

Examining the Relationship Between Principals' Supportive Work Environment Practices and Teacher Burnout in Pakistani Public Schools

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Teacher burnout is a critical issue in educational systems worldwide, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. In Pakistan, public sector teachers are particularly vulnerable due to overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and high administrative pressures. School principals, as instructional and organizational leaders, play a pivotal role in shaping work environments that can either exacerbate or mitigate burnout. This study investigates the relationship between principals' supportive work environment practices and teacher burnout among secondary school teachers in Pakistani public schools. Using a correlational research design, data were collected from 300 secondary school teachers in the district Lahore and Sheikhupura through the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI-ES) and the Supportive Work Environment Practices Scale (SWEP). Results indicated a significant positive correlation ($r = .56, p < .001$) between supportive practices and burnout. Findings suggest that principals' recognition of teachers, workload management, and emotional support play a crucial role in reducing burnout.

1. Introduction

Teacher burnout has emerged as a major issue for educational institutions around the globe (Li, 2023). Burnout is a condition that impairs teacher effectiveness, student results, and overall school performance (Madigan & Kim, 2021). It is characterized by emotional weariness, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 2013; Mabele et al., 2024). The risk of burnout is especially significant in Pakistan, where public schools frequently deal with congestion, a lack of funding, and administrative difficulties. The school climate is greatly influenced by the principal. Teachers' well-being can be enhanced and stress levels reduced by their supportive practices, which include communication, professional development opportunities, task management, emotional support, and acknowledgment (Carroll et al., 2021). Despite its significance, little empirical study has been done in Pakistan to examine the relationship between teacher burnout and supportive work environment practices implemented by principals. By investigating their relationship in public schools, our study fills this gap.

In the broadest sense, a supportive workplace places a high priority on the growth and well-being of its employees through initiatives including opportunity for professional advancement, open communication, work-life balance, and appreciation (Elufioye et al., 2024). By encouraging psychological safety, empowering employees to turn down assignments, exhibiting helpful behaviors, and having faith in their professionalism, principals establish this (Qu et al., 2024). Protecting prep time, minimizing needless administrative chores, and giving frequent, insightful feedback are important components (Braz Junior et al., 2024). Teachers who experience burnout are physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausted from prolonged exposure to emotionally taxing situations (Harrison, 1996, p. 25; White, 2021).

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To measure the level of teacher burnout in Pakistani public schools
2. To identify the level of teachers' burnout
3. To examine the relationship between principals' supportive environment practices and teachers' burnout.

2. Literature Review

Teacher burnout involves three dimensions: (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalization, and (c) reduced personal accomplishment. High burnout levels result in absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, and teacher turnover (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). In its most basic form, burnout is a three-part syndrome that includes depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and diminished feelings of personal accomplishment. It is primarily observed in people who perceive situations as extremely stressful, recognizing that what may be stressful for one person may not be stressful for another (Azeem & Nazir, 2008; Law, 2010; Yong & Yue, 2007).

Employees who are experiencing burnout express feelings of mental exhaustion or emotional exhaustion, emotionally distance themselves from others, such as coworkers, students,

and others (a process known as depersonalization), and negatively assess their own effectiveness and competence. A lower level of personal success is defined by a poor assessment of one's efficacy and competence at work. Emotional weariness is a major factor in burnout (Cropanzano et al., 2003). Travers (2017) examined emotional exhaustion, namely psychological and physical fatigue, in a variety of contexts, including personal life, the workplace, and clients or students (Avanzi et al., 2014; Kristensen et al., 2005; Schonfeld et al., 2017).

However, men and women experience stress and burnout in different ways. Burnout is more common among women and less experienced educators (Leiter et al., 2014). Accordingly, educators who possess greater emotional stability are more likely to manage their responses to stressors successfully (Borrelli et al., 2014; Chan, 2006; Pishghadam & Sahebjam, 2012). Teacher burnout is a multifaceted concept that is often characterized by three main elements: diminished personal accomplishment (feelings of inefficacy), depersonalization (cynicism or detachment toward students and work), and emotional exhaustion (chronic fatigue and depletion). The most popular assessment tool in empirical research on educator burnout worldwide is still the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and its educators' variation (MBI-ES), which has a validated framework for measuring these factors.

Research indicates that supportive leadership from principals significantly reduces burnout (Leithwood et al., 2019). Important tactics include giving instructors opportunity for growth and mentoring, communicating openly, recognizing their efforts, allocating the workload equitably, and offering emotional support. According to research, supportive environments improve teachers' motivation, resilience, and retention (Ingersoll, 2012; Kutsyruba et al., 2021).

Comprehensive assessments of school leadership indicate that fostering supportive leadership behaviors—such as providing opportunities for professional growth, providing constructive feedback and recognition, distributing the workload equitably, and providing emotional and psychological support—is crucial to establishing learning environments in schools that reduce teacher stress and burnout.

In addition to having a direct influence through resource distribution and interpersonal assistance, academics argue that administrators also indirectly affect teachers' well-being by influencing social norms, school policies, and teacher autonomy. Recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses of research on teacher well-being (2020–2024) have consolidated the evidence that leadership that promotes autonomy, growth, and teachers' voice tends to improve teacher wellbeing and minimize attrition risk. Contextual and interaction effects are the focus of more recent studies; a cooperative school culture, adequate material resources, and a carefully considered policy all boost the efficacy of leadership techniques. This corpus of studies warns against considering leadership as a magic bullet because context (country, resource levels, and policy environment) is crucial.

2.1 Relationship between Principals' Supportive Work Environment and Teachers Burn Out

Muhammad Javed Iqbal (2020) examined the burnout of high school teachers in KPK in connection to their social achievement and the perceived leadership style of their school administrators. According to the study, instructors who exhibit leadership behavior—that is, are seen as having supportive, socially effective heads—have significantly lower levels of burnout.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) paradigm is the most commonly used explanation for teacher burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). This paradigm states that while workplace resources (such as support, recognition, and autonomy) lessen stress and promote engagement, high job demands (such as workload, administrative duties, and huge classes) create emotional weariness. As the primary school administrators, principals have a significant impact on whether or not instructors have access to enough resources to meet demand. International studies show consistent negative correlations between principal support and teacher burnout. Teachers who perceive their leaders as supportive report less stress and are more likely to stay in the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Dicke et al., 2020).

Studies conducted in Pakistan show comparable trends, although there are additional contextual limitations. According to Malik & Siddiqui (2022), the impact of role overload on burnout is moderated and its intensity is decreased by supervisor assistance, particularly that of principals. Saeed et al. (2025) highlighted systemic issues including overcrowding and under-resourcing and demonstrated that supportive leadership by itself was insufficient to counteract the detrimental impacts of severe workloads.

Transformational and supportive leadership styles are also positively associated with teacher job satisfaction, retention, and self-efficacy, all of which lower the risk of burnout, according to research conducted in Lahore and Karachi (Naz et al., 2023). Therefore, there is an opposite relationship: teachers feel less burnout when principals foster favorable work environments and demonstrate supportive leadership qualities. However, even if principle assistance is crucial, it might not be enough to totally eradicate burnout in Pakistani public schools with serious structural issues (long class sizes, inadequate funding).

Teacher burnout is a persistent challenge in educational systems, typically characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Promoting open communication, including educators in decision-making, providing constructive criticism, and recognizing their efforts are all examples of supportive behaviors. Regular use of these strategies increases the likelihood that teachers will be more effective in their jobs, be less cynical about their work, and experience less emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Dicke et al., 2020). However, when principals have dictatorial or unsupportive attitudes, the likelihood of burnout increases, which often results in teacher turnover and job dissatisfaction.

Although the evidence from Pakistan emphasizes certain contextual constraints, it nevertheless substantially confirms this link. According to Malik and Siddiqui (2022), the association between role overload and burnout among teachers in Rawalpindi and Islamabad was reduced by supervisor and collegial support, indicating that principals' assistance can act as a stressor buffer.

In a similar vein, transformational leadership was found to be substantially linked to increased job satisfaction and teacher retention in Lahore's public schools by Naz et al. (2023), both of which had the indirect effect of lowering burnout.

However, Saeed et al. (2025) showed that supportive leadership by itself did not significantly mitigate the impact of workload on emotional exhaustion. This suggests that, despite its value, principal support may not be sufficient to completely counteract structural issues like overcrowded classrooms and subpar facilities in Pakistani public schools with limited resources.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a correlational research design. The population included secondary school teachers in Punjab.

3.2 Sample

A stratified random sampling technique selected 300 teachers (200 from district lahore and 100 from district sheikhupura).

3.3 Instrument

Two questionnaires were used for this study. The questionnaires were adaptive. To ensure accuracy in the local context, questionnaires were updated in accordance with expert advice. Using Cronbach's alpha, the instrument's reliability was examined.

4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The information was supplied by the school teachers themselves. The researcher visited secondary schools in person to evaluate the relationship between teachers' burnout and the supportive work environment provided by principals. To collect information on demographic traits, the researcher developed Performa. It contained information about the teachers' gender, district, and prior teaching experience. A range of data analysis techniques were applied in order to look at the collected data. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were applied to the data analysis using SPSS.

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the level of supportive workplace environment among secondary school teachers. As shown in Table 1, teachers reported the highest mean scores on work motivation ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 2.42$) and work recognition ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 2.09$), indicating that they generally feel motivated in their roles and that their efforts are acknowledged by school leadership. Employee engagement ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 2.11$) was also

relatively high, suggesting that teachers are moderately invested and committed to their work. In contrast, career development ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 2.21$) yielded the lowest mean score, highlighting teachers' perception of limited opportunities for professional growth and advancement within the school system. The mean score for employee performance ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 3.90$) showed considerable variation, as reflected in the large standard deviation, which suggests uneven experiences of performance support across teachers.

Table No 1: Level of Supportive workplace environment among Secondary School Teachers

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Work recognition	4.22	2.09
Work Motivation	4.24	2.42
Career development	3.70	2.21
Employee engagement	4.00	2.11
Employ performance	3.82	3.90
Supportive workplace environment	3.99	8.72

The overall composite score for the supportive workplace environment ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 8.72$) indicates a moderately supportive environment; however, the unusually high variability points to inconsistencies in how supportive practices are perceived across schools.

Table No 2: Level of Teachers Burnout among Secondary School Teachers

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Career satisfaction	3.63	3.01
Perceived administration support	4.03	3.15
Coping with job related stress	3.59	2.39
Attitude towards students	3.69	4.23
Burn out	3.74	8.84

As presented in Table 2, the overall burnout score was moderate ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 8.84$), though the large standard deviation indicates substantial variability in teachers' experiences. Among the subscales, perceived administrative support ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 3.15$) had the highest mean, suggesting that some teachers feel supported by school administration, while others perceive inadequate or inconsistent support. Attitude towards students ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 4.23$) and career satisfaction ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 3.01$) were also moderate, reflecting mixed perceptions regarding teachers' commitment to students and satisfaction with their professional roles. The lowest score was recorded for coping with job-related stress ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 2.39$), indicating that many teachers may lack effective strategies to manage occupational stress. Taken together, these results suggest that burnout is present at a moderate level among teachers, but its intensity and dimensions vary considerably across individuals and schools.

Table No 3: Relationship between Supportive Workplace Environment and Teachers Burn Out

Variables	1	2
1. supportive workplace environment	-	.56**
2. Teachers burn out	.56**	

Note. ** $p < .001$

The correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between supportive workplace environment and teacher burnout ($r = .56, p < .001$). This indicates that as perceptions of a supportive workplace environment increase, reported levels of burnout among secondary school teachers also tend to rise. While this finding is somewhat counterintuitive, it may suggest that even in supportive environments, teachers continue to experience high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion due to systemic challenges such as workload, large class sizes, or limited resources. Another possible explanation is that teachers who remain more engaged in supportive environments may also take on additional responsibilities, which in turn heightens their risk of burnout.

4.1 Discussion

The research was aimed to investigate the relationship between teacher burnout in public secondary schools in Pakistan as well as how principals can establish a conducive work environment. The results were shocking: the levels of burnout were also found to be higher in teachers who said that the atmosphere at school was more supportive ($r = .56, p < .001$). That is to say, as opposed to the protective effect that should have been observed, a positive, more powerful sense of support was correlated with an increase in stress, which is a complex and counter-intuitive phenomenon that does not fully adhere to the hypothesis that administrative support necessarily unloads teachers.

This might be attributed to the fact that the teachers who work under more amiable settings might be more committed to their schools and might be driven to work harder and be more responsible (Ingersoll, 2001). Although potential opportunities of involvement, motivation, and recognition can increase job satisfaction, teachers might become more stressed and emotionally fatigued due to the increased number of responsibilities (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

This is consistent with Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model created by Bakker and Demerouti (2007). This model assumes that although job resources have the potential to reduce stress, they also have the potential to encourage a higher involvement level, which in turn may increase burnout in high-stress situations, which is the opposite of what the model intends to demonstrate.

The Pakistani situation can also have structural issues like overcrowded classrooms, material resources, and burdensome administration to contribute to this conflict (Bashir and Ramay, 2010). Despite the presence of helpful policies that principals are implementing, the teachers are still limited due to structural problems that make them unable to exploit the assistance

provided. As such, more famous and active teachers might be psychologically stressed more and have more responsibilities.

Moreover, the results are consistent with the previous research findings that underline the complexity of burnout. Besides lack of support, Maslach and Leiter (2016) also pointed out that misfit between demands and resources may also lead to burnout. In situations where the demands are high all the time, the supportive strategies may not be adequate to curb burnout among teachers. In general, this paper emphasizes the need to have a more comprehensive view of teacher well-being. Along with the positive actions of principals, systemic changes are to be implemented, including a light workload, adequate staffing, stress reduction measures and the possibility to develop professionally with the emphasis made on coping strategies. Unless these structural issues are resolved, the supportive work conditions might not be adequate to reduce teacher burnout in public schools.

5. Conclusion

This paper brings to the fore the contradictory nature of the supportive working conditions and teacher burnout in Pakistani state schools. Although supportive practices can boost motivation and engagement, it might raise the amount of work and the level of stress among teachers in case institutions remain within the institutional scope. In order to successfully decrease burnout, supportive leadership should be accompanied by more comprehensive reforms, aimed at workload, resources, and stress-coping mechanisms. To enhance the standards of Pakistani education and their professional well-being, the health of teachers is important to maintain.

5.1 Recommendations

1. Distributive leadership methods should enable the principals to create a balance between participation opportunities, acknowledgement and reasonably allocated workload.
2. Policy-makers need to deal with structural issues such as the size of the classes, the lack of staff, and the lack of teaching resources.
3. Workshops, peer support, and counseling should present teachers with coping mechanisms and stress management techniques as a part of professional development.
4. Future studies should use longitudinal designs to elucidate causality and look at mediating factors (such as workload, role conflict, and emotional labor).

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