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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Understanding Burnout Through the Lens of Teachers During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A
Phenomenological Study

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Rita Marie Garcia

December 2023

Dedication

Thank you, Daniel and Madison, for always being my reason why. Thank you for your unconditional love, support, sacrifice, and understanding. Thank you for giving me grace for the many nights (years!) when school consumed me and kept me from doing some of the fun stuff while you were growing up. Thank you for being my forever motivation and number 1 fan! Thank you for believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself! Thank you for keeping me accountable and never letting me give up! The two of you are the greatest blessings God could have ever blessed me with! Thank you for teaching me what unconditional love is all about because without your unwavering love and support, this degree would not have been possible. WE did it! I love you both to the moon and back! To infinity and beyond! You will forever be my reason why! I love you MORE!

Thank you, Mom and Dad! Words cannot express my gratitude for your unconditional love and support. Dad, thank you for always making me believe I was smart and could do anything if I put my mind to it. Thank you for always pushing me to be the best version of myself. I have never been more proud to be Daddy's Girl! From the bottom of my heart, I love you, Dad!

Mom, I wish you were here to read this, but I have a feeling God already gave you my dissertation in Heaven! Thank you for all the years you selflessly helped me raise Daniel and Madison. I could not have done it without you! Days before God called you home, I promised you I would not give up...When I walk across the stage on December 15, 2023... I hope you know this one's for you, Mom! I love you MORE!

Thank you, Larry, for your beautiful support and insanely generous encouragement. Thank you for praying for me, cheering me on, educating me about pivot tables and coaching me up on the importance of data! Thank you for coffee shop adventures, recharge dates, flowers of

encouragement, kind words, and keeping me on track! You have shown me what a true partner is all about and I am so incredibly grateful for you!

Thank you to all teachers! You are the foundation of service to others. Take care of yourself because you are worth it! Take a deep breath often! Find healthy ways to cope because you are loved and needed by so many. Explore your resources and recharge often because you are changing the world for the better one student at a time! Continue to educate with passion! Serve with all your heart! BUT promise to fill your cup with goodness because education begins with you!

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Timothy Atkinson for accepting to chair my dissertation. I will forever hold a special place in my heart for you for sharing this journey with me, but I want you to know something near and dear to my heart. I received the email that you accepted to be my chair as we were leaving the church and processing to the cemetery to lay my Mom to rest. I believe God and my Mom had a part in choosing you to be my chair and I am forever grateful.

Thank you for sharing an ounce of your profound knowledge with me. I consider myself blessed that you exposed me to a new world of employee wellness and opened my eyes to the importance of meaningful work and coping to organizational wellness. Thank you for your selfless dedication and generous time as my chair; without you, this accomplishment would not have been possible. Thank you for being so incredibly patient and kind when I needed it most! I hope you know you are making dreams come true with your dedication to research and education, thank YOU and God bless you and yours!

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Abstract

As teachers make their way back to the classroom for the 2023–2024 school year, teacher burnout is manifesting itself mentally, physically, and emotionally. In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 epidemic a global pandemic, which forced unwanted change in many organizations, especially education (Pressley, 2021). In the state of emergency schools were forced to close and new teaching methods were erected abruptly. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation describes the professions of teaching as one of the most stressful occupations in the United States. Although stress is inevitable, the COVID-19 pandemic has created new stressors and demands that have negatively impacted teachers' and caused rising rates in mental health, coping, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, attrition, and turnover (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Pressley, 2021). Three years after the pandemic entered the United States, chronic stress and burnout have continued to wreak havoc on the education system, forcing many teachers to leave the profession and add to the teacher shortage crisis today. The immense uncertainty of the pandemic has resulted in unmanageable work stress, and many teachers are choosing to leave the classroom. In the midst of uncertainty, teachers had to adjust to increased job responsibilities, little to no administrative support, and less resources. Required to accept alternative teaching environments, technology challenges, and emergent safety protocols, teachers have been forced to cope and overcome adversity. The reality of teaching has changed dramatically, especially from before the COVID-19 pandemic. For many the added stress has negatively impacted the physical and psychological health of teachers, which can lead to negative effects on the classroom environment (Hurley, 2021). In this qualitative, phenomenological study, the focus was to gain a better understanding of teacher burnout during

the COVID-19 pandemic through the lived experiences of teachers and discover if coping and meaningful work were factors that influenced their experience.

Keywords: stress, burnout, COVID-19, pandemic, phenomenology, coping, meaningful work

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures.....	x
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions	6
Definition of Key Terms	6
Summary	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
Literature Search Methods	10
Conceptual Framework.....	10
Stress	13
Background on Burnout.....	14
Three Characteristics of Burnout	16
The International Classification of Diseases.....	18
Risk Factors of Work-Related Stress and Burnout.....	19
Physical and Psychological Consequences of Teacher Burnout.....	22
Financial Consequences of Teacher Burnout	24
Organizational Consequences of Teacher Burnout.....	24
The COVID-19 Pandemic.....	27
Shifting the Focus to Coping and Meaningful Work.....	31
Summary	33
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	34
Research Design and Method	34
Population	37
Study Sample	37
Participant Recruitment	38
Data Collection	39
Expert Panel and Field Test	40
Face-to-Face Interviews.....	41
Data Analysis	43
Analytic Memoing	43
Coding.....	44
Transcription of Audio Interviews.....	45

Ethical Considerations	45
Researcher’s Role	46
Transparency	46
Confidentiality	47
Empathy	47
Integrity and Honesty: Trustworthiness	48
Assumptions.....	48
Limitations	49
Delimitations.....	50
Summary	50
 Chapter 4: Results	 52
Participant Data.....	52
Themes	71
Meaningful Work.....	71
Coping.....	72
Technology Challenges.....	73
Summary	74
 Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	 76
Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature	76
RQ1: What are the Lived Experiences of Teacher Burnout During the COVID-19 Pandemic?	77
RQ2: How Do Teachers at Study Site ISD (pseudonym) Describe Burnout?.....	80
RQ3: How Do Teachers at Study Site ISD (pseudonym) Describe Coping and Meaningful Work?	82
Review of Findings	84
Limitations	87
Future Research	88
Recommendations.....	88
Essence Statement.....	88
Conclusions.....	90
Summary	91
 References.....	 92
 Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter	 112
 Appendix B: Example Questions for the Qualitative Interviews.....	 114

List of Tables

Table 1. Characteristics of Burnout	18
Table 2. Participant Demographic Summary	55
Table 3. Descriptive Stressors, Coping Strategies, and Life Events.....	57
Table 4. Summary of Coping Strategies	61
Table 5. Summary of Coping Strategies by Gender	63
Table 6. Summary of Stressors for Title 1 and Non-Title 1 Participants	65
Table 7. Summary of Stressors for Title 1 and Non-Title 1 Participants by Gender.....	67
Table 8. Most Common Stressors for Non-Title 1 Participants.....	68
Table 9. Most Common Stressors for Title 1 Participants.....	69
Table 10. Most Common Stressors by Gender	70

List of Figures

Figure 1. The Visual of Lazarus's Transactional Theory12

Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explain the phenomenon of teacher burnout through lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if coping and meaningful work are factors that influence burnout prevention. Over the last few years, the COVID-19 pandemic and the phenomenon of burnout have gained attention across the world, especially among teachers. Teaching has been recognized as a rewarding and vital field that many people choose to make a career, but over the last several years, teaching has changed considerably. Often recognized as pillars in the community, teachers are held to high standards because of their impact on the academic and life-long success of their students (Blazer, 2010). Aside from the pandemic, even under the most ideal conditions, teaching can also be a demanding and stressful profession. As teachers returned to the classroom in the United States for the 2020–2021 school year, many returned to less than rewarding conditions. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts were forced to conform to new ways of teaching and learning including hybrid classrooms, virtual learning, social distancing, and mask requirements (Pressley, 2021; Răducu & Stănculescu, 2022). The new job demands along with previous job demands have created higher-than-normal levels of stress for teachers.

Work-related stress and burnout are known to every profession and every walk of life. According to the World Health Organization (2020), work-related stress is the response people experience when presented with work demands and pressures that are incongruent to their knowledge and abilities and the ability to cope is challenged. Before the pandemic, the consequences of stress in the workplace were referred to as common organizational concerns (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Research has suggested that work overload, emotional and

physical job demands, and work-home conflict are risk factors for burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to chronic stress and unwavering demands resulting in rising rates of emotional exhaustion, feelings of low personal accomplishment, and job dissatisfaction (Maslach et al., 2001). Hurley (2021) suggested that teacher burnout is a major organizational problem due to the impact of the ability for teachers to perform their roles effectively by exhausting their mental health, emotional wellness, and physical wellbeing (as cited in Miller, 2022). Also, the exposure to such chronic stress has negatively impacted educators which is resulting in more absenteeism, attrition, and turnover (Miller, 2022). As teachers lead the education system and turnover rates continue to rise, it is now more critical than ever before to bring awareness to the plethora of risks associated with teacher burnout and explore tools that school districts can use with their teachers to minimize teacher burnout and provide resources for coping.

Due to the negative consequences burnout has on teachers, their students, the school community, and the educational system as a whole, teacher burnout has become a global organizational concern (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015). Burnout and the risks associated with burnout have the potential to impact teaching quality, output, lower engagement, and lower job satisfaction (Hyatt, 2022). Before the pandemic, other factors contributing to teacher burnout included standardized testing, unstable public policy surrounding education, accountability, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction (Hager, 2022; Liu, 2022). Since the COVID-19 pandemic erupted in the United States, burnout has become an organizational concern, and many experts are blaming the confluence of factors including new expectations for learning, job responsibilities, and school safety policies for the escalating rate of teacher burnout (Pressley, 2021). The

uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic has left many teachers feeling overworked, anxious, and unsupported (Rubilar & Oros, 2021).

Even though the pandemic was unavoidable, it has created new and challenging levels of work-related stress, emotional demands, and unmanageable workloads for teachers across the world. As the imbalance of job demands and available resources continue to rise in education, the number of teachers choosing to leave the classroom has also increased. Organizations need to make burnout and burnout prevention a priority because of the impact burnout has on employee well-being since most people today spend more time at work than they do at home (Atkinson et al., 2018; Maslach, 2019). Because burnout negatively affects teacher well-being, organizational effectiveness, and student learning, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explain the phenomenon of teacher burnout through lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if coping and meaningful work are factors that influence burnout prevention.

Statement of the Problem

Burnout can negatively impact an entire organization. More specifically, research has suggested that teacher burnout is a significant organizational problem because it affects the overall health and well-being of teachers, teacher attrition, job satisfaction, and student success (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). When teachers are not well, their students suffer. When teachers do not feel fulfilled, their work suffers. When teachers do not cope, they are unable to overcome adversity. Teachers are expected to provide instruction, social-emotional support, and build strong relationships with their students and families with inadequate compensation, and support from leadership and administration which can ultimately result in burnout (Atashpanjeh et al., 2020; Tesfaye et al., 2023). Even in the best of times, teaching has been recognized as a highly

stressful career. Many teachers have retained these original stressors but added other notable concerns surrounding their physical health, safety, and well-being (Will, 2021). The negative repercussions associated with work-related stress and burnout have gained much attention since the COVID-19 pandemic made its presence in the United States in early 2020. The United States has experienced teacher shortages for decades, but the many uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic added to the increase (García-Lázaro et al., 2022). In 2021, according to the RAND Corporation (2021), a nonprofit organization that focuses on research and development solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities safer, healthier, and more prosperous, nearly one in four teachers have contemplated leaving the profession at the end of the 2020–21 school year, compared to one in six teachers before the pandemic (Steiner & Woo, 2021). The uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened organizational challenges for teachers and added new concerns including physical and mental well-being (Robinson et al., 2023; Will, 2021). A recent survey done by the National Education Association (2022), the world's largest union for teachers, confirmed that stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic is a major organizational problem and suggested that immediate action is needed to address the crisis of teachers leaving the classroom including adequate pay salaries, mental health support, hiring more teachers and staff, and less paperwork. Although workplace stress and teacher burnout are not new concerns, it is imperative to fill the gap in research to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of teacher burnout through the lived experiences of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if coping and meaningful work prevent burnout.

Purpose of the Study

Teacher burnout is a growing organizational problem and a threat to our education system. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explain the phenomenon

of teacher burnout through lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if coping and meaningful work are factors that influence burnout prevention. There are many causes for teacher burnout, but the COVID-19 pandemic and issues related to the pandemic have created a discrepancy of relentless stress and unrealistic expectations for teachers today, which is forcing many out of the classroom. Teacher burnout has become one of the most prevailing challenges distressing the education system today due to the negative influence it can have on teachers' ability to perform their roles effectively and draining their mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Hurley, 2021). With the national crisis of teacher shortages and the consequences it can have on one's physical, social, emotional, and financial well-being, there is a great need for more research to better understand teacher burnout and discover potential strategies for preventing burnout.

For this qualitative study, the phenomenological research method seemed most appropriate because it allowed me to dive deep into the phenomenon of teacher burnout and provided the voice of the teacher. Although teacher burnout is not well-defined or a psychological diagnosis, teacher burnout is a growing organizational challenge that needs attention. Due to the growing concern of teacher burnout and the crisis of teacher shortages, it is critical to study the lived experiences of teachers teaching during the COVID-19 to fully understand teachers' experiences of burnout and discover if coping and meaningful work play a role in preventing burnout.

In my role as the district's Health and Financial Wellness Coordinator, this research is very important to me because I wanted to know more about what teachers experienced teaching during the toughest days of the COVID-19 pandemic and to help bring awareness of burnout and explore coping strategies to prevent burnout. Teachers who taught from the spring of 2020 until

now were selected from study site ISD. I reached out to campus principals to help me identify teachers from their campus who demonstrated positive coping skills during the pandemic and another teacher who struggled to adapt to the changes. I interviewed 15 teachers for this study, with representation from elementary, middle, high school, and special schools. The teachers selected received an email requesting participation in the study and contacted via email with a letter of consent explaining the study. After the consents were received, each teacher was asked to participate in an extensive, open-ended interview, approximately an hour in length, that I conducted face-to-face.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative, phenomenological study. The lived experiences helped explain teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if coping and meaningful work impact burnout prevention. For this study, the three main research questions were:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: How do teachers at study site ISD (pseudonym) describe burnout?

RQ3: How do teachers at study site ISD (pseudonym) describe coping and meaningful work?

Definition of Key Terms

Blended learning. The Texas Education Agency (2020) has defined blended learning as a combination of online learning with face-to-face teacher-led instruction to effectively differentiate instruction for all students.

Burnout. Burnout is a psychological syndrome that can develop with a prolonged exposure to chronic interpersonal stress and characterized by three components: exhaustion, cynicism, and a lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue refers to the physical or emotional stress and exhaustion that develops as a vicarious response to another's suffering. For teachers, they are considered at-risk to experience compassion fatigue because they are consistently helping others (Yu et al., 2022).

Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI). The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory is a free burnout measurement tool that measures: (a) personal burnout, (b) work-related burnout, and (c) client-related burnout (Kristensen et al., 2005).

Coping. Coping is defined as “cognitive and behavioral strategies used for possible solutions to a problem or a negative event or decrease the negative effects on the individual as much as possible” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in Berjot & Gillet, 2011).

International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). The International Classification of Diseases (ICD) is a diagnostic tool used and maintained by the World Health Organization (WHO) for epidemiology, health management, and clinical purposes. The 11th revision of the international classification of diseases identified burnout as an occupational phenomenon, not a medical condition, in May 2019.

Meaningful work. The construct of meaningful work is often studied as an important component of wellness and an act to combat burnout and the selfless focus on service to others (Atkinson et al., 2018).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was defined by Bandura (1997) as "... beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (as cited in Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020, p. 951).

Stress. Stress is when the demand outweighs one's coping resources (Ansley et al., 2021).

Summary

In summary, because COVID-19 pandemic was unavoidable, it has entirely changed the face of education. The changes that have occurred as a result of the pandemic have created new levels of work-related stress, emotional demands, and unmanageable workloads for teachers across the world. Chapter 2 presents a preview of the literature concerning work-related stress, burnout, coping, and meaningful work. Also included in Chapter 2 is a preview of the conceptual framework, targeted population, consequences of work-related stress, potential strategies for preventing burnout, and a background of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 3 includes the methodology used in the study, research design, and targeted population. Chapter 4 includes the discussion with a brief overview of the purpose of the research study and an overview of the chapter's organization. Chapter 5 includes a discussion, and conclusion and offers recommendations for application and further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Teacher burnout is an organizational concern that affects everyone from students, teachers, administrators, and the community at large. Stress is inevitable in every profession and does not discriminate from race, age, or demographic status. Since the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges teachers have faced has created unwavering levels of stress. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, common work-related stressors included education policies, student behaviors, and inadequate resources, but today while the common stressors remain, new ones have been added (Will, 2021). Stauffer and Mason (2013) described the expectation of teachers today is not just to provide instruction but also build strong relationships, social-emotional support, all with inadequate compensation, little to no support from leadership, limited resources, and a lack of coping interventions (as cited in Robinson et al., 2023). These factors alone can increase work-related stress and lead to burnout. The uncertainty and new challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic have created higher-than-normal levels of stress and teachers are suffering the consequences. While many teachers have retained the original stressors of teaching, more and more teachers are suffering from the newer concerns surrounding their physical health, safety, and well-being (Will, 2021).

Many teachers across the world are suffering the consequences of this pandemic, and teacher shortages have become a horrific reality. With new expectations for classroom teachers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing concern for burnout, it is imperative for teachers to learn and implement new ways of coping to prevent burnout. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explain the phenomenon of teacher burnout through the lived experiences of study site ISD (pseudonym) teachers who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if coping and meaningful work influenced burnout prevention. Research

has shown that burnout has a negative influence on absenteeism, mental illness, performance, early retirement, motivation, job satisfaction, and depersonalization (Huberman & Vandenberghe, 1999). To reduce teacher burnout and improve job satisfaction, engagement, and teacher retention, there needs to be a greater awareness of burnout, leadership support, and resources for coping.

Literature Search Methods

The literature search methods used in this chapter included The Abilene Christian University Online Library, Distance Learning Portal, Margaret and Herman Brown Library, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), and EBSCOhost. The San Antonio Public Library and the University of Texas at San Antonio Library were also used in finding resource materials. The literature review included the following keyword search phrases: *teacher burnout, burnout, teacher attrition, resilience, coping, meaningful work, emotional exhaustion, compassion fatigue, attrition, mental exhaustion, efficacy, Maslach Burnout Inventory, Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, Christina Maslach, COVID-19 and teachers, global pandemic and teaching, consequences of hybrid teaching, teacher turnover, teacher shortage, Freudenberger, perceived self-efficacy, teacher self-efficacy, depersonalization, retention, occupational stress, stress, phenomenological study, Maslach, self-efficacy, teacher stress, coping during a pandemic, teachers stress during a pandemic, and COVID-19 and teacher burnout.*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is an outline that often identifies a relationship between the theory used in the study and the data obtained from the research. The conceptual framework used in this study is based on Lazarus' theory of stress and coping and Maslach's theory of burnout.

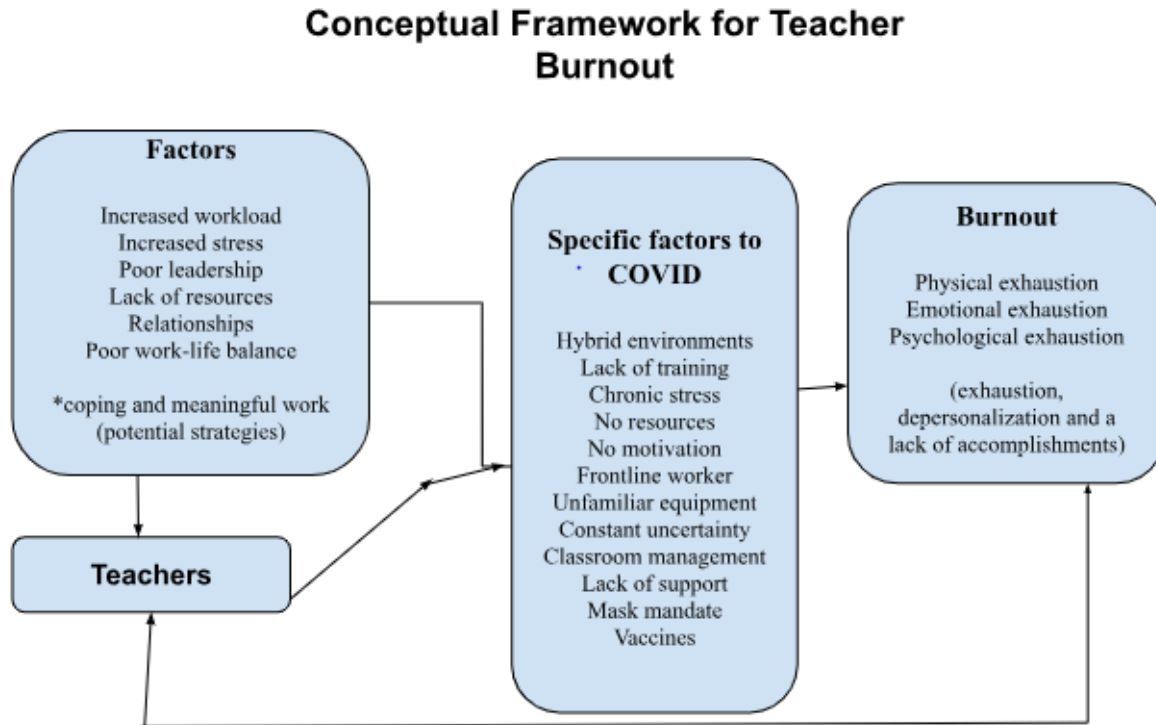
Both theories describe reasons why individuals might experience burnout and factors that may be associated with burnout. Lazarus's theory of stress and coping is appropriate because it portrays how people relate stress to their environment and ways of coping (Cooper & Quick, 2017).

Maslach's theory of burnout is also appropriate for this study because this theory examines the components of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment (Huberman & Vandenberghe, 1999). Examining the components of burnout as they relate to teachers will encourage a better understanding of what teachers experienced while teaching during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and will help to discover if coping and meaningful work influenced burnout prevention.

The transactional theory of stress and coping is often the most prevalent framework for comprehending teacher stress (McCarthy et al., 2022). The transactional theory of stress and coping was incorporated into the theoretical framework as the coping strategies for managing emotions and solution-oriented pertaining to health and well-being are associated with burnout (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The transactional theory of stress suggests that when demands increase, so must the available resources (McCarthy et al., 2022). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), "psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being" (as cited in Berjot & Gillet, 2011, p. 2). Based on this perspective, the greater the potential for damage perceived in the demands of the environment, the lower the ability for the individual to cope (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Figure 1 is my visual interpretation of Lazarus' transactional theory of stress and coping.

Figure 1

The Visual of Lazarus's Transactional Theory



Based on Lazarus' transactional theory of stress and coping when teachers perceive that job demands exceed their capabilities for coping, stress increases and more likely to experience job dissatisfaction, exhaustion, and burnout (McCarthy et al., 2022). This theory is critical to this study because of the relationship between the teacher and the classroom. With this theory, the teacher would self-evaluate the level of threat a situation (stress) offers, then apply a coping strategy like mindfulness, positive thinking, relaxation, or social support to help with stress management (McCarthy et al., 2022). According to Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of stress and coping (1984), individuals are always evaluating stimuli within their environment, and when the stimuli is perceived as threatening, coping strategies are initiated (Biggs et al.,

2017). When coping behaviors are applied, reactions can be positive or negative depending on the perception of the appraisal (Biggs et al., 2017). Maslach's theory of burnout examines all three components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment (Huberman & Vandenberghe, 1999). According to Maslach's theory of burnout, consistent feelings of tiredness, isolation, and feelings of personal incompetence can all contribute to burnout (Baker et al., 2021). These two theories were chosen for this study because I believe using both the Lazarus' transactional theory of stress and coping and the theory of burnout will better explain the positive relationship between coping strategies, meaningful work, and burnout prevention.

Stress

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined stress as a relationship between the individual and their current environment and occurs when the individual feels that a particular aspect of their environment is a threat or challenge to their strength, resulting in a threat to one's self-esteem or well-being (as cited in Vučinić et al., 2022). The reaction people experience when work demands and pressures are not congruent with their knowledge and abilities and challenge their ability to cope is what the World Health Organization (2020) described as work-related stress. Research has further suggested that work overload, emotional and physical job demands, and work-home conflict are also risk factors for burnout (Bakker et al., 2021). In 1978, Kyriacou and Sutcliffe first defined the experience of teacher stress as the

negative affect (such as anger or depression) by a teacher usually accompanied by potentially pathogenic physical or biological and biochemical changes... resulting from parts of the teacher's job 'mediated by the perception that' demands made upon the

teacher constitute a threat to his self-esteem or well-being and by coping mechanisms activated to reduce the perceived threat. (as cited in Agyapong et al., 2023, p. 1)

Kyriacou (2001) explained that teacher stress is unique to the individual and associated with negative emotions that are a result of exceeding demands associated with their role as a teacher. Stress is inevitable, but unresolved stress and poor coping should never be contributing factors to poor employee well-being, turnover, and burnout. It is critical to fully understand the phenomenon of burnout and explain any coping strategies associated with burnout with the belief that burnout can be defined within this group and can be prevented with the appropriate resources.

Background on Burnout

Herbert Freudenberger coined the term burnout in the early 1970s to describe people who were physically and psychologically depleted as a reaction to chronic, prolonged stress at work (Fitchett et al., 2021; Huberman & Vandenberghe, 1999). Freudenberger identified that burnout was most prevalent in human service professionals (healthcare workers, physicians, nurses, teachers, and therapists) because of the primary nature of their work (Fitchett et al., 2021; Huberman & Vandenberghe, 1999; Maslach, 1999). Although Freudenberger coined the term burnout, Maslach (1999) defined burnout as the psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion (i.e., stress component), depersonalization (i.e., other-evaluation component), and a reduced personal accomplishment (i.e., self-evaluation component; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). Maslach has been identified as a significant pioneer in burnout research and continues to be one of the most prominent scholars in this field of research (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017).

Burnout is a phenomenon that has been considerably researched for more than four decades. Until the early 1980s, burnout was studied exclusively in the United States (Maslach &

Leiter, 1999). In the early 1970s, there was still very little known about burnout. It was not until the early 1980s did burnout research become more focused, constructive, and empirical (Maslach, 1999, as cited in Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999, p. 213). In addition to being a major pioneer in burnout research, Maslach is also responsible for developing the burnout measurement tool known as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Huberman & Vandenberghe, 1999). The Maslach Burnout Inventory was specifically designed to address the three dimensions of the burnout experience and considered to be the standard tool for research in this field (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Since this tool was developed, other burnout measurement tools have now been introduced including The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, which measures exhaustion and disengagement from work, and the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, which measures physical and psychological exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson have since further conceptualized burnout as an individual stress experience that is rooted in a context of social relationships and involves the person's conception of both self and others (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Maslach, 1999, as cited in Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). Teacher burnout is a growing organizational concern because it can negatively affect the effectiveness of teaching, teachers' interactions with students, motivation, the ability to support students, and absenteeism (Gómez-Dominguez et al., 2022). Before the pandemic, stress and teacher burnout were still important organizational concerns. The added stressors and challenges fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic have only amplified this organizational concern because of the significant risk of burnout for teachers (Robinson et al., 2023; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021).

Three Characteristics of Burnout

The most influential definition of burnout dates back to 1981 from Maslach and Jackson: “Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced personal accomplishment that occurs frequently among individuals who do ‘people work’” (Schaufeli et al., 2023, p. 219). Maslach also described burnout as a type of prolonged occupational stress that particularly results from interpersonal demands at work and is distinguished by three domains, emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and the feeling of inadequacy (Maslach et al., 2001; Muhonen et al., 2022). Schaufeli et al. (2009) explained that burnout was significant because it stipulated that the employee was experiencing exhaustion and developed negative attitudes towards their clients (depersonalization), and often felt they lacked the competence needed to help their clients (as cited by Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 686). These characteristics make burnout most common among individuals who work in human service professions because of the immense “giving” nature of the profession (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Compassion fatigue is a term used to describe the physical or emotional stress and exhaustion that develops as a vicarious response to someone else’s suffering (Yu et al., 2022). Teachers are constantly taking the initiative to give more care and help to students build and maintain good relationships between teachers and students and handle a magnitude of educational and teaching problems (Yu et al., 2022). Compassion fatigue reduces the interest and ability to endure the pain of others, which makes teachers prone to this unique type of burnout (Yu et al., 2022).

Figure 2 is an outline of the three characteristics of burnout central to this study. The central component of burnout, emotional exhaustion, can occur when teachers feel their emotional resources are exhausted or overextended by contact with other people, especially their students (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015; Maslach et al., 2001; Muhonen et al., 2022). Müller

and Goldenberg (2020) suggested that due to the nature of their role, many teachers feel liable for processing their stress and supporting students through theirs (as cited in Weißenfels et al., 2021). Emotional exhaustion remains to be the hallmark component of burnout involving feelings of being overworked, inefficient, and emotionally and physically depleted (Maslach et al., 2001). When teachers remain emotionally and physically depleted, they often distance themselves from others (Rumschlag, 2017). The component of exhaustion is closest to a conservative variable of stress and therefore is more predictive of stress-related health outcomes than the other two dimensions (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The emotional exhaustion that occurs with burnout has been shown to be positively related with overload of work teachers are experiencing (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020).

The second component is depersonalization and includes negative feelings and perceptions about people you work with and those who share your environment (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Depersonalization refers to the dehumanized or impersonal perceptions of others (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015). Factors that affect depersonalization include self-efficacy, workload, emotional exhaustion, lack of decision-making (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015), lack of compassion, or disengagement to others, who are usually the recipients of one's service or care (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Reduced personal accomplishment is the third component and involves a decrease in feelings of personal accomplishment which can also impact self-efficacy, performance, job satisfaction, and morale (McCormack et al., 2018). A decrease in professional competence and effectiveness, or personal accomplishment, also includes factors like student misbehavior, teaching efficacy, confidence, depersonalization, and lack of resources for mindfulness interventions (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015).

Table 1*Characteristics of Burnout*

Characteristic of burnout	Description of the characteristic
Emotional Exhaustion	A key component of burnout involving feelings of being overworked, inefficient, and emotionally and physically depleted (Maslach et al., 2001).
Depersonalization or Cynicism	Refers to a negative, lacking compassion, or detached response to others, who are usually the recipients of one's service or care (Maslach, 1999).
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	Measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work (Maslach, 1999).

The International Classification of Diseases

The International Classification of Diseases (ICD) is a diagnostic tool globally used and maintained by the World Health Organization (WHO) for epidemiology, health management, and clinical purposes. The 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases was released in May 2019, which identified burnout as an occupational phenomenon, not a medical condition. The International Classification of Diseases provides critical knowledge on the extent, causes and consequences of human disease and death worldwide via data that is reported and coded with the International Classification of Diseases. In the latest revision (2019), burnout was included as an *occupational phenomenon*. In a recent [video] discussion on understanding job burnout, Maslach (2019) said, "It [the phenomenon of burnout] is not a disease, it is something that can lead to other kinds of health issues and can lead people to go to health institutions for

help.” Burnout is not new to this classification but more details were added. The latest revision for burnout according to the World Health Organization (2019) included,

Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- 1) feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- 2) increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job, and
- 3) a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment.

Burnout is a public health concern, and more research is needed to fully define this phenomenon because of the impact it has on individual work and personal lives (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022).

Risk Factors of Work-Related Stress and Burnout

Work-related stress is inevitable in every profession. Stress is not always bad. Burnout can be beneficial when it is short term, positive, and prepares you for something ahead. Short-term stress can be positive when it motivates resilience to help overcome difficult situations (Baffour, 2017; Bienertova-Vasku et al., 2020). When stress becomes chronic and becomes unresolved, more problems are likely to arise. According to American University (2021) in Washington, D.C., the risk factors associated with prolonged stress and burnout are serious concerns because of the increased feelings of inefficiency, disengagement, and not being supported or fulfilled. The American Psychological Association (2023) suggested that prolonged work-related stress can lead to poor health including mental and physical symptoms including anxiety, depression, and sleep problems.

Teachers are the foundation for our children’s academic success and are recognized as exemplary pillars in the community. Teachers play an extremely critical part in the academic

success of their students. Teachers' help students feel safe, encouraged, and connected by creating solid learning environments and positive relationships (Davis et al., 2022). Teachers give children purpose, prepare a path for success, and inspire them to do their best. Teaching is a profession where relationships between teacher and students are vital to the success of the student and teacher. In 2019, the Rand Corporation reported that in the subjects of math and science, teachers have two or three times the effect of any other school factor including academic services, facilities, and leadership (Opper, 2019). Teachers often choose education as a profession because of the inherent passion for teaching students. However, there are always challenges to every career. While teaching can be a very rewarding and gratifying career, it can also be demanding and exhausting.

The expectation for teachers has changed dramatically as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The nature of how quickly change had to occur for students and teachers, there is no doubt teachers have struggled with higher levels of stress, anxiety, and even depression (Ma et al., 2022). Kyriacou (2001) described teacher stress "as the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" (p. 28). Most definitions of stress align well with Kyriacou's definition of teacher stress; however, the way an individual perceives stress can determine how well they cope with stress. The constant feelings of being overworked, having no support, and feeling inadequate play an important role in burnout, making burnout costly to the employee because it increases the risk for chronic illnesses including heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes (Weiss, 2020; White, 2021). Associated with depression, anxiety, muscle pain, headaches, and insomnia, work-related stress is a major predictor of burnout (Hurley, 2021). Nonspecific symptoms associated with burnout syndrome include

emotional instability, and rigidity in social relationships (Carod-Artal & Vázquez-Cabrera, 2013). Unresolved and poorly managed stress often results in adverse physical and mental health, disengagement, and high turnover (Barton, 2021; Moss, 2019; Thrush et al., 2021).

Maslach and others have explored that burnout is related to the degree of fit between a person and his or her job requirements (Coyle et al., 2020). In 1984, Lazarus and Folkman defined stress “as a particular interaction between the person and the environment, appraised or evaluated by the person as being taxing or exceeding his or her personal resources, and, as a consequence, disrupting his or her daily routines” (as cited in Montgomery & Rupp, 2005, p. 460). The ability to cope is challenged when the demands and pressures of work are not matched to an individual’s knowledge and abilities (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Lazarus’ theory of stress and coping suggested that stress and burnout occur when an individual has a negative appraisal between the demands given and the ability to cope with those demands (Herman et al., 2018). Conversely, the World Health Organization (2020), explained that individuals are less likely to experience work-related stress when (a) demands and pressures of work are matched to their knowledge and abilities, (b) control can be exercised over their work and the way they do it, (c) support is received from supervisors and colleagues, and (d) participation in decisions that concern their jobs is provided. While stress affects everyone differently because of the way it is perceived, burnout is an inherent part of stress and more likely to occur when the stressor is not successfully managed.

Teacher stress has been linked to poor performance, job dissatisfaction, and teacher burnout (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Teachers who experience chronic stress are less effective in the classroom (Wettstein et al., 2021). With less effectiveness in the classroom, self-efficacy suffers, performance drops, mental and physical health declines, and academic success can also

suffer (Lever et al., 2017). Due to the negative impact burnout creates for teachers and students, teacher burnout is considered to be one of the most notable problems affecting the education system today (Hurley, 2021). Work-related stress can reduce productivity and creativity and decrease job satisfaction and job commitment (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Teachers are vital in every community, but teaching is discernibly not an easy profession. The risks associated with burnout are critical because stress and burnout impact employee well-being (Atkinson et al., 2018; Maslach, 2019).

Physical and Psychological Consequences of Teacher Burnout

The outcomes of chronic stress and burnout can include adverse physical and mental health, disengagement, and high turnout (Barton, 2021; Moss, 2019; Thrush et al., 2021). The two body systems most affected by acute stressors and prolonged stress, are the autonomic nervous system (ANS) and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA; Bayes et al., 2021). The human body's natural response to acute (short-lived) stress is beneficial and necessary for survival (Dhabhar, 2018). When short-term stress is not resolved, chronic stress can result.

Since the body is not intended to remain in a fight or flight state for extended periods of time, the body often does not respond well, and negative health effects can result (Dhabhar, 2018). When a resolution to stress does not occur, the HPA is activated to release hormones that increase blood sugar and energetic effects and suppress the immune system (Bayes et al., 2021). For some individuals, common physical symptoms of stress may include headaches, stomachaches, backaches, stiffness in the neck, elevated blood pressure, eating problems, and fatigue, and insomnia (Hurley, 2021; Miller, 2022; Shoulders et al., 2021; Weiss, 2020; White, 2021). The frequent inability to relax and restore a healthy work-life balance can lead to increased risk for serious health concerns and chronic illnesses, including musculoskeletal

disorders, cardiovascular disease, myocardial infarction, type 2 diabetes, depression, and suicide (Carod-Artal & Vásquez-Cabrera, 2013; Hurley, 2021; Miller, 2022; Weiss, 2020; White, 2021). Other physical symptoms related to work-related stress and burnout may include depression, anxiety, and an increased risk for alcoholism (Carod-Artal & Vásquez-Cabrera, 2013). In a recent newsletter, The Mayo Clinic (2021) addressed that job burnout can have significant consequences, including exhaustion, depression, and disengagement, all of which impact employee well-being. Nielsen et al. (2017) described employee wellbeing as “the state of individuals' mental, physical, and general health, as well as their experiences of satisfaction both at work and outside of work.” (p. 104).

The American Psychological Association (2018) suggested that chronic work-related stress can lead to poor health including mental and physical symptoms including anxiety, depression, and sleep problems. More research on teacher burnout has suggested that stress associated with work can be linked to three overlapping issues: burnout, anxiety, and depression, which have a multitude of effects, including an impact on teachers' health, overall well-being, and productivity (Agyapong et al., 2023). With less effectiveness in the classroom, self-efficacy suffers, performance drops, mental and physical health declines, and academic success can also suffer (Lever et al., 2017). The adverse health outcomes associated with chronic stress can affect teachers' personal lives, work-related performance, productivity, and unintentionally impact students (Agyapong et al., 2023). As more teachers are experiencing burnout, more research has pointed toward teacher burnout and the negative association with mental health and job satisfaction (Capone & Pertrillo, 2020). A better understanding of burnout is needed because of the impact on physical and mental health, performance, morale, job satisfaction, and turnover (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022).

Financial Consequences of Teacher Burnout

The financial costs of burnout to an organization are significant (Garton, 2017). Research done by the University of California at Berkeley (2020) and the American Psychological Association (2020) suggested that the physical and emotional problems associated with burnout cost the U.S. economy a surplus of more than \$500 billion a year, with lost productivity amounting to \$550 million workdays (Schelenz, 2020). The *Harvard Business Review* reported that the physical and psychological healthcare costs in the United States alone are estimated at \$125 billion to \$190 billion (Garton, 2017). Teacher turnover creates a high financial strain on school leaders because recruiting and training new teachers takes time and money. It is estimated that one-third of employees experience high levels of burnout and ultimately leave their profession during the first 3 to 5 years of employment (Schneider-Levi et al., 2020). The Learning Policy Institute (2017) revealed that urban school districts spend an average of \$20,000 on a new hire, including school and district expenses related to separation, recruitment, hiring, and training. Specifically for teachers, high turnover increases financial burdens on the school district and our education system (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). According to the Learning Policy Institute (2017), high teacher turnover threatens student achievement and consumes time and resources. Burnout impacts the organization with higher healthcare costs, absenteeism, and job dissatisfaction (Salvagioni et al., 2017).

Organizational Consequences of Teacher Burnout

Researchers have continued to explain that long-term stress in the workplace is a significant concern because of the negative impact it can present on the overall well-being of employees and the organization's success. Burnout is a complex phenomenon and must be specific to describe that the feelings of exhaustion are work-related and not related to other

experiences outside of the workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The risks of burnout are considerable and growing occupational concerns for employers because stress and burnout directly impact employee well-being (Atkinson et al., 2018; Maslach, 2019; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Teacher burnout is an organizational problem because of the association of higher levels of chronic, work-related stress and poor coping skills (Herman et al., 2021). Teacher burnout is associated with negative consequences on teachers, their students, the school community, and the entire educational system (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015). With the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the growing problem of teacher burnout has continued to worsen because the experts are blaming the confluence of factors including pandemic-induced teacher exhaustion, low pay, personal safety, and political debates on curriculum for the escalating rate of teacher burnout (Pressley, 2021).

According to Schelenz (2020), at the University of California at Berkeley, the World Health Organization recently embraced Maslach's concept of burnout and is developing guidelines to help organizations manage the problem. The more burnout is understood, the more accepted the burden of fixing this organizational problem will be on the employer, rather than the employee. Based on Maslach's work, burnout has been conceptualized in terms of three components: overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In addition to Maslach's three components of burnout, other common symptoms have included forgetfulness and difficulty concentrating, diminished pride in one's work, losing sight of goals, and irritability with others (White, 2021). Exhaustion involves the loss of energy, depletion, and fatigue (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). An individual experiencing exhaustion may feel depleted of energy and unable to do their job. Exhaustion does not have to be context specific, since it typically

results from work overload (Tikkanen et al., 2021). Exhaustion can be used as a general indicator of a teacher's overall struggle. The state of cynicism involves depersonalization, withdrawal, negative attitudes toward others, and irritability (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). A teacher experiencing cynicism may feel detached from their work and their students and develop negativity toward the world around them. The state of inefficacy involves a loss of personal accomplishment, low productivity, low morale, and an inability to cope (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). A teacher experiencing inefficacy may have feelings of incompetence and even become unable to do their job. With a better understanding of teacher burnout, school districts can do better by implementing strategies to help reduce the perception of workplace stress and prevent burnout. Researchers have explained that long-term stress in the workplace can be a significant concern because of the negative impact it can present on employee well-being, academic success, and organizational success.

Organizational burnout negatively influences the way people feel, which often creates feelings of being ineffective, disengaged, unsupported, and unfulfilled (Atkinson et al., 2018; Maslach, 2019). Burnout has been identified as one of the main factors contributing to job dissatisfaction (Salvagioni et al., 2017). Due to the negative impact burnout creates for teachers and students, teacher burnout is considered to be one of the most significant problems plaguing the education system today (Hurley, 2021). Work-related consequences of burnout can include job dissatisfaction, engagement, absenteeism, disability claims, job demands, resources, and presenteeism (Salvagioni et al., 2017, p. 1). Other negative consequences for teachers may include mental exhaustion, poor performance, and turnover (Daniel & Van Bergen, 2023). Research on burnout continues to confirm a strong relationship between burnout and job performance, attrition, and job satisfaction (Barton, 2021; Moss, 2019; Thrush et al., 2021). In

addition, long-term stress at work and the risks associated have also been linked to increased stress in other areas of life, including financial, marital, and family (Coleman et al., 2016). A better understanding of this growing organizational problem is needed because of the significant influence it has on the overall health and well-being of individuals including job performance, satisfaction, and turnover (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Although burnout is not a new phenomenon, it has been a growing organizational concern ever since COVID-19 made its presence in the United States in early 2020.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

In January 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency. The unfortunate reality is that everyone has suffered from this unrelenting pandemic in some way. Not only teachers and students have suffered the consequences of the pandemic, large and small businesses have also suffered. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations faced challenges with stay-at-home orders, less profit, supply shortages, less production, fewer hours, and downsizing. Just like businesses, individuals, families, and even children were affected. Many individuals also struggled with isolation and loneliness which caused a social concern, especially for the elderly and at-risk populations. The added stress exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic has gained attention across the world. In a COVID-era study conducted by the consulting firm McKinsey and Company (2020), 90% of employers indicated the pandemic had negatively impacted employees' behavioral health (Pfeffer & Williams, 2020). There is a quadrupling of anxiety and depression among workers during the same period (Panchal et al., 2020).

Studies on teacher satisfaction have confirmed that there is in fact a negative correlation between teachers' job satisfaction and psychological issues (Ma et al., 2022). Therefore, when

there is a sense of job satisfaction, teachers are more likely to be more committed (Ma et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic did not discriminate against age, type of worker, level of education, race, culture, or gender. School districts, teachers, and students were definitely not excluded. School districts have suffered from the uncertainty of the future in education which has created psychological symptomatology all over the world (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, almost eight percent of teachers were choosing to leave the classroom, while newer teachers (< 5 years) were leaving at rates between 19 and 30% (Pressley, 2021). In February 2022, the National Education Association released a nationwide survey revealing that 55% of teachers reported that the pandemic had pushed them to consider leaving the profession much sooner than they had originally planned. Patty Santos (2022), reporter with the KSAT news station, shared that The Texas Tribune (2022) showed a 60% increase from 2021 to this school year in the number of teachers who are breaking their contracts and leaving their jobs before the end of the school year. In a recent member survey, the National Education Association (2022) reported that 90% of teachers are currently experiencing burnout.

Gómez-Dominguez et al. (2022) explained it is the drastic increase in work-related stress and workload without an equal increase in support and control of resources allocated to them, which has led many teachers to experience burnout. Extensive research has revealed that prolonged exposure to stress is a major factor in teacher burnout (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Teaching has always been recognized as a high-stress profession; however, the number of teachers leaving the classroom today is reason to believe that teachers are still feeling the many burdens of the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased job demands, changing responsibilities, longer workdays, weakened leadership support, and feelings of inadequacy are all potential

contributing factors to the rising number of teachers experiencing burnout and choosing to leave the classroom (Walter & Fox, 2021).

Three years ago, when the pandemic started, teaching was already considered one of the toughest professions. The COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment where teachers feel overwhelmed, underappreciated, and unsupported (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Many teachers have retained the original stressors of teaching but have since added the new challenges of teaching. The added stress and challenges heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic have forced teachers to accept new expectations and less resources to do their job. From stay-at-home orders, distance learning, mask mandates, controversial vaccines, and hybrid learning environments, many teachers experienced higher-than-normal stress levels. Unwavering uncertainty, increased anxiety, and fear of dying became common feelings among teachers (Paget et al., 2021). After the government-issued-stay-at-home order was lifted, teachers were told to return to the classroom and required to teach in-person instruction as well as provide virtual instruction. Teachers were also required to meet the needs of the students whose parents chose to keep them at home. The lack of adequate training and preparation for unfamiliar technology, learning platforms, and safety protocols created even more stress and anxiety for teachers. The consequences of burnout seem endless, but it has become a harsh reality for those experiencing it and those who are desperately trying to recover from it. Although many populations have experienced chronic stress and burnout, teachers and other social services workers have been forced to learn to cope with staffing shortages, higher demands, lockdowns, and school closures (Paget et al., 2021).

To no one's surprise, teachers have suffered physically, emotionally, and mentally. Burnout is a significant concern because without quality teachers the students' achievement and

academic success both suffer as well as the overall well-being of the teacher (García & Weiss, 2019; Kim & Asbury, 2020). The amount of time, care, and counseling teachers have devoted to their students and their jobs have caused serious neglect on their well-being (Heider, 2021). When teachers' mental health is threatened, the risk to students' learning may also suffer (Davis et al., 2022). In this particular situation, teachers experiencing prolonged stress at work may begin to lack sensitivity to their students' needs and become more likely to disengage or withdraw from the classroom (Davis et al., 2022). In addition, teachers leaving the classroom has a direct negative impact on the employee, their students, the community, and the organization (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015; Kim & Asbury, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted organizational wellness and employee well-being but also erected new work-related stressors and emotional demands, resulting in feelings of inadequacy, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified new challenges for teachers, making it very important for school leaders, administrators, and teachers to identify common stressors and explore ways to prevent burnout.

As the many uncertainties created by the COVID-19 pandemic continue to unfold, more research is needed to explore the importance of teacher well-being and better understand the adverse health effects of public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent detrimental occupational phenomena like burnout. However, since the pandemic, the uncertainty, growing teacher shortage crisis, and new expectations exacerbated by the pandemic has prompted more research. Many teachers have learned to cope well with the rapid changes that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic, others have not (Heider, 2021). More research is needed to support the connection between teacher stress, burnout, coping and meaningful work.

Shifting the Focus to Coping and Meaningful Work

Cherniss (2016) linked burnout to the quest for meaning (as cited in Hyatt, 2022). Teachers are the foundation of our education system; therefore, research on meaningful work is important because it translates to workplace sustainability and the overall well-being of the organization (Atkinson et al., 2018). When individuals feel their work is “meaningful work,” they want to be more productive, be committed to their job, use ethical awareness, be more professional, and feel satisfied (as cited in Akar, 2020). Akar (2020) suggested, “The new generation of employees demand fulfillment of purposes and expectations, work excitement, autonomous and improving work conditions in their relationship with work, besides financial earnings” (p. 1225). Understanding meaningful work and the relationship it has on job satisfaction and positive well-being is even more important with the younger generation of teachers to sustain job retention and improve job recruitment.

As many spend the majority of their days at work rather than at home, finding meaning and purpose at work is critical for organizational growth and success. Martela and Pessi (2018) described meaningful work by three components: “the subjective experience of work as intrinsically significant and worth doing, the experience that one can realize oneself through work, and the work serving a broader purpose,” (as cited in Groot Wassink et al., 2019). Meaningful work refers to work that is perceived as significant and valuable to an individual (Groot Wassink et al., 2019). Lysoya et al. (2018) similarly defined meaningful work “as an individual’s experience at work as being personally significant, worthwhile, and valued” (p. 1227). Steger et al. (2012) explained that meaningful work, reflected in employees’ sense of meaning, has been defined as significant, having a remarkable contribution to “the greater good,” and being aligned towards growth and a worthwhile purpose (as cited by Lavy & Bocker, 2018,

p. 1486). Lief (2009) described meaningful work as the “realization of one's potential and purpose at which a person's passions, strengths, and core values interact synergistically in his or her work” (as cited in Akar, 2020, p. 1226). Every definition of meaningful work referenced in this study is aligned with the idea that meaningful work refers to significant work, facilitates personal growth, and contributes to the greater good (Allan et al., 2018).

Meaningful work benefits both employees and organizations by increasing personal well-being, job satisfaction, and engagement (Groot Wassink et al., 2019; Lease et al., 2019). Aligned with relationships, Martela and Pessi (2018) suggested that finding meaning is about connecting and the importance of expected relationships and associations that people see in their lives. More specifically to this study, when teachers feel their work is meaningful and significant, they feel more purposeful and engaged at work (Fouché et al., 2017). When teachers feel engaged in their work, they are more inclined to increase their job resources and demands and create a more challenging work environment (Groot Wassink et al., 2019). Meaningful work often reflects the feelings of individuals' to make them feel that their work is of value and encourages the use of their abilities in pursuit of a worthwhile goal (Lavy, 2022). Therefore, meaningful work can help reduce or even prevent burnout (Hyatt, 2022).

With turnover rates at an all-time high, it is critical to fully understand the risk factors and consequences of teacher burnout and explore the relationship between burnout prevention, coping, and meaningful work. More research is also needed to determine if the COVID-19 pandemic is the sole contributor to teacher burnout or elucidate other factors that may be contributing to teacher burnout.

Summary

When employees perceive their work as meaningful, they are more likely to feel valued, motivated, and engaged (Fouché et al., 2017). Over the last decade, research has shed new light on the many consequences of chronic stress and burnout including adverse health conditions, disengagement, and high turnover (Barton, 2017; Moss, 2019; Thrush et al., 2021). Although stress is inevitable, higher-than-normal levels of stress in the workplace have become the norm for teachers around the world. Burnout affects every organization and is a major organizational problem because it encompasses the dimensions of employee well-being by dismissing what employees personalize as meaningful work (Atkinson et al., 2018).

Even in the best of times, teaching is considered a high-stress profession. As more people spend the majority of the day at work than home, the risk of burnout due to emotional exhaustion and feelings of being ineffective and unfulfilled are major concerns for employers because stress and burnout impact employee wellbeing (Atkinson et al., 2018; Maslach, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the challenges of teaching with longer workdays, greater emotional demands, blended learning environments, and student behaviors (Robinson et al., 2023). Chronic stress in the workplace is often associated with burnout, reduced job satisfaction, lowered occupational commitment, and poor job performance (Fitchett et al., 2021). Unfortunately, it has also become a terrible reality that school districts are suffering from teacher shortages and poor academic performance as a result of teacher burnout (Fitchett et al., 2021). Teacher burnout is a noteworthy organizational concern because it affects students, teachers, administration, and the community at large. In this study, I conducted a phenomenological analysis that consisted of in-depth interviews that explored the lived experiences of teachers to explain the phenomenon of burnout and discovered if coping and meaningful work influenced burnout prevention.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Teaching was considered a high-stress career even before the COVID-19 pandemic made its presence in the United States. Drastic changes in teachers' day-to-day routines have amplified many uncertainties and additional stressors impacting coping, job satisfaction, burnout, and retention. The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented environments for teaching and learning. Teachers have been challenged with unfamiliar technology, ever-changing tasks, and other responsibilities that have created feelings of inadequacy, unfulfillment, and no support. As many organizations have experienced job cuts due to budget shortages and downsizing, many teachers are choosing to leave the classroom. Teachers are leaving the classroom due to feelings of being overworked, anxious, unprepared, and unsupported (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Teacher shortages have become a jarring reality. As organizations ask more from their employees with fewer resources to offer, it is critical to understand how burnout impacts the entire organization including student learning, job satisfaction, performance, and employee retention.

Research Design and Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research design was to explain the phenomenon of teacher burnout through the lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if coping and meaningful work influence burnout prevention. I chose a qualitative methodology to better understand the phenomenon of burnout through teachers' experience of classroom teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Phenomenology is a systematic attempt to characterize the phenomenon through the lens of those who have experienced it and then compare and contrast their accounts to identify the essence of what is shared between them, and define the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I chose a phenomenological research design because this study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the phenomena (burnout) and

see how things appear to us in terms of our subjective experience (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Phenomenology research is useful when the researcher has a phenomenon identified to understand and has a group of people who can describe what they have experienced. In a phenomenology research design, it is beneficial that the researcher has a personal connection to the phenomenon being researched. As the wellness coordinator for the district, I do have a personal connection to employee wellness and the crisis of teacher shortage and employee burnout.

Transcendental phenomenology, largely developed by Edmund Husserl, is a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology seeking to understand human experience, or lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The founding principle of phenomenological design is that experience is examined in the way that it occurs (Smith et al., 2009). Edmund Husserl is considered the founder of phenomenology where he described a phenomenon as the thing itself - not a generalization, an approximation, a representation, or a deducted outcome (Vagle, 2018). Husserl explained we do not *reason* phenomena - rather we *live them* (Vagle, 2018). Groenewald (2004) further explained that Husserl rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable (p. 4). Husserl argued that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness (Groenewald, 2004). Groenewald (2004) said,

To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way, the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure 'phenomena' and the only absolute data from where to begin. (p. 4)

To further distinguish phenomenological philosophy from other philosophies, Husserl introduced the term lifeworld, which signified the world of human experience (Vagle, 2018). Another

interesting concept of phenomenology is that phenomenologists use the word “intentionality” to mean the inseparable connectedness between subjects and objects in the world (Vagle, 2018). The word intention can be misunderstood because in this context it is used to “signify how we are meaningfully connected to the world” (Vagle, 2018, p. 28). Intentionality is significant for this study to see if there is intentionality between burnout prevention and meaningful work and coping in the lived experiences of teachers teaching during the global pandemic.

The focus of phenomenological research accurately describes and thematizes experience systematically (Bevan, 2014). Bevan (2014) described the three main themes as contextualizing experience, apprehending the phenomenon, and clarification of the phenomenon. Through thematized verbalization of this reflected experience, researchers gain access to the experience, its modes of appearing in natural attitude, and its meaning (Bevan, 2014). According to Bevan (2014),

Husserl (1970) explained the natural attitude as how each of us is involved in the lifeworld. Lifeworld is described as the consciousness of the world, including objects or experiences within it, and is always set against a horizon that provides context...It is precisely the experience of the lifeworld in the natural attitude that is under investigation in phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1997). Therefore, a phenomenological researcher is interested in describing a person’s experience in the way he or she experiences it, and not from some theoretical standpoint. (p. 136)

It is important that the researcher refrains from judgment and separates him/herself from the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). Being able to withhold judgments about a research environment and its participants and focus solely on the participants’ experience is unique and important in phenomenology research (Billups, 2021). Bracketing is a tool that

allows the researcher to set aside their own beliefs to avoid misinterpreting a participant's experience (Billups, 2021).

In this qualitative, phenomenological study, all participants were teachers who taught during the pandemic and still work with the district. The teachers chosen to participate in this study teach across different disciplines and different grade levels. As the sole researcher, I am connected to the phenomenon through my role as Health and Financial Wellness Coordinator. I oversee the employee wellness program for study site ISD (pseudonym); therefore, I am fully invested in wanting to improve employee well-being and have a better understanding of the influence of coping and meaningful work on burnout prevention.

Population

Study site ISD (pseudonym) was established in the late 1940s and is one of the largest school districts in Texas. Employing more than 12,900 individuals and more than 7,200 teachers, study site ISD (pseudonym) covers 355 square miles of land and is comprised of 83 elementary schools, 24 middle schools, 17 high schools, four special schools, and two enrichment academies. Study site ISD (pseudonym) has three middle school magnet programs and eight high school magnet programs which offer specialized focus in addition to the standard curriculum. The study site ISD (pseudonym) magnet schools specialize in fields like health careers, construction, law, first responders, cybersecurity, agriculture, education, science and engineering, and communication arts. Study site ISD (pseudonym) has 83 non-Title 1 schools and 48 Title 1 schools.

Study Sample

For this study, convenience sampling was the method used to collect the participant sample. Convenience sampling is a method that uses participants who are convenient to the

researcher (Galloway, 2005). Although convenience sampling comes with a high degree of bias, it is helpful to minimize costs and provide efficient data in research. This study included 16 teachers from study site ISD (pseudonym) and did not include administrators, paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, or any other professionals within the district. However, I believe other groups like administrators, principals, nurses, special education teachers, etc. would need to be considered for future research.

For this study, the convenience sample of 16 teachers from study site ISD (pseudonym) schools included 10 elementary teachers, three middle school teachers, two high school teachers, and one teacher from study site ISD (pseudonym) special schools. There were 11 female participants and five male participants. The ages of the participants ranged from 29-60 and the years of service ranged from 7 years to 28 years. Gender, age, and number of years of teaching are excluded from this dissertation to maintain confidentiality of each participant. All teachers taught for study site ISD (pseudonym) during the 2019–2020, 2020–2021, and 2021–2022 academic school years. Each teacher was asked the same questions to gather each person's point of view to capture the fundamental essence of phenomenology with the interview questions (see Appendix B). Due to the nature of the study, there were times when additional questions were asked to encourage more conversation, but the questions asked aligned with the conversation.

Participant Recruitment

The school principals were addressed at a principals' meeting to help identify two teachers from their campus: (a) one who has adapted to the changes of the COVID-19 pandemic well, and (b) one who has struggled to cope with the changes and additional challenges. Less than one-fourth of the school principals responded to the request. From the principals that responded, 32 teachers' names were provided. Of these 32 teachers, 15 teachers were then

selected by the benefits director. I reached out to the 15 teachers selected to participate in this study and asked them if they were interested in participating in the study. I had three teachers that said they did not have time but all three were interested in future studies. I reached out to three more teachers on the initial list of teachers provided by the principals. Once I had 15 participants, each received an email from me requesting their participation in the study. Each participant was provided with details regarding the qualifications of the study. Next, participants were contacted via email and received a letter of consent explaining the study, the purpose, and any associated risks. Each participant agreed to actively participate in an extensive, open-ended interview. The interviews were semistructured, approximately an hour in length, and were conducted face-to-face. The interviews were recorded via traditional field notes, audio-recording, analytic memoing, and observation. Participants were informed before the interview that it would be recorded. Open-ended interviews are important in qualitative research because they allow participants to respond in their own words. All teachers interviewed taught from the spring of 2020 until the present. Participants were contacted through email and explained the details of the study. Once participants agreed to participate, each participant signed their consent before the interview or provided a signed consent before the interview began. Other participants signed and scanned their consent to my email. All communication will be conducted through emails or text. The interview questions are listed in Appendix B.

Data Collection

Qualitative research is a semistructured, circular type of research that primarily seeks to explore phenomena (Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative research is focused on unstructured data collection, analysis, and interpretation of narrative, not quantitative data to gain insight about a phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). With the researcher as the primary instrument for data

collection and analysis (Billups, 2021; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), qualitative research involves systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of textual material derived from observation which is used to explore particular phenomena as lived experiences (Malterud, 2001). Phenomenology is a research method that can help others see and interpret things in new and different ways (Vagle, 2018).

Open-ended interviews were conducted to align with phenomenological research. Van Manen (2017) described two major purposes for interviews: (a) to explore and develop a rich understanding of the phenomenon, and (b) to develop a conversation around the meaning of experience (as cited in Lauterbach, 2018). For this study, the primary method of data collection was open-ended interviews.

Expert Panel and Field Test

Expert panels provide a forum in which leading experts in a given field are invited to share their experiences and thoughts (Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016). Expert panels are also important to ensure the researchers' questions do not have bias and are fully understood (Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016). A field test, or mock interview, was conducted to practice asking the interview questions and ensure the questions asked would provide enough data. The expert panel used in this study consisted of the Assistant Superintendent for the Whole Child Department, the Director of Social and Emotional Learning, and the Director of Benefits. The field test participant was identified the same way the other participants were identified (participant #), and the responses were used for data collection. In this study, before any data were collected, approval from the IRB was received (see Appendix A). An expert panel was created, and a field test was performed to preview the interview questions and ensure the questions were relevant to what I intended to gain from this study.

Face-to-Face Interviews

In qualitative studies, it is important to explore the experiences of participants and the meanings they attribute to them by using in-depth and semistructured interviews (Tong et al., 2007). Building a strong foundation of trust is important when conducting interviews to ensure that participants feel comfortable about sharing their lived experiences because it may entail personal feelings toward others and raw emotions. It is important to build trust in any research study because it helps to establish transparency and allows employees to feel safe to express their mind, without the fear of judgment or punishment (Pratt et al., 2019).

Semistructured interviews are the most appropriate conversational technique in phenomenology research because the participants' responses rely on memories and reflections which help capture the lived experiences (Lauterbach, 2018). Similarly, conversational interviewing is another type of interview technique but uses a more flexible format than structured interviews (Lauterbach, 2018). By asking open-ended questions, the researcher encourages participants to discuss issues relevant to the research (Tong et al., 2007). Each participant in this study took part in a semistructured face-to-face interview. The interviews functioned as the major source of data collection which helped describe the lived experiences of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Semistructured interviews provided me guidance for conversation but also allowed flexibility during the interview to go off-script. During the interview phase, the questions were purposely asked face-to-face to observe body language, and the interviews were recorded and later transcribed for data analysis.

The interviews included open-ended questions that were reviewed by both the Social and Emotional (SEL) leadership team and the Whole Child leadership team before the interviews were conducted. The Whole Child Department is led by the Assistant Superintendent of Whole

Child and includes the Behavior Education Support Team, Health Education, Health Services, School Age Parenting Program, the Connections Program, Family Engagement Services, Even Start Family Literacy, Counseling, and Social and Emotional Learning. The goal of this department is to provide students the opportunities to develop skills in many areas of social and emotional learning including relationship building, peer-mediation, self-regulation, and leadership skills. The Whole Child department at study site ISD (pseudonym) focuses on aligning wrap-around systems of support to improve each child's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. The participant interview questions included the following:

- Interview question 1: Explain how your vision of teaching has changed over the past 2 years.
- Interview question 2: Describe to me any new challenges you have experienced at work since the pandemic started.
- Interview question 3: Describe your interaction with work structure: How did you view your work life? What was difficult? What was different?
- Interview question 4: Describe your interactions with your students: How did you view them during the pandemic? What was difficult? What was different?
- Interview question 5: Describe your interactions at home and personal life. How did you view your personal life during the pandemic? What was difficult, different?
- Interview question 6: Explain your coping strategies (pre, post, and during) during the pandemic.
- Interview question 7: In what ways can leaders show support for teachers like yourself during a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Interview question 8: Explain what burnout looks like to you. (If needed, do you feel you have experienced burnout?)

Interviews varied in length from 15 minutes to 67 minutes. All 16 interviews were recorded using the iPhone app, Voice Memos, and transcribed using the iPhone transcription app, iTranscribe. Once each interview was recorded and transcribed, I began listing participant information and responses in an Excel spreadsheet. Once I began to see a pattern of responses developing, I was able to examine the data and organize it into a table for visualization.

Data Analysis

Data analysis as described by Hatch (2002) is a methodical search for meaning and a way to process nonnumerical data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others (as cited in Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, distinguish themes, discover relationships, establish explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Patton (2002) described the intention of qualitative data analysis as the exposure of emerging themes, patterns, ideas, and perceptions (as cited in Suter, 2011, p. 344). After the teacher interviews were completed, each audio recording was then transcribed using the iPhone application, iTranscribe. I highlighted common words and phrases that aligned with the research questions. I reviewed each interview and categorized commonalities and identified three themes to report my findings. Also, to ensure confidentiality all recorded interviews, transcriptions, and notes were saved in a separate, encrypted file on my computer.

Analytic Memoing

In qualitative research, memoing is a methodological strategy used to enhance the research experience and outcomes examined (Birks et al., 2008). Saldaña (2013) suggested that

memoing is similar to journal writing and blogs because this is a way researchers can create conversations with themselves about data. Analytic memo writing in a document can serve many purposes to reflect on including: your coding processes and code choices, how the process of inquiry is taking form, and the emergent patterns, categories, and subcategories, themes, and concepts in the data (Saldaña, 2013). Memos are grounded in data but can be varied during research. This methodology allows the researcher to immerse themselves into the participants' world, summarize the data received, and process observations while staying true to the data. Memoing is a valuable analytic strategy that enables the researcher to engage with the data at a level that would otherwise be difficult to achieve (Birks et al., 2008). For this study, the intention was to use analytic memoing to provide support documentation to each of the participant interviews and audio transcription.

Coding

Coding is a construct that is researcher-generated, within data analysis, which symbolizes and assigns interpreted meaning to data for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes and also requires a researcher's analytic lens (Saldaña, 2013). Coding includes text materials such as interview transcripts, field notes, and documents including artifacts, photographs, video recordings, and internet sites (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña (2013) suggested that data coded during the First Cycle is often a single word, a full sentence, or an entire page of text, of moving images (p. 3), organized into seven subcategories, grammatical, elemental, affective, literary, language, exploratory, procedural, and theming data (p. 3). The Second Cycle requires analytical skills like classifying, prioritizing, integrating, conceptualizing, and theory building (Saldaña, 2013, p. 81). Data coding and analysis offer essential benefits in research including transparency, validity, reliability, and less bias (Saldaña,

2013). Data coding is an essential analytic tool in qualitative research in which data can be collected and analyzed during any part of the First or Second Cycle (Saldaña, 2013).

Transcription of Audio Interviews

Transcription is a tool in qualitative research that researchers can use to manage and analyze data (Matheson, 2007; Saldaña, 2013). Transcription is a critical component of the data management process used for conducting advanced data analysis or using computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo or ATLAS.ti (Saldaña, 2013). There are less expensive transcription services available that demonstrate the same or a similar coding process to include iTranscribe (iphone app) or Microsoft Word.

Ethical Considerations

Following the Abilene Christian University requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership, I completed the required course on Protecting Human Research Participants prior to the study. At all times during this study, ethical considerations were accounted for, and there was no risk of harm to anyone during this study. Some of the ethical components addressed in this study include trustworthiness, confidentiality, and empathy. Participants were told their names and campuses would be kept anonymous and they would be identified in the study as participant #1, participant #2...to ensure trust, confidentiality, and psychological safety. All participants were advised the interviews would be recorded, analyzed, and transcribed for research purposes and requirements for degree completion. To ensure confidentiality the only identifiable information used in the data tables for this study included the participant number, gender, age, school type, school program, and years of service.

Researcher's Role

For this study, I was the primary and sole researcher. As the primary researcher obtaining data from participant interactions, it was important to create an environment where participants felt comfortable to share their experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant was asked for their preferred location for me to conduct the interview. Eleven participants asked for me to meet at their classroom before or after school hours. Two participants asked to meet at a coffee shop. One participant asked to meet at a park while we walked together during the interview, and two participants came to my office.

I have served as the study site ISD (pseudonym) Health and Financial Wellness Coordinator for the last 8 years I have worked for the district. It is my responsibility to educate employees about the four dimensions of wellness: physical, social, emotional, and financial, and also provide resources that promote employee wellness. I work closely with the district's health insurance carrier to educate, inform, and help promote and implement wellness resources offered to employees and staff. Some of the benefits offered to employees include a comprehensive employee wellness program, employee assistance program, disease management program, weight loss programs, multi-gym membership discounts, mental health therapy, a tobacco cessation program, a healthy pregnancy program, nurse line, onsite account manager, and nutrition education. These programs are offered to 4,358 employees who elected to have medical insurance offered through study site ISD (pseudonym).

Transparency

In qualitative research two key values within the data analysis process include trustworthiness and transparency (O'Kane et al., 2021). Aguinis et al. (2018) defined transparency as "the degree of detail and disclosure about the specific steps, decisions, and

judgment calls made during a scientific study” (as cited in O’Kane, 2021, p. 105). Similarly, transparency refers to the researcher's responsibility to disclose what was done, not what was not done, or what was not reported (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Transparency is important to trustworthiness because trustworthiness refers to the measure to which the reader can evaluate if the researcher has been honest about how the research was conducted and if the conclusions are reasonable (Pratt et al., 2019). Transparency requires full disclosure, which improves the integrity of research. In both qualitative and quantitative research, it is important for research to be replicable, which requires trustworthiness; however, to ensure replicability, transparency is even more imperative (Pratt et al., 2019).

Confidentiality

All studies involving human participants are strictly guided by the ethical principles of research with human participants which includes maintaining confidentiality (Moustakas, 1994). This study maintained the necessary ethical standards, obtained informed consent from all research participants, and followed standard procedures that disclosed all details of the study. In regard to the health and well-being of the participant, there was minimal risk to the participant. The participants were informed they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

Empathy

Practicing empathy is key to phenomenology because researchers must be able to interpret nonverbal cues and adapt to participants’ responses and behaviors (Billups, 2021). Demonstrating empathy throughout the entire study is important because researcher-participant relationship is close and intimate and guarantees rich, quality, personal data (Billups, 2021). A good researcher needs to be a good listener, patient, and know when probing for more information is appropriate (Billups, 2021).

Integrity and Honesty: Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is critical in any research study because it helps to establish transferability, dependability, confirmability, and credibility (as cited in Suter, 2011). In research, it is valuable to create a trusting environment where participants feel comfortable and free to express themselves and do not feel they will experience judgment from others (Rallis & Rossman, 2009). Developing trust helps build a positive working environment and creates autonomy, which are two great qualities that show employees are valued and appreciated (Rallis & Rossman, 2009). When partnered by strong evidence, clear logic, valid data, and the ruling out of alternative explanations, credibility is the main criterion for judging the trustworthiness of qualitative data analysis (Suter, 2011). Credibility is essential in qualitative research because it helps to ensure that the research is authentic and correct (Suter, 2011). All participants were treated fairly and justly and given the highest respect. In this study, all 16 participants were teachers from the study site ISD who taught during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Assumptions

This phenomenological study design assumed that all teachers interpret or perceive burnout the same and that most classroom teachers experienced some level of burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. The assumptions in research studies are often out of the researcher's control, and necessary for the study to be relevant (Simon, 2011). One possible assumption in this study was that all teachers are experiencing work-related stress and burnout related to the COVID-19 pandemic. A second assumption was that teachers are experiencing more stress at work than at home but may be experiencing other stressors outside of work such as financial, marital, familial, school, emotional, or health related. A third assumption was that teachers were

completely honest with me regarding their responses, especially since the process of getting to know the participant I shared that I worked in the human resources department.

Limitations

Limitations are the constraints individuals are not able to control in a study and are based on research methodology and design (Coker, 2022). Limitations are common and out of the researcher's control but are considered potential weaknesses or shortcomings in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Limitations are important to address because they can impact the interpretation of research conclusions but can provide opportunities and guidance for further research.

One limitation of this study was the population sample of Title 1 schools to non-Title 1 schools is not fully represented. The population sample in this study represented 10 non-Title 1 schools and six Title 1 schools whereas the number of actual non-Title 1 schools is 83 and Title 1 schools is 48. Another limitation is the sample size of teachers in comparison to the size of the district. With the consideration that study site ISD (pseudonym) is the largest school district in San Antonio employing more than 14,000 employees, the sample size of 15 teachers used for this study is considered relatively small. Future studies might consider a larger sample size to gain a better understanding of the population, phenomenon, and burnout. Other possible limitations of this study included:

- researcher bias
- participants not fully understanding the phenomena of burnout
- time
- funding for burnout assessment tools
- convenience sampling

Delimitations

Delimitations are the concerns with the scope of the study that can prevent a researcher from being able to generalize research findings to a whole population (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Delimitations essentially stem from limitations in the scope of the research study but are intentional (Coker, 2022). The focus of this study was to learn more about the experiences of teachers who taught in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic. I specifically wanted to study classroom teachers and the phenomenon of teacher burnout since there is a natural teacher shortage crisis. Although there is significant research on teacher burnout, there is still a limited number of research studies specifically looking at teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic and looking at coping and meaningful work as possible factors that influence burnout prevention. This study included a delimitation on only selecting classroom teachers and not instructional assistants, administrators, specialists, or support teachers.

An example of a delimitation in this particular study is the phenomenon of burnout and the need for a more widespread sample to include administrators, custodians, bus drivers, instructional assistants, executive admins, and nurses. Other delimitations for this study might include:

- questions asked during the interview
- sample size in comparison to the size of the organization
- time of year the interviews were conducted
- data were limited to only one interaction (one interview)

Summary

In every profession, stress in the workplace is inevitable. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated challenges in the classroom and revamped the working conditions for teachers in

unforeseen ways. Increased job demands, changing responsibilities, longer workdays, weakened leadership support, and feelings of inadequacy are all potential contributing factors to the rising burnout and attrition among teachers today (Walter & Fox, 2021). As more teachers feel overwhelmed, inadequate, and unfulfilled, many have chosen to leave the profession they once had a great passion for. Burnout affects everyone differently. Some people will never come close to reaching burnout. Other employees who do reach burnout may find it difficult to do their job effectively because of emotional exhaustion, or energy depletion (Cooper et al., 2023). Burnout can also create feelings of reduced personal accomplishment, low self-esteem, and low motivation, making their jobs feel meaningless. It was critical to explore the lived experiences of study site ISD (pseudonym) teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if coping and meaningful work influence burnout prevention. With the current teacher shortage crisis the United States is currently experiencing, it is important for organizations to seek innovative ways that implement and encourage meaningful work and coping to keep employees motivated and engaged.

Chapter 4: Results

“Burnout is when you begin to ask yourself, am I even making a difference in the lives of the children anymore” (female participant).

The purpose of this study was to explain the phenomenon of teacher burnout through lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if coping and meaningful work influence burnout prevention. Chapter 4 presents the findings using text counts and *in vivo* codes to demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the teacher burnout phenomenon within this sample. The discussion covers the demographic breakdown of the participants then moves into a discussion of the different facets of the phenomenon stratified by stressors, coping mechanisms, coping mechanisms by reported gender, other confounding life events, stressors by reported gender, and experience by organizational type. An attempt was made to stratify by reported gender if the data represented meaningful differences. Finally, taking all data and tables into account, a discussion of themes is presented in detail. A discussion of the three themes of coping, meaningful work, and technology challenges is presented in detail later in this chapter.

Participant Data

Given that coding is a researcher-generated construct (Saldaña, 2013), I chose to conduct my initial coding pass in a manner that captures the voices of the participants so their voices can be heard about what stress means to them. This strategy proved to be very interesting as I was able to segregate codes by stressors, coping, and coping strategies and then stratify each of these by gender and organizational type. This helped answer the questions about burnout and meaningful work. I considered this a First Cycle coding session where I isolated single words and sentences (Saldaña, 2013) that described stress in the participant's own words, which in turn allowed me to organize these codes into concise affective categories, and thereby complete the

coding cycle described by Saldaña. Recall that "affective categories" highlight the description of moods and feelings in terms of what's important to the participant when discussing the notions of stress and burnout. This also satisfied the Second Cycle of coding as I was able to classify burnout in this sample using 12 different categories that highlight the essence of burnout along with three powerful themes that help round out the discussion of burnout, coping, meaningful work, and technology challenges.

After substantial review of the data collected from the interviews, it was evident that teachers are stressed out and overwhelmed. Table 1 is the three characteristics of burnout. Table 2 is an overview of the participants in this study. Table 3 are the descriptive stressors, coping strategies, and life events participants experienced. Table 4 is a summary of coping strategies for male and female participants. Table 5 is a summary of stressors experienced by gender. Table 6 is a summary of Title 1 and non Title 1 stressors experienced. Table 7 is a summary of the stressors for Title 1 and non-Title 1 participants. Table 8 is the most common stressors by gender for non-Title 1 participants. Table 9 is the most common stressors for Title 1 participants. Table 10 is the most common stressors for both male and female participants.

Table 2 represents the demographics of all 16 teachers interviewed for this qualitative, phenomenological study. There were 11 female participants and five male participants. Participants ranged in age from 29–60 years of age. The number of years of service ranged from 7 to 28 years. Participants represented elementary school, middle school, high school, and study site ISD (pseudonym)'s special schools. The 16 teachers that participated in the study represented two elementary physical education coaches, one high school geography teacher, one high school English as a second language teacher, one music teacher, one STEM teacher, one English as a second language teacher, one AVID teacher, one elementary art teacher, one

elementary math specialist, four elementary teachers, and two middle school teachers. Ten Title 1 campuses and six non-Title 1 campuses were represented in this study. According to the United States Department of Education (2018), Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) provides financial support to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from economically disadvantaged families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards.

Table 2*Participant Demographic Summary*

Name	M/F	Age	Yrs	Program	Type	Position
P1	F	29	7	Non-Title 1	Elementary	Teacher
P2	F	29	7	Non-Title 1	High School	Teacher
P3	M	36	11	Title 1	Elementary	P.E. Coach
P4	M	38	8	Non-Title 1	Elementary	Teacher
P5	F	40	19	Non-Title 1	High School	Teacher
P6	F	44	19	Non-Title 1	Elementary	Teacher
P7	F	46	16	Title 1	Middle School	Teacher
P8	F	47	9	Title 1	Middle School	Teacher
P9	F	47	19	Title 1	Middle School	Teacher
P10	F	51	17	Non-Title 1	Elementary	Teacher
P11	F	58	17	Non-Title 1	Elementary	Teacher
P12	F	57	21	Non-Title 1	Elementary	Teacher
P13	M	56	23	Non-Title 1	High School	Teacher
P14	M	51	28	Non-Title 1	Elementary	Teacher
P15	M	53	19	Title 1	Elementary	Teacher
P16	F	60	21	Title 1	Elementary	P.E. Coach

Note. Participant interview data.

The purpose of Title 1 (2020) is to provide all children with a significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps. study site ISD (pseudonym) currently has 125 schools and 101,976 students. The district's minority enrollment is 80%, and 33.8% of students are considered economically disadvantaged and eligible to receive the federal free and reduced meals.

Table 3 is a collective summary of descriptive stressors experienced by the participants in this study. When participants were asked to describe any new challenges they had experienced at work since the pandemic started, the most common stressors were addressed in Table 3. The most commonly mentioned stressors were low morale, new expectations, student behavior, technology, and student motivation. Participants shared many stories they experienced during the pandemic when they struggled with technology, connectivity issues, and learning platform challenges. Participants reminisced about the many struggles with their students from not being able to log on, to students not showing up on screen, poor communication with parents, and not feeling connected to their students like they felt in previous years. Participants shared at times they felt "helpless," "isolated," "lost," and even "depressed." It was very evident that every teacher I interviewed experienced stress. What made this study so interesting and profound to me was the way each teacher perceived stress which made a difference in how they handled the stress. Overall, participants shared they missed their students and the feeling they made a difference in the lives of their students.

Table 3*Descriptive Stressors, Coping Strategies, and Life Events*

Stressors	Coping strategies	Life events during
Low Morale	Relationships	Student Suicide
New Expectations	Self-Care	Childbirth
Academic Loss / Gap	Exercise	Teacher Shortage
Time Constraints	Gym	Caregiving
Empty Classroom	Sports	Graduation
Tech Platform	Boundaries	Child Mental Health Concerns
Isolation	Church	Divorce
Anxiety	Prayer	Relationship Break-Up
Depression	Hobbies	Isolation
Lower Standards		
Low Student Expectations	Self-Taught Learning	Depression
Student Behavior	Alcohol	Anxiety
Lack of Parent Support	Positive Thinking	Cancer Treatment
Lack of Admin Support	Less alcohol	Chronic Illness Diagnosis
Hybrid Learning	Part-Time Job	
Low Social Skills	Travel	
Illness	Officiating	
Uncertainty	Relaxation	
Student Attention Span	Counseling	
Social Media		
Student Motivation	Higher Education	
No Student Consequences	Mental Health Practices	
Staffing Shortages	Healthier Eating	
Teacher / Student Connection		
Mental Exhaustion		
Teacher Not Valued (Tutor)		
Locked Classroom		
No Safety Training		
Teacher Outlook		

Note. Participant interview data. Study site ISD's (pseudonym) Whole Child Department, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

It was evident the most common stressors experienced by the participants in this study were new expectations, academic loss, technology, lack of teaching standards and lowered expectations for the students, remote learning environment, and student behaviors. I found several findings in this study fascinating and compelling:

1. Almost every participant expressed challenges with the following stressors: technology, digital learning platform, and hybrid learning environments. When I probed more about technology, it was not necessarily the technology itself that caused the stress; for some it was the difficulty that students faced trying to access the internet. For others, it was the unfamiliarity of the various learning platforms they were required to use and no assistance with navigation. Even then, for others, it was simply feeling disconnected from their students.
2. Many participants in this study expressed their greatest stress was the obvious academic loss that many students have experienced. This was an observable finding to me because even 3 years after the pandemic started, many students still struggle with some degree of academic loss.
3. Another observable finding for me was that even more participants expressed that the lack of student motivation and poor student behaviors were a greater concern.
4. With the national crisis of teacher shortages, it was not surprising to hear that the new expectations of teaching were a stressor experienced by all 16 participants in this study. Teachers described new expectations as having to use more technology in the classroom, different learning platforms, role changes, less instructional time, lower standards for students, more job duties, behavior issues, little to no support, poor mental health, and longer workdays.

5. The mental exhaustion component of burnout (anxiety and depression) was significantly lower than I imagined it to be. For this study, mental exhaustion was not assumed unless the participant said they were experiencing or had experienced mental exhaustion. If participants did not say the word mental exhaustion, anxiety, or depression, I did not record it as mental exhaustion. This could be considered an assumption because as the researcher I was assuming if they did not use a particular word, they may not be experiencing it. It could also be delimitation because as the researcher it was my decision to assume the participant was not experiencing mental exhaustion, anxiety, or depression unless they verbally said they were.
6. Despite the struggle and stress each participant described the majority of the participants I interviewed shared an overwhelming positive outlook for teaching especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4 is a collective, descriptive summary of the expressed coping strategies used by the participants in this study. When participants were asked about the coping strategies used during the COVID-19 pandemic and now, the five most common coping strategies from the collective list in Table 3 were relationships, self-care, positive thinking, social and emotional learning practices, and exercise. One participant shared, “I journal a lot! I really enjoy journal writing! I also try to exercise every day.” Another participant shared, “I go to church, I pray, I exercise, and I spend time with my family. That’s how I recharge.” Twelve participants mentioned spending time with family and friends was a major coping strategy during the pandemic and currently.

Study site ISD follows the CASEL's framework, which is a systemic approach that emphasizes the importance of establishing equitable learning environments and coordinating practices across key settings of classrooms, schools, families, and communities to enhance all students' social, emotional, and academic learning. Table 4 is a descriptive summary of the coping strategies and the total number of participants that mentioned they practiced or are still practicing them now. In this study it was evident that relationships, exercise, positive thinking, social emotional learning practices, and self-care were the most common coping strategies used among the participants in this study. Twelve of the 16 participants expressed how they currently use or used relationships to cope with stress over the last 3 years. When it was appropriate to ask participants to clarify who was considered part of this relationship, family, spouse, and friends were the most common responses. Nine participants shared that exercise was mandatory for managing stress. Nine participants shared that they regularly used positive thinking strategies to manage stress. One participant shared that journaling was very helpful. Another participant shared that a gratitude journal was a favorite coping technique that helped. Nine participants mentioned that self-care was the preferred coping strategy which when asked to clarify what self-care was, the responses included getting their nails done, travel, happy hour, exercise, eating better, getting their hair done, and reading. One of my favorite responses was from a participant who shared that during the pandemic she started using positive morning mantras and breathing exercises with her students. She also shared that many of her students said they looked forward to this practice every morning. One exciting finding was that the majority of participants coped very well with stress. Another fascinating finding was the majority of participants who mentioned they used a coping strategy to cope with stress during the pandemic reported they were still using it today.

In regard to personal life, when teachers were asked to describe any interactions or challenges at home and personal life during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was evident that there were observable stressors outside of work and in addition to teaching. One participant had a baby during the early part of the first stay-at-home work order. Another participant shared her struggle with being the primary caregiver to her mother diagnosed with Alzheimer's. During the pandemic, she has had to provide more care to her ailing mother and also move her to another assisted living facility. One participant went through a marriage separation, and another two participants experienced long-term relationship break-ups during the pandemic. One participant shared, "The stress of both of us being at home got to be too much, I think." Two participants shared that they experienced other challenges at home, including moving to another home. One participant received a cancer diagnosis during the pandemic and also underwent cancer treatment. She graciously shared, "It's been hard but I have made a lot of health changes. I try to eat healthier and take better care of myself."

Table 4

Summary of Coping Strategies for Both Male and Female Participants

Coping strategy	Total
Relationships	12
Self-Care	9
Exercise	9
Positive Thinking	9
SEL	8
Boundaries	5
Spirituality	4

Coping strategy	Total
Mental Health	4
Alcohol	3
Hobbies	2
Travel	2
Part-Time Job	1
Officiating	1

Note. Participant interview data.

Table 5 is a summary description of female participants' most common stressors experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of student social skills and student behavior. Overall, female participants expressed low morale, new expectations, technology, student behavior, hybrid learning environments and student motivation as the most common stressors. Similarly, the male participants expressed new expectations, academic loss, technology, and hybrid learning environments as the most common stressors. One participant shared, “Everything is the teachers fault...There are no consequences for students anymore, and no parent involvement.” Another participant shared, “The pandemic was a crucible.”

Based on the data collected from this study, the top three stressors experienced by both male and female participants were the new expectations of teaching, hybrid learning environments, and technology platform hurdles. One compelling finding based on the collective summary of stressors for male and female participants was that during the interviews, female participants seemed to be more concerned with the loss of student social skills, self-efficacy and decline in behavior than male participants.

Table 5*Summary of Stressors Experienced by Gender*

Stressor	M	F
Hybrid Learning Environment	5	11
New Expectations	5	11
Technology Platform Hurdles	5	10
Student Behavior	3	8
Student Motivation	3	8
Lack of Student Social Skills	1	8
Low Morale	2	5
Academic Loss/Gap	5	6
Time Constrained	0	3
Empty Classroom	0	3
Isolation	1	3
Anxiety	0	4
Depression	0	3
Teaching Stds/Student Expectations	3	6
Lack of Parent Support	0	2
Lack of Admin / Teacher Support	2	5
Illness	0	2
Uncertainty	1	4
Student Attention Span / Focus	3	6
Lack of Student Consequences	1	4
Staffing Shortages	1	1
Lack of Teacher/Student Connection	1	5
Mental Exhaustion	1	3
Teacher Skills Not Valued	0	3
Locked Down Classroom	0	3
Lack of Safety Training	0	2
Teacher Outlook	2	4

Note. There were 11 women and five men represented in this study.

Table 6 is a descriptive summary of stressors for Title 1 and Non-Title 1 participants in this study. In this study there were six Title 1 campuses and 10 Non-Title 1 campuses represented. According to Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2018), the Texas Education Agency provides

supplemental funding to state and local educational agencies to acquire additional education resources at schools serving high concentrations of students from economically disadvantaged homes. One compelling finding was that of the 10 participants from Title 1 campuses eight participants described student motivation as a stressor. Conversely, of the six participants representing non-Title 1 campuses, only three participants described student motivations as a stressor. One participant shared, “I couldn’t give fist bumps, high fives, or hugs...I struggled not being able to see the kids facial expressions and body language to know when they were struggling.” Another intriguing finding from the data collected in this study was all six participants representing Title 1 campuses experienced hybrid learning environments, the new expectations of teaching, technology platform hurdles, and academic loss. Similarly, the most common stressors among the participants representing the Title 1 campuses were the same four stressors, hybrid learning environments, the new expectations of teaching, technology platform hurdles, and academic loss. There was an observable difference in non-Title 1 campuses and Title 1 campuses in the areas of student motivation, teacher outlook, lack of teaching standards and lowered student expectations. One captivating finding was that the overall stressors for both Title 1 campuses and non-Title 1 campuses were technology hurdles and new expectations.

Table 6*Summary of Title 1 and Non-Title 1 Stressors Experienced*

Stressors	Title 1	Non-Title 1
Hybrid Learning Environment	6	10
New Expectations	6	10
Technology Platform Hurdles	6	9
Academic Loss/Gap	6	5
Student Motivation	3	8
Time Constrained	3	4
Empty Classroom	1	2
Isolation	1	3
Anxiety	3	1
Depression	1	2
Teaching Stds/Student Expectations	2	7
Student Behavior	3	6
Lack of Parent Support	1	1
Lack of Admin / Teacher Support	3	4
Low Morale	2	5
Lack of Student Social Skills	4	5
Illness	1	1
Uncertainty	1	4
Student Attention Span / Focus	4	5
Lack of Student Consequences	2	3
Staffing Shortages	0	3
Lack of Teacher/Student Connection	3	3
Mental Exhaustion	2	2
Teacher Skills Not Valued	1	2
Locked Down Classroom	1	2
Lack of Safety Training	0	2
Teacher Outlook	1	5

Note. Participant interview data. There were 10 Non-Title 1 campuses and 6 Title 1 campuses represented in this study.

Table 7 is a summary of common stressors for Title 1 and Non-Title 1 participants by gender. The top six stressors for female participants were hybrid learning environments, new expectations, technology platform hurdles, student motivation, lack of social skills, and student

behavior. All 11 female participants expressed the hybrid learning environment and new expectations were concerns or challenges for them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The top four stressors experienced by the male participants were hybrid learning environments, new expectations, technology platform hurdles, and the academic loss of students. One participant shared in regard to students being behind, “I feel like they are way behind. I feel like it [the COVID-19 pandemic] hindered their progression. I feel like it has been a big roadblock.” Another participant shared about how student motivation has changed significantly, “The good ones are still good, and the others just don’t give a damn. And I am seeing a lot more of that than before” Another participant described his fear for education as a result of COVID as, “The COVID situation gave everybody permission to just give up...I fear some will continue operating like this for the rest of their lives.” All five male participants mentioned the top four stressors were concerns or challenges for them during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the data collected in this study, both male and female participants were currently still concerned with new expectations of teaching, but overall, both agreed that the technology, learning platforms and hybrid learning environments have since improved.

Table 7*Summary of Stressors for Title 1 and Non-Title 1 Participants by Gender*

Stressors	M	F
Hybrid Learning Environment	5	11
New Expectations	5	11
Technology Platform Hurdles	5	10
Academic Loss/Gap	5	6
Student Motivation	3	8
Lack of Student Social Skills	1	8
Teaching Stds/Student Expectations	3	6
Student Behavior	3	8
Low Morale	2	5
Time Constrained	0	3
Empty Classroom	0	3
Isolation	1	3
Anxiety	0	4
Depression	0	3
Lack of Parent Support	0	2
Lack of Admin / Teacher Support	2	5
Illness	0	2
Uncertainty	1	4
Student Attention Span / Focus	3	6
Lack of Student Consequences	1	4
Staffing Shortages	1	1
Lack of Teacher/Student Connection	1	5
Mental Exhaustion	1	3
Teacher Skills Not Valued	0	3
Locked Down Classroom	0	3
Lack of Safety Training	0	2
Teacher Outlook	2	4

Note. Participant interview data. There were 11 women and five men represented in this study.

There were 10 Non-title 1 campus participants and six Title 1 campus participants. Only the stressors with more than six participant responses are included in the most common stressors experienced. Teacher outlook was mentioned by six Non-Title 1 participants. Table 10 is a descriptive summary of the most common stressors for Non-Title 1 participants in this study.

Ten participants represented Non-Title 1 campuses. Only the stressors with more than six participant responses are included in the most common stressors experienced. All 10 participants expressed the new expectations of teaching and hybrid learning environments were the most observable stressors. Nine participants expressed technology and the challenges associated with technology was the most prevalent stressor. Eight participants expressed student motivation was an observable concern and challenge for the classroom. Seven participants expressed the changed teaching standards and student behaviors were the greatest stressors. One compelling finding to me for Non-Title 1 participants was that six responded saying that their outlook on teaching has observably been challenged.

Table 8

Most Common Stressors for Non-Title 1 Participants

Common stressors	Number
Hybrid Learning Environment	10
New Expectations	10
Technology Platform Hurdles	9
Student Motivation	8
Teaching Stds/Student Expectations	7
Student Behavior	6
Teacher Outlook	5

Table 9 is a summary of the most common stressors for Title 1 participants in this study. There were six participants from Title 1 campuses represented in this study. All six participants expressed their greatest concerns including the new expectations for teaching, technology, hybrid learning environments, and the academic loss for students. Four of the six participants felt the

lack of students' social skills and attention span were also significant concerns. One participant shared, "I just feel kids don't learn quite as much as they should as they do if it's tactile."

Another participant shared, "The kids came back to the classroom and they are not used to sitting in a classroom anymore." One interesting finding to me with participants representing Title 1 campuses was that they seemed more passionate about teaching and their students.

Table 9

Most Common Stressors for Title 1 Participants

Common stressors	Number
Hybrid Learning Environment	6
New Expectations	6
Technology Platform Hurdles	6
Student Motivation	3
Teaching Stds/Student Expectations	2
Student Behavior	3
Teacher Outlook	1

Table 10 is a summary of the most common stressors for female participants in this study. Consistent with the common stressors among all participants, all 11 female participants expressed their greatest stressors including the new expectations for teaching, and hybrid learning environments. Technology was the third most common stressor that followed the new expectations of teaching and hybrid learning environments. Technology had 10 female participants represented in this total number. Student motivation, social skills, and student attention span were mentioned by more than half of the female participants (six). One participant said, "Student behaviors have changed for sure. They don't know how to interact with others. I

have had to take more time teaching basic kindergarten skills because they missed this while they were at home.” Another participant shared, “When we came back, there were so many kids that just...we are starting from scratch.” It was alarming to see that all female participants struggled and were still struggling with the new expectations of teaching especially considering that education remains to be a female dominated field.

Consistent with the female participants, new expectations and hybrid learning environments were represented by all five male participants. One participant shared, “There are significant gaps...we are having to reteach and try to get them caught up.” Another participant shared, “These kids have lost their stamina. And their understanding of what we are doing is just so minimal.” One captivating finding for me was that all five male participants expressed technology and students’ academic loss were significant stressors for them. Lowered student standards, behavior, student motivation and a decreased attention span were mentioned by more than half of the male participants as a current concern. Overall, when it came to technology, the male participants in this study did not struggle with technology as much as they struggled with knowing and seeing their co-workers and students struggle with it.

Table 10

Most Common Stressors Experienced by Both Male and Female Participants

Common stressors	Number
Hybrid Learning Environment	11
New Expectations	11
Technology Platform Hurdles	10
Student Behavior	8
Student Motivation	8

Lack of Student Social Skills	8
Low Morale	5
Academic Loss/Gap	6
Teaching Stds/Student Expectations	6

Note. There were 5 men and 11 women represented in this study.

Themes

- “I feel like my job, my purpose is to teach. Not become an administrator or any other role in the education field but just be there with the students in the classroom.”
- “I think teaching is not for everyone. Teaching comes from your heart. You have to remember that it’s the children you serve first.”

In qualitative research, coding is a construct that is researcher-generated, within data analysis that symbolizes and assigns interpreted meaning to data for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes and also requires a researcher’s analytic lens (Saldaña, 2013). Through analytic memoing, participant interviews, and data collected in this study, several emergent patterns and commonalities began to surface to identify three themes I extracted from this study (Saldaña, 2013). The three themes in this study included: meaningful work, coping, and technology challenges.

Meaningful Work

Meaningful work is “work that is experienced as particularly significant and holding positive meaning for an individual” and refers to work that is perceived and valuable to an individual (Van Wingerden & Poell, 2019, p. 1). When individuals feel their work is meaningful and important, they feel more purposeful and engaged at work (Martela & Pessi, 2018). When one feels engaged at work, they are more inclined to increase their job resources and job

demands, to create a better suited and more challenging work environment (Van Wingerden & Poell, 2019). Martela and Pessi (2018) explained the three components of meaningful work: (a) the subjective experience of work as intrinsically significant and worth, (b) the experience that one is able to realize oneself through work, and (c) the work serving a broader purpose. When individuals find their work meaningful, they tend to be more motivated to do their job and do it well (Martela & Pessi, 2018).

In this study, eight of the 27 stressors mentioned by the teachers participating in this study were aligned with the theme of meaningful work. The theme of meaningful work indicates a strong relationship with perceived personal value. One participant shared,

I still love the kids. But my patience for everything else is not what it was before.

Paperwork, dealing with parents, walk-throughs, doing tedious jobs that have no meaning but we have to check off that box just to say we did them that to me is frustrating.

One participant who had been teaching for more than 20 years shared, “I feel like with some [students], I have made a difference...that’s what keeps me coming back day after day, year after year.” During the interviews, each participant shared their passion or purpose for teaching in their own words. Each of their stories told a different story, but every participant painted a beautiful picture of their passion or purpose for teaching. One participant shared their passion “was hurting or wounded” over the last several years since the pandemic started, but overall, the way each participant perceived their work made it evident that meaningful work positively influenced burnout prevention.

Coping

- “If they hired a teacher, they should trust they are doing the right thing.”
- “Teachers don’t do it for the money. When you can’t find your why, that’s what burnout

is to me.”

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explained that “coping refers to a person’s cognitive and behavioral efforts to master, reduce, or tolerate the internal and/or external demands that are created by the stressful transaction” (as cited in Berjot & Gillet, 2011, p. 2). Overall, the participants in this study coped rather well to the number of stressors they said they had experienced since the pandemic started in January 2020. Although there was enough evidence of an observable mismatch between job demands and stressors, the 16 participants in this study positively used available resources to cope with the demands they were experiencing today. The way an individual perceives stress and copes with stress is important, which made it evident that the level of resilience was high among this group of teachers.

Technology Challenges

- “Technology alone cannot replace the guidance and expertise of dedicated educators.”
- “We did google classroom...after we came back and we were on Schoology...that was terrible trying to Zoom with three classes...it was exhausting. I was exhausted...I was mentally tapped.”
- “[discussion about remote instruction]...I felt like if there was anything in my brain it was like Jello, sliding off.”

The use of technology is a blessing in most organizations but for many teachers, the abrupt change from in-person to remote classrooms was overwhelming. The COVID-19 unleashed unprecedented changes in the classroom which teachers and students are still learning to adjust almost 3 years after the pandemic presented in the United States. Herold (2020) explained some school districts gave teachers a weekend to prepare, expecting them to

restructure their lessons to remote instruction (as cited in Leech et al., 2020). Leech et al. (2020) explained,

Remote instruction is significantly different from online learning...“remote” is used to refer to the adapted lessons that teachers created as a result of the switch away from in-person learning. These lessons are not necessarily designed for online [learning], but rather reformatted to work in the online format. (p. 247)

Based on the teachers’ experiences and the explanation of remote instruction, I believe technology was not as big a challenge as remote instruction. Although both involved the use of technology, more participants struggled with not being able to connect with students face-to-face or experience those high-quality connections with their students in the classroom. One of the participants shared his view on technology challenges and said,

Technology is a powerful tool in education, but its effectiveness depends on how educators utilize it to enhance the learning experience. It’s important to have skilled and knowledgeable teachers who can integrate technology effectively to benefit students and address their unique educational needs.

In this study, there was always a majority of participants that experienced technology challenges during the pandemic and now. The overall findings of technology challenges describe depersonalization which aligns with Maslach’s definition of burnout and the CBI in the dimension of work-related burnout.

Summary

Chapter 4 began with the results from the data collected for this study and an overview of the findings that were presented in the data. This chapter also captures the three major themes that were presented from the findings which included coping, meaningful work, and technology

challenges. Chapter 5 includes the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

- “Burnout means you are just so tired. Tired of feeling like a failure because you can’t meet expectations. The worst part is feeling like you are letting your students down.”
- “Student behaviors have changed for sure. Their attention span has also changed. They need more “brain breaks” and they just don’t want to learn anymore.”
- “Burnout is when you don't look forward to coming to work. To me, it’s also when it takes a toll on your health and when you don't enjoy what you're doing anymore.”

Stress is inevitable in every profession, but the COVID-19 pandemic has created new stressors that have since contributed to many teachers choosing to leave the profession. As the teacher shortage crisis continues to rise, it is more imperative for school districts and school leaders to do everything they can to prevent teacher burnout. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explain the phenomenon of teacher burnout through lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if coping and meaningful work are factors that influence burnout prevention.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

After a substantial review of the data collected from the interviews, three major themes emerged from the teachers’ responses: (a) meaningful work, (b) coping, and (c) technology challenges. All three research questions were addressed in the study and all three themes are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The main research questions for this study included:

- RQ1: What are the lived experiences of teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- RQ2: How do teachers at study site ISD (pseudonym) describe burnout?
- RQ3: How do teachers at study site ISD (pseudonym) describe coping and meaningful work?

RQ1: What are the Lived Experiences of Teacher Burnout During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Some of the participants answered as follows:

- “Behavior, disrespect, the student do not have consequences for behaviors...we are asked to do more, more, and more with less, less, and less.”
- “Student behaviors have changed for sure. Their attention span has also changed. They need more brain breaks and they just don’t want to learn anymore.”
- “Kids have zero tolerance for each other.”

RQ1 was addressed by stressors participants experienced. The most common stressors mentioned by participants included student behaviors, technology, remote learning, no support from leadership, the academic loss or gap, a significant lack of student motivation, unrealistic expectations for classroom teachers, longer workdays, and not feeling valued.

Many participants openly shared that the COVID-19 changed education. One participant shared, “Coming back from the pandemic, kids are different. They don’t want to learn. They have no desire to be creative or even think for themselves anymore. And no one holds them accountable anymore.” Several participants shared that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated other stressors like anxiety, school security (e.g., lockdowns, shooter drills, etc.), and the reduction of social skills. One participant shared, “I started seeing a therapist...it completely altered my life...I was terrified to go back [to the classroom].” The overwhelming consensus was that teachers felt the student behaviors, the lack of student motivation, technology challenges, and the new expectations for classroom teachers have caused more stress than the academic loss of students. Five teachers interviewed shared their concern that too many students returned to the classroom lacking social skills, self-efficacy, the desire to learn and increased behavior problems. Several participants shared that they felt the pandemic had “lowered the bar”

for students' academically which did not offer students the challenge to even try. It was an interesting finding that the academic gap was not the greater concern for most participants. Instead, the greater concern seemed to include the lack of social skills and student behaviors.

One gripping finding was that several participants during their interviews said that they felt less valued as a teacher after coming back from the stay-at-home work orders despite having been forced to take on more roles and responsibilities than before. One participant said, "To some of these kids we are probably their parent for 9 months." Two participants shared that their mental health was greatly affected. Several other participants shared that there have been many days they "want to quit," or "just don't want to go to work." One participant shared that since that in her few years of teaching she had lost two students to suicide. "This is my sixth year teaching and... this is only the second year...that I have not had a student die by suicide." Several participants shared personal situations where to me they exemplified going above and beyond for students. Four participants shared that during the pandemic they delivered books, supplies, and even food to students and their families that were in need. Almost every participant interviewed shared the frustration and stress of having to meet new, unrealistic expectations in addition to the previous expectations for classroom teachers. One participant shared,

At a point when you think you have things figured out, they throw something else at you.

Like with this new reading and the way they are revamping the STARR, they gave that to us 5 weeks ago, they said learn this and teach it. That was it.

Additional stressors included longer workdays (for planning), decreased morale, lack of parental support, poor social skills, disrespect, and lack of accountability. Despite the added stress and unrealistic expectations, another interesting finding was that none of the teachers I interviewed ever blamed their principal for the challenges they are experiencing today in the classroom.

When participants were asked about what leaders could do to better support teachers in the case of another crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, their responses were consistent and strong. One participant responded, “I want leaders to keep expectations high for students and teachers. Set the bar high, otherwise, you will get low performance from both.” Another one shared, “Listen to us. We are the ones in the classroom.” And another one responded, “Give us grace. And more opportunities to practice self-care.” The responses to this question made it evident to me that teachers are not feeling heard or valued. This finding was profound to my research because burnout is described as a syndrome of “overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment” (Maslach & Leiter, 2016, para. 3).

The biggest take away for me from the responses to question 1 was that the level of stress for most participants was very high. Without question participants painted a clear picture of high stress, uncertainty, and frustration. But they also described clear images of coping, passion, and purpose. The participants in this study coped rather well with the level of stress they endured. Because stress is inevitable, and because there is a maximum threshold for the amount of stress an individual can handle, it became evident to me that there is an obvious need for more resources that offer teachers new ways to cope with stress. Overall, my findings were parallel with past research to confirm that if teachers continue working in a constant state of stress and uncertainty with no resolution, over time they will experience burnout, and manifest burnout psychologically, emotionally, and physically (Hurley, 2021). Also, since the conceptual framework in a study serves as an outline to identify the relationship between theory and the data collected, I feel that both Lazarus’ theory of stress and coping and Maslach’s theory of burnout

helped describe burnout according to the participants, and explained other factors that may have contributed to their experience of burnout.

To summarize question 1, most teachers interviewed described their lived experience during the COVID-19 pandemic to include stressors such as technology, unrealistic expectations, student behaviors, less parental involvement, uncertainty for the future (of education), school safety, teacher shortages, and leadership support.

RQ2: How Do Teachers at study site ISD (pseudonym) Describe Burnout?

RQ2 was addressed by all three components, stressors, coping, and meaningful work. When participants were asked to describe what burnout meant to them, it became apparent to me that burnout is not fully understood. Most of the participants I interviewed agreed that burnout was when an individual felt overwhelmed, tired, and had little to no desire to do anything. Several participants cried during the interview. One participant shared, “I used to feel like I connected with my students. I felt like I made a difference in their lives. That feeling is hard to find now.” Another participant said, “Burnout is when you don't look forward to coming to work. To me, it's also when it takes a toll on your health and when you don't enjoy what you're doing anymore.” The following comments came from several participants as they described what burnout meant to them.

- “Burnout is when you don't look forward to coming to work.”
- “Burnout is when you don't feel like you are making a difference in your student's lives anymore.”
- “Burnout is when you simply don't care anymore.”
- “Burnout is when the negative outweighs the positive.”

Research on burnout suggests that burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). With the trending and unfortunate teacher shortage plaguing the world, I found it compelling that after interviewing 16 participants only two said they felt they had ever reached burnout. Several shared they felt they were close to burnout, and one shared they were experiencing burnout currently. One participant responded, “Look in my eyes. I am burned out with administration, the lack of student concern, and disrespectful children, not teaching.” This was another observable finding for me because as the researcher, I assumed the students would be the biggest stressor, not administration and poor leadership. I considered this response an example of emotional exhaustion because throughout her interview she shared how exhausted she was with administration, unrealistic expectations, student behaviors, disrespect, and the reduction of title, role, and responsibility. Even though this one participant’s responses aligned with all three characteristics of burnout, several other teachers' responses aligned with one or more characteristics of burnout.

The conversations that came from this question were profound to me because the participants’ responses told me that the phenomenon of burnout is very complex and not fully understood. The participants consistently described burnout as “feeling tired” or “overwhelmed”. Not one teacher blamed the children or their principal. Overall, the majority of the teachers shared that despite the added stress exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, they still maintained their passion for teaching. I believe their passion and resilience was evident throughout the interviews. The participants’ tears and heart felt stories told me teachers just want to be heard, do not feel valued, do not feel their profession is valued the way it used to. The

responses and heartfelt stories painted the picture that meaning or purpose in their work had been lost but for many there was still hope for it to be rediscovered.

In summary, the teachers described burnout as feeling tired or overwhelmed which aligned well with Maslach's theory of burnout. I found it intriguing that not one teacher blamed the students. However, the majority of the teachers who participated in this study shared that they still maintained a passion for teaching. One participant shared, "The kids aren't the problem, there is just nothing enjoyable about teaching anymore because we aren't allowed to teach." The overall findings describe cynicism which aligns with Maslach's definition of burnout (Maslach, 1982). However, in title 1 teachers I observed evidence that seems to indicate client-related burnout, like that found in the CBI. This data are very valuable since the participants did not blame the children, but they are still experiencing a form of burnout.

RQ3: How Do Teachers at Study Site ISD (pseudonym) Describe Coping and Meaningful Work?

RQ3 was addressed by the participants' ability of coping and their perception of meaningful work. Most participants in this study openly shared their struggles with old and new stressors in the classroom, but they also demonstrated strong coping strategies. It was engrossing to hear participants share how they used coping strategies they taught their students, like deep breathing, exercise, and journaling in their own practice of self-care. Parallel with research on coping and meaningful work, individuals that demonstrated positive coping strategies tended to adapt better to stress and had a greater sense of psychological well-being. I found it remarkable that the majority of the participants' in this study described significant ways of coping during the COVID-19 pandemic and now. Similarly, most participants in this study described their work as meaningful and felt they still served a purpose in teaching their students which told the story that

these teachers continue to teach because they felt their work was intrinsically significant, valuable to their students, and were making a difference in the lives of others (Groot Wassink et al., 2019; Martela & Pessi, 2018). When teachers feel engaged in their work, they are more inclined to increase their job resources and demands and create a more challenging work environment (Groot Wassink et al., 2019). Meaningful work often reflects the feelings of individuals' to make them feel that their work is of value and encourages the use of their abilities in pursuit of a worthwhile goal (Lavy, 2022). Therefore, meaningful work can help reduce or even prevent burnout (Hyatt, 2022). It was evident during the participant interviews that when teachers felt engaged and supported at work, they were more inclined to cope better with daily stress. Research on meaningful work is still in the early stages but the data collected in this study revealed that when individuals' felt their work was meaningful, they were able to cope better with other stressors. Overall, the participants' responses aligned well with my research, reinforcing the work of authors such as Atkinson et al. (2018), Hyatt (2022), and Lavy (2022) who identified coping and meaningful work as factors in burnout prevention.

Several participants I interviewed shared that they had either started a new physical activity during the stay-at-home work order or have since used a self-care strategy to cope including exercise, meditation, attending church, positive thinking practices, prayer, counseling or therapy, professional development (going back to school), setting boundaries, travel, officiating games, spending time with family, and even social-emotional-learning practices. One teacher shared that during the stay-at-home work order, she was able to spend more time with her kids and take time to walk outside every day. Another participant shared about learning a new hobby which also helped improve his mental health and provided a positive mind-body-soul mindset. Two teachers shared that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, they started setting

boundaries to separate from work to maintain a positive mindset. Two teachers described limiting late-night emails and taking work home to allow more time for self-care, family, and friends.

Review of Findings

After substantial data collection, it was evident that my findings aligned with prior research suggesting that the way an individual perceives stress can determine how well they cope with stress (Kyriacou, 2001). The data collected in this study also aligned with the literature review that suggested the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many new stressors in the classroom for teachers which has negatively impacted their physical, mental, social and emotional health, personal safety, and overall well-being. Parallel to the conceptual framework used in this study, Lazarus's theory of stress and coping and Maslach's theory of burnout, both theories were appropriate because they describe reasons why individuals might experience burnout and factors that may be associated with burnout. Specifically, Lazarus' theory of stress and coping was relevant to this study because it portrays how people relate stress to their environment and ways of coping (Cooper & Quick, 2017) and Maslach's theory of burnout was relevant because this theory examines the components of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment (Huberman & Vandenberghe, 1999). Research on burnout has remained congruent for several decades now conveying that individuals feel overworked, unappreciated, lack leadership support, and feel deficient in their abilities (Maslach et al., 2001). The data findings in this study perfectly aligned with both past and current research on burnout, more specifically teacher burnout.

This is a qualitative phenomenological research design to explain the phenomenon of teacher burnout through the lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and discover if

coping and meaningful work influence burnout prevention. The participants of this study consisted of 16 teachers from study site ISD (pseudonym). There were 10 elementary teachers, three middle school teachers, two high school teachers, and one teacher from study site ISD (pseudonym) special schools. Open-ended questions were used during in-depth interviews to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the data collected from this study, the most common stressors experienced by the 16 participants were hybrid learning environments, the new expectations of teaching, technology platforms, student motivation, and student behavior. The most common stressor for female participants was the new expectations for teachers and this was also consistent with the most common stressor for male participants. The most common stressor for title 1 campus participants was the new expectations of teaching and hybrid learning environments and this too was consistent with the most common stressor for non-title 1 campus participants. The two most common stressors for women were the new expectations for teaching, and hybrid learning environments. Technology was the third most common stressor for female participants. For both male and female participants, the five most common coping strategies were relationships (i.e., spouse, children, friends, and family), self-care practices (i.e., getting manicure/pedicure, getting hair done, massage, exercise, retail therapy, hobbies, travel, church, prayer), physical activity, positive thinking, and social and emotional learning practices (i.e., meditation, deep breathing, journaling, prayers). For this study there were three main research questions which are listed below along with a brief summary of the participants' responses.

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Summary of RQ1: Participants described their lived experience during the COVID-19 pandemic to include many stressors in the classroom including technology, unrealistic expectations, student behaviors, less parental involvement, uncertainty for the future (of education), school safety, teacher shortages, and leadership support. It was interesting to hear about the struggles many faced, but it would be beneficial to use a measurement tool on burnout to elucidate any other reasons for burnout aside from work-related burnout.

RQ2: How do teachers at study site ISD (pseudonym) describe burnout?

Summary of RQ2: The participants described burnout as a feeling of being tired or overwhelmed. No one blamed the students. No one just blamed leadership. Overall, the majority of the teachers who participated in this study shared that they still maintained a passion for teaching, and I believe that was evident throughout the interviews. To me, there is no doubt many participants either experienced or are still experiencing burnout, however, there needs to be more studies to determine if their experience was just from the COVID-19 pandemic or other factors such as the other life events that occurred during the same time frame.

RQ3: How do teachers at study site ISD (pseudonym) describe coping and meaningful work?

Summary of RQ3: Overall the participants' responses aligned well with my research and suggested that coping and meaningful work are factors in burnout prevention, but I believe there is opportunity for more research on coping and meaningful work. In my role with the district, I look forward to developing, analyzing, and implementing new intervention strategies surrounding employee wellness that increase the available resources for teachers and staff to cope better in the face of adversity. By implementing interventions to build on coping strategies

and meaningful work, employees will feel more purposeful and engaged at work (Martela & Pessi, 2018).

Limitations

Limitations are common in almost every endeavor but describe potential weaknesses in the study that are beyond the researcher's control (Simon, 2011). Limitations are important to address because they can impact or influence the interpretation of the findings from the research (Simon, 2011). Limitations are also important in research because they often provide opportunities for further research.

One major limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size of teachers. With the consideration that study site ISD (pseudonym) is the largest school district in a large urban city employing more than 14,000 employees, the sample size of 16 teachers used for this study would be considered relatively small. Future studies might consider a larger sample size to gain a better understanding of the population, phenomenon, and burnout. A second limitation might include job classification because specialists, administrative assistants, nurses, leadership, and counselors were not included in the teacher population for this particular study. Other possible limitations of this study are as follows:

- researcher bias
- questions asked during the interview may not have probed enough conversation
- pure bracketing
- sample size in comparison to the size of the organization
- time of year the interviews were conducted
- data were limited to only one interaction (one interview)
- participants not fully understanding the phenomena of burnout

Future Research

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is new and research on teachers' experience during the COVID-19 pandemic is still in its infancy, there is a great need for future research to bring awareness to the phenomenon of burnout to close the gap of the teacher shortage crisis. This study was specific to study site ISD (pseudonym) but served as a preliminary study to explore the lived experiences of teachers who taught during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the findings make it evident there is a need for more specialized research (within study site ISD (pseudonym) including positive leadership, coping, resilience, gratitude, self-efficacy, self-care, and the importance of leadership support in regard to burnout prevention.

The stressors that occurred outside of the classroom were plentiful and some quite extensive; this fact made it relevant to me that in future studies, it is important to use a measurement tool like the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory or the Maslach Burnout Inventory to further elucidate that participants are experiencing personal, work-related, or client-related burnout.

Future research with long-term follow-up and a larger population sample would also be beneficial to strengthen and validate the current findings. More research is also needed to explore the effectiveness of coping strategies as a way to reduce teacher burnout and increase teacher retention and job satisfaction. Finally, with the trending crisis of teacher shortages in the United States, more research is needed to explore the new expectations of teaching 3 years after being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations

As the crisis of teacher shortages continues to increase around the world, it is important to fully understand the phenomena of burnout and discover new ways to encourage and

implement intervention strategies. Maslach and Leiter (2016) described several common intervention strategies to prevent burnout to include:

a) changing work patterns (e.g., working less, taking more breaks, avoiding overtime work, balancing work with the rest of one's life); b) developing coping skills (e.g., cognitive restructuring, conflict resolution, time management); c) obtaining social support (both from colleagues and family); d) utilizing relaxation strategies; e) promoting good health and fitness; and f) developing a better self-understanding (via various self-analytic techniques, counseling, or therapy). (p. 109)

Burnout is a major organizational concern and growing trend because of the potential to impact overall teaching quality, output, lower engagement, and job satisfaction (Hyatt, 2022). Stress and teacher burnout existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The unpredictability and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic has left many teachers feeling overworked, anxious, and unsupported (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has opened the eyes for employers to be more aware and proactive when it comes to employee wellness. Even though workplace stress is unavoidable, learning to cope with stress should be the priority when it comes to burnout prevention. Since stress is a risk factor for poor mental and physical well-being, and burnout, it is important for organizations to explore coping and meaningful work to fight workplace stress and prevent burnout. There is limited knowledge regarding coping and meaningful work interventions to address stress and burnout among teachers.

Essence Statement

Teacher burnout is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon we do not know enough about, but leaders in education need to understand burnout and the magnitude of this phenomena because teachers are leaving the classroom because they feel devalued as a teacher and do not

feel their work is meaningful. Burnout is an enormous organizational concern because it not only affects an individual's health, happiness, and overall well-being but also has the potential to impact the entire organization.

Conclusions

This study focused on explaining the phenomenon of teacher burnout through the lived experiences of teachers who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic and discovered if coping and meaningful work were factors for preventing burnout. The three main conclusions that emerged from this study were:

- Conclusion 1: Teacher burnout may not truly be what teachers are experiencing, but rightfully feel overwhelmed with the new expectations exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers that participated in this study coped extremely well, which demonstrates the resiliency of teachers.
- Conclusion 2: Teachers can benefit from supportive leadership and a well-implemented employee wellness program in place. Teachers need to feel supported with resources to cope with stressors (e.g., employee wellness program, social-emotional learning, mindfulness, Employee Assistance Program, etc.). Organizations need to invest in their employees and view them as their number one asset. Employers need to invest in customized wellness programs, interactive employee assistance programs, and implement innovative coping interventions that all encourage positive employee well-being.
- Conclusion 3: Teachers want to feel supported by their co-workers and leaders. They want to be included in decision making, and well informed about changes and new practices. Teachers need to feel supported because most are more than willing to go the extra mile for their students. Teachers have lost their drive because they are

overwhelmed, they haven't lost their purpose. They need reassurance, support, empathy, recognition, and trust.

Summary

In summary, this qualitative phenomenology study explained teachers' lived experiences of teaching since the COVID-19 made its presence in the United States. The conceptual framework used in this study was based on both Lazarus' theory of stress and coping and Maslach's theory of burnout and both theories described reasons why individuals might experience burnout and factors that may be associated with burnout. The teachers I interviewed provided detailed examples of what they have had to endure inside and outside of the classroom. Some teachers shared how their jobs have changed for the better and some shared how their jobs have changed for the worse. Many teachers shared opportunities for growth and others voiced their concerns for the future of education. This study provided me with clear insight on why leadership support is ideal in every situation and how beneficial a well-implemented and supported employee wellness program is to any organization. This small study gave me clear insight into what employees want and need to feel more supported and valued as a teacher which I believe will help me significantly in my role of health and financial wellness coordinator for the district. This study opened my eyes to understand the immense role a teacher has, and even more 3 years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also provided me with a better understanding of how coping and meaningful work influence burnout prevention and how organizations and policies can help create conditions that not only reduce the risk of burnout and compassion fatigue, but also promote healthy, more effective workers.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

IRB-2023-51 - Initial: Initial - Exempt – ACU

External

Inbox



do-not-reply@cayuse.com

Mar 23,
2023,
3:51 PM

to me, xxxxx

Date: March 23, 2023

PI: Rita Petersen

Department: ONL-Online Student, 17250-EdD Online

Re: Initial - IRB-2023-51

Understanding Burnout Through the Lens of Teachers During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Understanding Burnout Through the Lens of Teachers During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study*. The administrative check-in date is --.

Decision: Exempt

Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Research Notes:

Additional Approvals/Instructions:

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the

Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:

- When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.
- According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
- It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website <http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...> or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board

Appendix B: Example Questions for the Qualitative Interviews

Q1: Explain how your vision of teaching has changed over the past 2 years?

Q2: Describe to me any new challenges you have experienced at work since the pandemic started.

Q3: Describe your interaction with work structure: How did you view your work life? What was difficult? What was different?

Q4: Describe your interactions with your students: how did you view them during the pandemic? What was difficult? What was different?

Q5: Describe your interactions at home and personal life? How did you view your personal life during the pandemic? What was difficult, different?

Q6: Explain your coping strategies (pre, post, and during) during the pandemic.

Q7: In what ways can leaders show support for teachers like yourself during a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic?

Q8: What does burnout mean to you?