

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BURNOUT AND INTENTION TO QUIT AMONG TECHNICAL SCHOOL TEACHERS WITHIN KUCHING DISTRICT

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the inter-relationship between intention to quit and burnout among technical school teachers in order to provide a better understanding of these two phenomena invading the field of education and to enable the authorities concerned to generate concrete measures to subdue conditions leading to burnout and intention to quit. Intention to quit was measured using 3 statements adapted from Weisberg and Sagie's model (1999) whereas 22-item statements adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory were used to measure burnout which comprised of three dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment). Burnout was further correlated with intention to quit using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. It was found that burnout and all the three dimensions of burnout, were positively and significantly related to intention to quit. To measure the degree of contribution attributed by the dimensions of burnout on intention to quit, a multiple regression analysis was used. Only emotional exhaustion significantly explained 12% of the variance in intention to quit.

INTRODUCTION

The problem pertaining to intention to quit is becoming a growing concern in the teaching profession. From studies conducted both locally and internationally, it has been confirmed that more and more teachers are seeking permanent avoidance by leaving or intending to leave their jobs. For instance, a study on Malaysian teachers reported that 73% of them indicated moderate to high level of intention to quit (Ding, 2000). This is an alarming figure to indicate the urgency of addressing this problem. In 1997, the National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP) reported that 15,000 teachers in the country have quit the profession since 1992. Studies have indicated that many teachers are trying to avoid the teaching profession by either taking up other school based positions or pursue their career outside of education (George & George, 1995). It has also been reported that if they were to start their working life again, it was unlikely that they would choose teaching as a career. In another study, 50% of the teachers surveyed had resigned from their profession within 7 years of experience (Merseth, 1992). In fact, intention to quit has been widely surveyed but sadly, most of the studies were performed in Western settings. Few studies have been carried out in the Malaysian context and limited published studies or possibly none addressed this issue among technical school teachers, which makes it an important issue to be investigated.

THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Intention to quit is a phenomenon that if left uncontrolled, is likely to produce negative outcomes. Past studies have reported that intention to quit was strongly related to turnover or attrition (Tett & Meyer, 1993). The effect on attrition is not only a disruption to day to day activities but teacher shortages will become a major problem. To overcome shortages, most administrators normally resorted to extensive use of substitute teachers who are normally less qualified and often inexperienced. In addition, teacher attrition can also undermine the ability of the education system to provide quality care. As a result, reducing teacher's intention to quit and maintaining a committed workforce are particularly critical for upholding the image of the profession as well as for future generations.

What causes intention to quit among teachers? According to past research, burnout was found to be a major factor influencing intention to quit. In a study conducted by Weisberg and Sagie (1999), intention to quit among female teachers in Israel was contributed by burnout and according to Merseth (1992), the reason behind the resignation of the 50% of teachers who resigned from their profession within 7 years of experience was also due to burnout. It is reasonable to accept that teachers faced burnout due to the many problems they faced at the workplace such as large and difficult classes, students' behavioural problems and fear of violence. As a result, teachers felt frustrated, mentally exhausted, excessively worried, depressed, anxious and at times defensive towards others. In order to avoid the adverse effect of burnout, they sought permanent avoidance by leaving or intending to leave their jobs. Thus, if these problems are not curbed, they will have a great impact on the accomplishment of predetermined educational goals. Both, the education success of the students and the progress of the school development will be greatly affected.

From the adverse effect of intention to quit and burnout in the teaching profession, it is thus undeniable that they are becoming a major public and professional concern. The continuous research on these phenomena on a worldwide scale is clear evidence of this claim. However, despite the number of studies conducted, a review of the literature reported limited published studies or possibly none addressed the inter-relationship between burnout and intention to quit among technical school teachers.

Thus, this study aimed to investigate (1) the extent of teachers' intention to quit; (2) the level of teacher burnout; (3) the relationship between burnout and intention to quit; and (4) the relationship between the dimensions of burnout and intention to quit among technical school teachers within the Kuching district in Sarawak.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intention to quit has been widely studied by past researchers. The concept of intention to quit was often referred to as turnover intentions (Cohen, 1999; Liou, 1998; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Omundson & Schroeder, 1996), intention to terminate one's job (Raine, 1995; Taylor, et al., 1990) or the propensity to leave one's organization (Rahim & Afza, 1993). More specifically, it means having an inclination or disposition to leave the present organization or it is a conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization. In this study, it is referred to as having the thoughts of leaving the present school taught either at the time of the survey or in a future date.

Burnout was used by Freudenberger (1974) to refer to a state of emotional exhaustion as a result of working too intensely and without regard to one's personal needs. Others viewed burnout from a wider perspective, which describes a specific psychological condition in which people suffer emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, 1986). As extensive study has shown support and validated the measurement of burnout as comprising of these three dimensions, burnout in this study is referred to as the development of increased feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

A large body of empirical studies has been conducted and documented on the nature of burnout and its influence on intention to quit. It has been found that burnout has a direct, dysfunctional influence on intention to quit. Previous studies have even indicated that it was an important predictor of intention to quit among sport officials (Rainey, 1995; Taylor, et al., 1990), social workers (Um & Harrison, 1998; Drake & Yadama, 1996), accountants (Fogarty, et al., 2000), and teachers (George & George, 1999; Weisberg & Sagie, 1999; Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Friedman, 1993).

Upon closer examination between the dimensions of burnout and intention to quit, both emotional exhaustion (Friedman, 1993; Koeske & Koeske, 1993; Drake & Yadama, 1996) and depersonalization (Fogarty, et al., 2000; Friedman, 1993) were found to be significantly and positively related to intention to quit. A person is more likely to leave his job when he is overextended emotionally and depleted of his emotional resources and also when he developed negative and cynical feelings towards the recipient of his service, which, in this study referred to the students. Only reduced sense of personal accomplishment departs from the pattern of being associated with intention to quit. So far no studies have been able to find any significant relationship between a reduced sense of personal accomplishment and the intention to quit (Fogarty, et al., 2000; Drake & Yadama, 1996)

Based on literature review, it was hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Burnout is positively related to intention to quit.

Hypothesis 2: Emotional exhaustion is positively related to intention to quit.

Hypothesis 3: Depersonalisation is positively related to intention to quit

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between a reduced personal accomplishment and the intention to quit.

METHOD

Participants

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 131 teachers in three technical schools in Kuching, with 56.5% male and 43.5% female teachers. In terms of ethnicity, 62.6% were Malays, followed by 18.3% Chinese, 16.8%, Dayak, 1.5%, Indian and 0.8% not included in the groups mentioned. Majority of the respondents (71.0%) were married with slightly more than one quarter (26.7%) single and the remaining 2.3% either separated or divorced. About 54% of them held an academic degree while the 46% possessed a college teaching certificate. Their average age was 33 years and they had been teaching for an average of 10 years.

Measures

Three statements modeled after Wiesberg and Sagie (1999) were used to measure intention to quit: (a) I have considered leaving the current school I teach at; (b) I think that if I were choosing my place of work again, I would choose teaching at this school (reverse-coded); and (c) I think in the near future I will leave teaching at this school. The statements were placed in random order and were evaluated on a 5-point scale ranging from very little (1) to very much (5). The responses from the three items were added to obtain an overall score for teachers' intention to leave. High scores indicate high intention to quit whereas low scores imply that intention to quit is low.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) consisting of 22-item statements was used to assess burnout comprising of three dimensions, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Each item statement employs a 7-point Likert-type response format. Responses varied from 1, 'feelings had never been experienced' to 7, 'feelings have always been experienced'. Respondents' responses on each statement within the same dimension of the MBI were added. Higher scores on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation scales and lower scores on the personal accomplishment scale were associated with burnout. The summation of all the three dimensions gave rise to overall burnout with higher score to indicate high level of burnout and lower burnout scores to denote low level of burnout.

Reliability pre-tests revealed Cronbach alpha of .83 for burnout and .93, .85 and .87 for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced sense of personal accomplishment respectively. The pretest also gave a very strong reliability reading for intention to quit with an alpha value of .91, which made the instrument valid and acceptable in terms of reliability

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of burnout and its dimensions of burnout. The results show that slightly more teachers reported low level of burnout (57.3%) compared to moderate level of burnout (42.7%). However, none of them revealed that they suffered from high burnout level. Thus, burnout is not a serious problem among technical school teachers understudied.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of burnout among respondents

Level of Burnout	Frequency	Percentage
Low (22-65)	75	57.3
Moderate (66-109)	56	42.7
High (110-154)	0	0.0
Total	131	100.0

In Table 2, the study revealed that slightly more than half (54.2%) of the respondents indicated low level of intention to quit and the remaining 45.8% reported moderate to high level of intention to quit. Out of this proportion, 29.0% of them reported moderate level of intention to quit and 16.8% revealed high level of intention to quit. Overall, teachers who responded to this survey reported low to moderate level of intention to quit. Only a small proportion reported high level of intention to quit.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of level of intention to quit among respondents

Level of Intention to Quit	Frequency	Percentage
Low (3-7)	71	54.2
Moderate (8-11)	38	29.0
High (12-15)	22	16.8
Total	131	100.0

Based on the Pearson correlation analysis shown in Table 3, intention to quit was found to be positively and significantly related to burnout and the three dimensions of burnout ($p < .05$). Teachers having high intention to quit faced higher level of burnout, higher emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced sense of personal accomplishment than those with lower intention to quit.

Table 3. Correlation coefficient between burnout, dimensions of burnout and intention to quit

	Intention to quit
	<i>r</i>
Burnout	.342**
Emotional Exhaustion	.357**
Depersonalisation	.153*
Reduced sense of personal accomplishment	.180*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

In order to test the significant contribution of the three burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced sense of personal accomplishment on intention to quit, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was used (Table 4). Only emotional exhaustion was found to be statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Depersonalization and reduced sense of personal accomplishment were found to be insignificant. However, emotional exhaustion accounted for only 12% of the explained variance in intention to quit. One possible explanation could be that there are other possible factors that contributed to intention to quit which are not covered in the research model.

Table 4. Multiple regression results of dimensions of burnout on intention to quit

Variable	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients
Constant	3.399	1.059	
Emotional exhaustion	.158	.036	3.57

R = 0.357 R square = 0 .128 R square adjusted = 0.121

CONCLUSION

The findings permit several conclusions regarding the association of burnout with intention to quit among technical school teachers. The main conclusions are provided below.

The results confirm that burnout is composed of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced sense of personal accomplishment. The empirical patterns of the three dimensions revealed total compatibility with the theoretical pattern suggested by Maslach and Jackson (1981, 1986).

The extent of teachers' intention to quit was found to be low with only a marginal proportion indicating moderate to high intention to quit. In addition, the teachers surveyed also reported low level of burnout arising from emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

In terms of the relationship between burnout and intention to quit, teachers who experienced higher level of burnout have higher tendency to quit the current school. Similarly, those who faced higher level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment, their intention to quit, were found to be higher too. This goes on to imply that burnout has real consequences that triggered the person from having thoughts of leaving the school they are currently attached to.

In terms of the degree of contributions of intention to quit attributed by the three dimensions of burnout, only emotional exhaustion provided the major weight in explaining teachers' intention to quit their current jobs.

IMPLICATIONS

The study brought forth several implications regarding the association of burnout and intention to quit.

From the applicative perspective, two remedies are suggested: prevention and alleviation. Approaches to curb and control teachers' intention to quit and burnout can be designed at either the institution or individual level. Among the remedies that an institution can introduce may include:

- • provide adequate training for teachers in order to give them the awareness of the various problems that teachers are likely to encounter in this line of profession;
- • provide compensation differentiation based on quality in addition to academic degree and years of experience;
- • improve low standing status of teachers;
- • provide counseling for distressed teachers;
- • provide coping skill training to help alleviate problems;
- • ensure principal and collegial support.
- • maintain positive self-image by developing supportive relationships and networks both professionally and personally.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Many questions still remain unanswered, which provided useful grounds for future researchers. Future research needs to be conducted to confirm the findings or explore other possible factors contributing to intention to quit. Another suggestion is to enhance the findings of this study with qualitative information or investigate using a longitudinal design with intervention or experimental studies to investigate the causal links between variables. In addition, a replication of the model presented in this study using different samples or population is also highly recommended.

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