation and overall learning quality.

The focal point of this study revolves around the manifestation of job burnout in the context of these teachers, wherein extrinsic motivation emerges as a key driver. The investigation highlights the close association between extrinsic motivation and detrimental outcomes, often culminating in teacher burnout. Recognizing this, the study advances a comprehensive perspective, grounded in teacher motivation, to envisage effective strategies for mitigating job burnout.

*A. Transitioning Extrinsic Motivation to Intrinsic Motivation for Rural Teachers*

Conceptualized as a continuum spanning from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, the transition involves a process of internalization and integration of individual values and needs. This

journey from non-self-determined motivation to self-determined motivation necessitates the fulfillment of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. By aligning their actions with personal interests and values, teachers in rural western regions embody self-expression, emanating from their intrinsic autonomy. Moreover, nurturing their competence involves embracing challenges, showcasing abilities, and bolstering self-assurance. Lastly, fostering a sense of relatedness through meaningful connections with fellow educators and students nurtures a feeling of community belonging. The confluence of these three needs and the resultant behaviors, driven by self-determined motivation, holds the promise of alleviating teacher job burnout.

### *B. Elevating the Quality of Teacher Motivation in Rural Settings*

Central to the pursuit of mitigating burnout is the elevation of motivation quality among teachers in rural areas. Contrasting higher-quality, autonomous motivation types (identification, integration, and intrinsic) with lower-quality, involuntary types (external motivation, acceptance motivation) reveals a stark distinction. The study corroborates the positive implications of autonomous motivation types, fostering improvements in psychological dimensions such as self-esteem, life satisfaction, happiness, and overall well-being. These positive psychological outcomes are mirrored in behavioral facets, including enhanced learning engagement, heightened interest, improved performance, and sustained perseverance.

To cultivate autonomous motivation, fostering "supportive interpersonal relationship behaviors" emerges as a cornerstone. This involves bolstering teachers' autonomy-supportive behaviors, encouraging the expression of diverse viewpoints, and actively involving them in decision-making processes. Additionally, supporting the development of others' competencies entails nurturing positive expectations, fostering learning enthusiasm, and offering constructive feedback to acknowledge progress. Finally, nurturing interpersonal relationships rests upon a foundation of understanding, support, and genuine care for colleagues and students. These collective efforts culminate in behaviors that nourish a supportive community. It is within this enriched motivational context that teachers find relief from burnout, as the positive impact of high-quality motivation permeates the realm of education and teaching.

In essence, the study's findings resonate with the pioneering self-determination theory, offering profound insights into teachers' motivation. It encapsulates their decision to embrace teaching, persevere in their educational journey, reap the rewards of success, and derive satisfaction from their work. The study's contributions extend beyond theory, delving into the contextual nuances of rural teaching environments. By unearthing the pivotal role of teacher motivation in shaping burnout, it underscores the significance of holistic strategies aimed at improving motivation quality, ultimately yielding far-reaching benefits for educators and students alike.

By addressing the editor's suggestion to emphasize the study's significance and contribution, the revised conclusion underscores how the research not only aligns with theoretical frameworks but also speaks directly to the real-world challenges faced by teachers, specifically in rural settings. It portrays how motivation, burnout, and effective mitigation strategies are intertwined, thereby solidifying the research's significance in both theoretical and practical dimensions.

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