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Emotional burnout in secondary school teachers in Cayambe Canton, Ecuador: application of the modified MBI instrument

Agotamiento emocional en los docentes de secundaria del Cantón de Cayambe, Ecuador: aplicación del instrumento MBI modificado

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ABSTRACT

Emotional exhaustion is the central dimension of the syndrome known as burnout. Consequently, this study was conducted to detail emotional exhaustion within the management of burnout syndrome among secondary school teachers in Cayambe, Ecuador. To this end, a quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive, and cross-sectional study was conducted that applied the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and a complementary sociodemographic form. The results revealed a high prevalence of symptoms associated with fatigue and emotional exhaustion, also a noticeable diminished impact subsequently on motivation and professional performance. Triggering factors, particularly administrative overload and multitasking, were more variable among the teachers surveyed. These results align with international evidence that burnout is associated with structural working conditions, institutional pressure, and limited resources. It is concluded that emotional exhaustion among this group of teachers is a persistent phenomenon that goes beyond the individual and shapes educational dynamics, requiring specific preventive strategies.

KEYWORDS: Emotional exhaustion; Burnout syndrome; Secondary school teachers; Occupational health.

RESUMEN

El agotamiento emocional es la dimensión central del síndrome conocido como burnout. Por consiguiente, este estudio se llevó a cabo para detallar el agotamiento emocional en el manejo del síndrome de burnout entre los docentes de secundaria en Cayambe, Ecuador. Para ello, se realizó un estudio cuantitativo, no experimental, descriptivo y transversal, en el que se aplicó el Inventario de Burnout de Maslach (MBI) y un formulario sociodemográfico complementario. Los resultados revelaron una alta prevalencia de síntomas asociados con la fatiga y el agotamiento emocional, así como un notable impacto posterior en la motivación y el rendimiento profesional. Los factores desencadenantes, en particular la sobrecarga administrativa y la multitarea, fueron más variables entre los docentes encuestados. Estos resultados concuerdan con la evidencia internacional de que el agotamiento está asociado con las condiciones estructurales de trabajo, la presión institucional y los recursos limitados. Se concluye que el agotamiento emocional entre este grupo de docentes es un fenómeno persistente que va más allá del individuo y configura la dinámica educativa, lo que requiere estrategias preventivas específicas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Agotamiento emocional; Síndrome de burnout; Profesores de secundaria; Salud laboral.*

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INTRODUCTION

Burnout and emotional exhaustion are among the most critical issues affecting the health of educational professionals today, as they represent the cumulative response to chronic stress and job demands. It refers to an acute and chronic response to workplace stressors, capturing a triad of constructs: a decrease in productivity, emotional exhaustion, and the tendency to treat others in a depersonalized manner. Among these, emotional exhaustion is considered the most important, as the level of exhaustion invoked by a task is entirely disproportionate to an individual's coping resources (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2020).

In the international context, it has been shown that emotional exhaustion dimension burnout reduces the capacity for pedagogical innovation, limits the response to students' needs and deteriorates teaching in qualitative terms (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Moreno-Murcia et al., 2019; Arís-Redó et al., 2022). Among the structural factors that trigger it are work overload and its related problems, the multitude of administrative requirements, the pressure to meet certain academic indicators and the limited opportunities for growth, creating favorable conditions for chronic fatigue and demotivation in the teaching context (Álvarez-García et al., 2019).

More recent studies by Li et al. (2023) explored the impact of self-efficacy and resilience on burnout. They confirmed the negative association of self-efficacy and resilience with burnout and the indirect impact of emotional regulation on burnout through resilience. Teacher motivation as a mediator between perceived autonomy and emotional exhaustion and the quality of teacher-student relationships was determined by Wang et al. (2024). Ornaghi et al. (2023) showed that socio-emotional competence buffers perceived stress by improving engagement. These studies extend the work of Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2020), who argue that emotional exhaustion is the element most influenced by external pressures and, in particular, by the lack of resources.

Research in Ecuador addresses the problem from a more educational and social perspective. For example, Maldonado and Bustos (2024) have shown that the absence of adequate policy frameworks on teacher burnout, and stress more generally, affects teachers' motivation and attitudes toward teaching, ultimately diminishing the quality of instructional processes. This minimally anchored foundation provides a starting point for further exploration of the relationship between teachers' emotional exhaustion and motivation within the educational environment in the region.

In this case, the mountainous region of the Ecuadorian province of Cayambe, where public education is

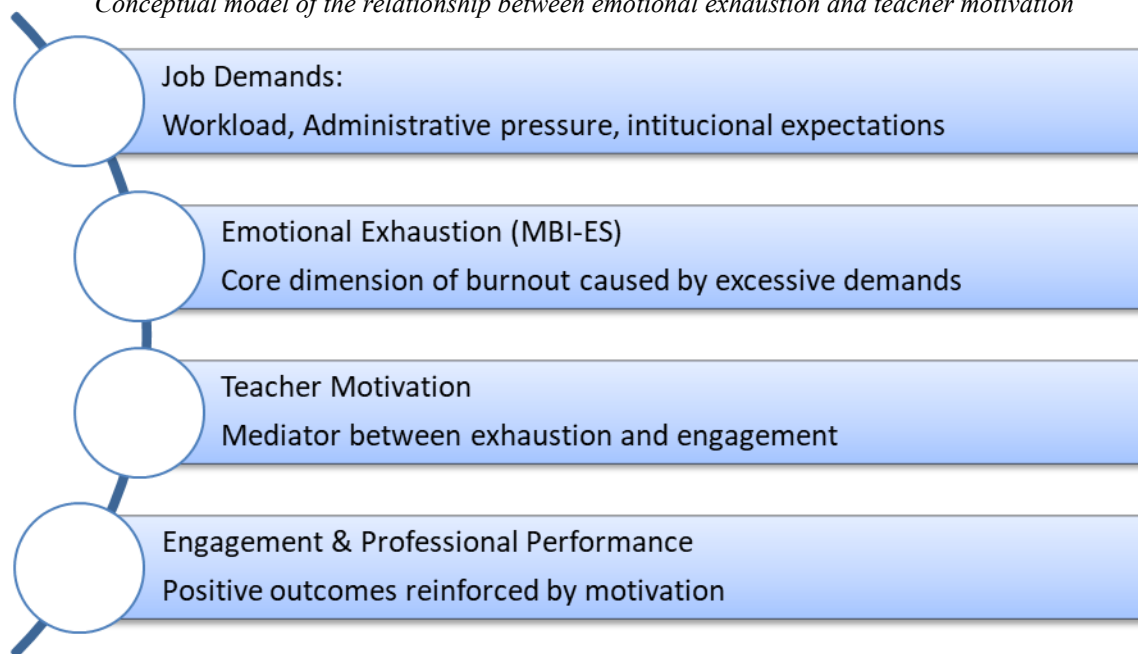
the central focus of the school, is of particular interest to the research activities, as the region is characterized by a culturally diverse population, overwhelming and unrealistic administrative and social expectations, and limited resources. All these elements characterize the most pedagogical, decisive, and pragmatic approach to constructing and justifying the case for contextualized evidence.

Thus, the focus of this study is to assess the levels of emotional exhaustion among public secondary school teachers in Cayambe, Ecuador, and associate them with their motivation levels in order to provide step-by-step evidence for formulating plans and strategies to improve teacher motivation and well-being.

Job demands can lead to emotional exhaustion, which is also the basis of this study within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theoretical framework (Demerouti et al. 2001; Bakker & Demerouti 2017). Therefore, emotional exhaustion is a consequence of high job demands, which consist of workload and administrative pressure. Conversely, teacher motivation, resilience, and self-efficacy as personal resources reduce burnout and promote lasting professional commitment. The proposed conceptual model (Figure 1) illustrates these relationships and how emotional exhaustion negatively impacts motivation, which, in turn, hinders teacher well-being and performance through contextual stressors.

Figure 1

Conceptual model of the relationship between emotional exhaustion and teacher motivation



Note. The model is grounded on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti,

Methodology

The research developed a descriptive, non-experimental design with a quantitative, cross-sectional approach. It determined the levels of emotional exhaustion among secondary school teachers who manage burnout syndrome in Cayambe, Ecuador, capturing a reality at a specific moment in time without manipulating variables. This methodological classification is based on the typology defined by Ato, López, and Benavente (2013), who systematized research designs in psychology according to the degree of variable manipulation and temporality.

The study population was defined as active secondary school teachers working in the canton's public schools. Non-probability convenience sampling was used. The inclusion criteria were (a) at least one year of experience teaching secondary school, (b) employment in public schools in the canton, and (c) voluntary participation through informed consent. Based on accessibility and statistical representativeness, the study sample consisted of 100 teachers.

A variant of the Burnout Inventory for Educators (MBI-ES) was used to collect data from 100 secondary school teachers. Customization focused solely on the Emotional Exhaustion component, which consists of nine items. For analytical precision, the items were consolidated into three measures: Symptoms, Factors, and Impact, with three items each. This approach resulted in 300 responses (100 respondents × 3 measures). The validated questionnaire for diagnosing burnout for educators that was adapted to Spanish and it was validated by six professionals in Education.

Since the study focused on only one dimension, emotional exhaustion, it was because the theoretical framework describes this dimension as the main component of the syndrome, as well as the first prominent indicator of teacher burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Bedoya et al., 2017). Furthermore, the research team developed a questionnaire on burnout syndrome, along with teacher motivation, which was part of the study.

To examine the relationship between teacher motivation and emotional exhaustion, a Pearson correlation was performed. The analysis yielded a significant negative correlation between the two variables ($r = -0.861$, $p < .001$). This indicates a substantial decrease in teacher motivation as emotional exhaustion increases. This finding is consistent with previous research that noted the negative correlation between teachers' intrinsic motivation and burnout (Li et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

The project was carried out in a total of three phases. Phase one involved approaching educational authorities for institutional permission and sharing the study objectives with teaching staff. In the second phase, the instruments were implemented during in-person and virtual sessions, depending on the participants' availability. Finally, in phase three, the collected data were organized into matrices and analyzed using SPSS Statistics v. 27 software for rigorous statistical processing.

Data analysis was carried out in two stages. First, a descriptive analysis of frequencies, means, standard deviations, and coefficients of variation was developed to characterize the levels of emotional exhaustion within the sample. Then, an inferential analysis was performed that included the estimation of the internal reliability of the instrument with Cronbach's α coefficient, as recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), who accept values above 0.70 for applied research. The empirical calculation of the pilot test gave a value of $\alpha = 0.92$, $n = 15$, which indicating excellent internal consistency. It was rated on 5 likert Scale rating from never 0 to always 5. Items like: I feel emotionally drained from my work, were analyzing. In addition, Pearson correlations were used to determine the correspondence between burnout syndrome management and teacher motivation, obtaining a result of $r = -0.86116949$ ($p < .001$), indicating a strong negative correlation.

Table 1
Correlation between Emotional Exhaustion and Teacher Motivation

Variables	1	2
1. Emotional Exhaustion	—	
2. Teacher Motivation	-.861***	—

Note. $p < .001$. Pearson correlation coefficients.

Regarding ethics, the research was conducted based on the provisions of the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the applicable national regulations in force in Ecuador regarding research involving human subjects. The confidentiality of the data collected, the anonymity of the respondents, and the use of information exclusively for scientific and academic purposes were protected. Written informed consent was obtained from the respondents, which explained the voluntary nature of their participation in the study, their right to withdraw from the research at any time, and the absence of significant risks associated with the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 outlines the information for the emotional exhaustion dimension and its indicators. First, the percentage figures summarized in said table are presented. In Symptoms, the concentration predominates at high levels (56.0%, sum of Almost always 12.3% and Always 43.7%); the low categories (Never + Almost never) account for 5.3% and the intermediate level (Sometimes) 38.3%. In Factors, high responses total 40.3% (Almost always 18.3% + Always 22.0%), low responses 26.6% (Never 7.3% + Almost never 19.3%), and the intermediate level 33.0%. In Impact, the highest concentration is observed at high levels (62.0%, Almost always 15.0% + Always 47.0%), with 15.6% at low levels and 22.3% at the intermediate level. Together, these percentages confirm the sustained presence of signs of emotional fatigue and the recognition of its effects on professional performance.

TABLE 1

Descriptive statistics of Emotional Exhaustion

Alternatives	SYMPTOMS		FACTORS		IMPACT	
	fa	%	fa	%	fa	%
(1) Never (N)	1	0	22	7.3	10	3.3
(2) Almost Never (CN)	16	5.3	58	19.3	37	12.3
(3) Sometimes (AV)	115	38.3	99	33.0	67	22.3
(4) Almost Always (CS)	37	12.3	55	18.3	45	15.0
(5) Always (S)	131	43.7	66	22.0	141	47.0
total	300	100	300	100	300	100
□ of the indicator	3,937		3,283		3,900	
Indicator category	HIGH		AVERAGE		HIGH	
σ of the indicator	1,031		1,214		1,217	
Dispersion	Low dispersion		Low dispersion		Low dispersion	
CV of the indicator	26.19%		36.99%		31.21%	
□ of the Dimension	3.71					
Dimension Category	HIGH					
σ of the Dimension	0.318					
Dispersion	Low dispersion					
CV of the Dimension	8.57%					

Source: Own elaboration

TABLE 2

Descriptive statistics of Emotional Exhaustion

Indicator	Mean (M)	SD (σ)	CV (%)	Interpretation
Symptoms	3.94	1.03	26.19	Moderate–High
Factors	3.28	1.21	36.99	Moderate
Impact	3.90	1.22	31.21	Moderate–High
Overall Emotional Exhaustion	3.71	1.16	31.27	Moderate

Source: Own elaboration.

Note.

Means represent averages of individual item responses on a five-point Likert scale (0 = never, 5 = always).

Standard deviations (SD) were calculated across all items within each indicator. $CV = (SD / Mean) \times 100$. Interpretation thresholds are based on Maslach and Jackson (1986): Low < 2.99, Moderate = 3.00–4.49, High ≥ 4.50 .

Table 1 shows the behavior of the indicators. Symptoms had the highest mean, with an average of 3.937, with $\sigma = 1.031$ and $CV = 26.19\%$, reflecting frequent experiences of fatigue and emotional saturation. Factors had the lowest mean ($\bar{x} = 3.283$, $\sigma = 1.214$) and the greatest variation ($CV = 36.99\%$), indicating heterogeneity in the perception of triggers such as administrative burden, multiple roles, and pressure for results. This variability may be explained by unequal task distribution and differences in institutional management practices among schools in the canton. Impact maintained a high mean ($\bar{x} = 3.900$, $\sigma = 1.217$, $CV = 31.21\%$), showing that the effects of burnout manifest regularly, although with different intensities between sub-groups. At a global level, the dimension reaches $M = 3.71/5$ (high category) with $\sigma = 0.318$ and $CV = 8.57\%$, showing low dispersion and responses grouped around a shared perception. According to the MBI-ES thresholds (Maslach and Jackson, 1986), this average indicates a level of emotional exhaustion that is moderately high emotionally.

In this sense, the results are consistent with the background information included in the research and with international open-access evidence. In schools in Cali, Díaz Bambula et al. (2012) identified organizational and role factors associated with teacher burnout, which supports that Factors is the component with the greatest variability in this sample. At the neuropsychological level, Sanabria Alarcón's (2025) thesis reports

associations between burnout and deficits in executive functions (e.g., flexibility and working memory), providing a framework for understanding the perceived impact on daily performance. Converging, recent studies show that greater perceived autonomy, better teacher-student relationships, and motivation to teach are linked to lower emotional exhaustion (Wang et al., 2024); and that reducing/adjusting job demands (overload, administrative tasks) is associated with improvements in teacher mental health (Morris et al., 2025). In turn, systematic reviews with primary school teachers point to the close relationship between well-being/burnout and working conditions, with direct implications for educational outcomes (Öztürk et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the findings related to teachers' emotional exhaustion in Cayambe are consistent with the region. According to Maldonado-Marín and Bustos-Nicolalde (2024), the lack of motivation and ineffectiveness of teachers resulting from exhaustion directly translates into a decrease in the quality of education. Comparing Marsollier et al. (2024) and Deroncele-Acosta (2025), both also pointed out that emotional fatigue and exhaustion are contributing factors in the rise of organizational stress, being systemic problems rooted in the education system rather than internal problems of an individual.

Therefore, from an institutional perspective, the need for proactive approaches becomes more prevalent. As Cao (2025) highlighted, "with the development of well-being programs, the redistribution of work, and the development of more supportive school environments," the reduction of exhaustion is facilitated. Along the same lines of thought, the current work argues that teacher burnout from an emotional perspective provides an excuse for failing to improve motivation levels and for skimping on the quality of education provided in Ecuador, thus demanding the need for organizational change.

Considering the averages and dispersion, the high level of Symptoms and Impact and the variability of Factors suggest a common floor of burnout in most participants (low overall QoL), coexisting with subgroups that experience the triggers of burnout more intensely (QoL > 30% in Factors and Impact). This pattern is consistent with longitudinal evidence linking increased demands with deteriorating teachers' mental health (Morris et al., 2025) and with the literature highlighting the protective role of autonomy and the pedagogical relationship (Wang et al., 2024).

Thus, it is recommended to move towards a preventive management phase in which strategies aimed at reducing non-pedagogical workloads and associated bureaucracy predominate; redistributing roles and ensuring recovery times; and strengthening didactic autonomy and quality pedagogical relationships as pro-

tective resources against burnout, in line with the aforementioned findings and the approach of the reviewed background.

When reviewed by components, in the symptoms section, an average of 3.94 is evident. Within a high category, with a coefficient of variation of 26.19%, indicating that the majority of teachers surveyed evidence of having frequently experienced signs of emotional exhaustion, which helps to affirm a general perception of sustained burnout. Thus, 43.7% responded "always" and 38.3%, "sometimes," which confirms this trend, evidencing shared experiences of intense exhaustion that become more visible in certain activities or moments of the school year.

If we reflect on the factors, we obtain a variable of 3.28, placing it in a medium category, with a coefficient of variation of 36.99%, having a greater variability in the perception of this indicator, the intensity with which teachers perceive the factors is varied.

Likewise, the impact reached an average of 3.90. This places it in a high category, with a CV of 31.21%; 47% of respondents answered "always" to the questions in this component. This demonstrates that the effects of emotional exhaustion do significantly affect their professional performance and emotional well-being.

This dimension is related to the proposal made by Maslach and Jackson (1986), who considered emotional exhaustion to be the most immediate response to prolonged stress in the workplace. In Latin America, similar configurations have been reported (Marsollier et al., 2024; Deroncele-Acosta, 2025), reinforcing that these stressors are structurally embedded in educational systems.

The administrative burden, pressure to achieve results, the multiplicity of unrecognized functions, and the limited margin for physical and mental recovery mean that this exhaustion is not an occasional phenomenon; rather, it accumulates over time, progressively eroding motivation.

Although no extreme scores were identified, the results warn of a sustained trend that could worsen if not accompanied by institutional care strategies. A mean of around 3.70 may appear neutral at first glance; however, observing that almost all items have coefficients of variation above 30%, it is possible to conclude that many teachers find themselves in a gray area where burnout has not become chronic, but has become normalized.

Conclusion

Although this study offers valuable insights into teacher burnout, it is necessary to acknowledge certain methodological limitations, including non-probability sampling, the use of a cross-sectional design, and the limited psychometric validation of the adapted instrument. The analysis concludes that burnout in teachers is a widespread phenomenon, expressed in the recurrence of symptoms of affective fatigue, feelings of sustained exhaustion, and a perception of its impact on professional practice. The results show that, although most participants frequently recognize signs of fatigue, the intensity of the triggering factors varies, especially those associated with administrative burdens, multiple roles, and institutional pressure for results, which generates heterogeneous experiences within the group. The impact, however, is perceived more uniformly, with negative effects on motivation, teaching quality, and emotional well-being, suggesting that this syndrome transcends the individual sphere and is positioned as a collective problem with educational implications. This aligns with the inverse correlation proposed by Wang et al. (2024) as demonstrated by the strong negative association between emotional exhaustion and motivation ($r = -0.861, p < .001$). These trends are consistent with the literature that highlights burnout as an immediate response to demanding and prolonged working conditions, as well as with evidence that points to pedagogical autonomy, institutional support, and quality interpersonal relationships as protective resources. Consequently, the implementation of preventive measures is recommended to reduce non-pedagogical burdens, strengthen teacher motivation, and ensure spaces for physical and emotional recovery, promoting institutional management geared toward the well-being and sustainability of teaching. The proposals stem from the differences observed within the 'Factors' and the considerable inverse relationship between burnout and motivation.

The conclusions are generally consistent with the quantitative data from this study, highlighted by the average level of emotional burnout, which is moderate to high ($M = 3.71, CV = 31.27\%$), and the strong negative correlation with teacher motivation ($r = -0.861, p < .001$).

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