

Resilience in Education Landscape: School Heads' Role in Mitigating Teacher Burnout

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100600595>

Received: 10 June 2026; Accepted: 15 June 2026; Published: 30 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to find out the role of school heads in addressing teacher burnout in Cantilan District, Surigao del Sur, Philippines for School Year 2024-2025. A mixed method design was employed, using correlational analysis and qualitative phenomenology. The study respondents were 22 school heads and 185 teachers selected through stratified random and complete enumeration respectively from 22 elementary schools. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency analysis, weighted mean, Pearson correlation and ANOVA. Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Significant relationships were found among demographic characteristics (age, gender, marital status, type of school) and burnout dimensions. Principals' supportive practices were significantly related to personal accomplishment ($r=0.445$, $p<0.01$) and professional development support ($r=0.467$, $p<0.01$) but not to emotional exhaustion or depersonalization. The only major difference between teachers and school heads was in the perceptions of support and recognition ($t=2.345$, $p<0.05$). The major contributors to burnout were work overloads, administrative demands, multiple roles and resource limitations. Coping strategies were peer support, stress management techniques and administrative recognitions. The study concludes that principals are effective in managing tangible resources, but systemic well-being interventions are not adequate, indicating a significant discord between operational efficiency and psychosocial support. The proposed Thrive Together program has a multi-level framework using systemic leadership, peer support and individual interventions aligned to SDG 3 and SDG 4.

Keywords: teacher burnout, school leadership, principal support, job demands-resources model, conservation of resources theory, well-being, resilience in education, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies in education studies have shown that school leadership is an important element to enhance teacher well-being and reduce burnout. Specific Supportive Practices of School Heads in the Professional Climate: The Positive Role of School Heads in Cantilan District, Surigao del Sur, Philippines can motivate teachers by providing relevant professional development, mentoring, empathetic workload management and emotional support. As Jones and Smith (2020) explain, "Good leadership fosters a school climate in which teachers feel appreciated and empowered." Lee, Park and Kim (2021) also underscore the importance of organizational climate and communication in the fight against burnout. The present Philippine education curriculum was designed to decongest and simplify content and reporting requirements for teachers, to ease the administrative burden of teachers. But there is a significant gap between this policy aspiration and the documented systemic reality. Research shows that systemic issues like cultural pressure not to talk about stress (Santos & Reyes, 2020) and hierarchical barriers to support (Garcia & Hernandez, 2021) are long-standing barriers to well-being interventions. What is missing and matters most is not the rationale for the curriculum but evidence that it has been successfully implemented to meet these challenges. The results of this study indicate that the burnout of the Filipino teachers is a result of the failure of the education system. This imbalance results in a vicious cycle where demands keep on draining personal resources of teachers (as predicted by COR theory; Hobfoll, 1989). Burnout has also been conceptualized as a state of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization resulting from a chronic imbalance between demands and resources within the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) extending COR theory. The study was conducted to determine the effect of supportive practices of principals on teachers' burnout in the district of Cantilan. The objectives were to (1)

determine the demographical profile of the respondents, (2) determine the role of principals to reduce the level of burnout, (3) determine the level of teachers' burnout, (4) determine the relationship between profile and burnout, (5) determine the relationship between principals' role and burnout, (6) determine the perception differences between teachers and principals, (7) determine the major challenges that lead to burnout, (8) determine the coping mechanisms used and (9) develop an intervention based on the findings.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methodology of a combination of correlational study and qualitative phenomenology and used a hermeneutics approach. This mixed-methods approach provided a robust understanding by triangulating quantitative data on burnout levels with qualitative insights into contextual factors and lived experiences of educators. The study was conducted in 22 elementary schools of Cantilan District, Surigao del Sur, Philippines. stratified random sampling. The sample size exceeded the statistically recommended minimum for a population of 344 teachers with a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error. The main research tool was a structured questionnaire with three sections: (1) demographic and professional profile; (2) principals' mitigating roles (support and recognition, resource allocation, positive school culture, professional growth and development, burnout and well-being); and (3) teachers' burnout experiences (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, support for professional development, workload and administrative pressure). The questionnaire showed a good validity (mean rating 4.86) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70 for all indicators). Semi-structured interviews were also performed. Permission was granted from division level and from the principals of the schools by the researcher. Teachers were given consent letters that included objectives, procedures, risks and benefits. The researcher conducted the questionnaires and interviews herself. The study was conducted according to ethical standards of beneficence, transparency, member checking, triangulation and informed consent. Participants were assured confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency analysis, weighted mean, Pearson product-moment correlation and one-way ANOVA. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the framework by Braun and Clarke (2006).

RESULTS

The teaching workforce was predominantly female (85.4% of teachers, 63.6% of school heads). School heads were typically older than teachers (45+ years compared to 30-39 years). Most of the respondents were married (teachers: 68.1%; school heads: 90.9%). In relation to the type of school, 45.4% of teachers were from small schools, 27.6% from medium schools and 27.0% from large schools. Notably, 72.4 percent of teachers reported working beyond their regular working hours, whereas all school heads reported working standard weekly hours. Table 1 underscores the teachers' and school heads' views on mitigating roles of principals. The highest rated indicator was resource allocation (teachers: 4.21; school heads: 4.35, very high). This means that principals have the greatest success in providing access to the necessary materials and technology. In contrast, the lowest rated indicator was addressing burnout and well-being (teachers: 2.98; school heads: 2.67, moderate), pointing to a critical vulnerability in principal leadership. This gap indicates that schools may be more interested in operational efficiency than in human sustainability.

Table 1. Level of Principals' Role in Mitigating Burnout

Indicator	Teachers (Mean)	School (Mean) Heads	Interpretation
Support and Recognition	3.42	3.89	High
Resource Allocation	4.21	4.35	Very High

Promoting Positive School Culture	3.87	4.01	High
Professional Growth and Development	3.76	3.92	High
Addressing Burnout and Well-being	2.98	2.67	Moderate

Table 2 presents teachers' burnout levels. Support for professional development was the highest-rated indicator (4.08, high), showing institutional commitment to teacher learning. Depersonalization was lowest (2.12, low), indicating relatively positive interpersonal engagement. Lower depersonalization is associated with better interpersonal relationships and greater professional fulfillment (Collie, 2022).

Table 2. Level of Teachers' Burnout

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Emotional Exhaustion	2.89	Moderate
Depersonalization	2.12	Low
Personal Accomplishment	3.98	High
Support for Professional Development	4.08	High
Workload and Administrative Pressure	3.45	Moderate

Correlation analysis revealed that sex was the most consistent predictor across several burnout dimensions. Female teachers were significantly more emotionally exhausted ($r=0.324$, $p<0.01$), reported higher personal accomplishment ($r=0.287$, $p<0.05$), felt more support for professional development ($r=0.256$, $p<0.05$), and experienced greater workload pressure ($r=0.312$, $p<0.01$). Age, marital status, and school type were also significant predictors for some dimensions.

Table 3 presents correlation results. The strongest relationships were with personal accomplishment and support for professional development, where all leadership indicators showed strong positive correlations (ranging from $r=0.334$ to $r=0.467$, $p<0.01$). However, no significant relationships emerged with emotional exhaustion (except positive school culture, $r=-0.201$, $p<0.05$) and depersonalization. This suggests principals may be more successful in enhancing positive experiences than directly reducing negative burnout dimensions.

Table 3. Correlation Between Principals' Role and Teacher Burnout

Principal Indicators	Personal Accomplishment	Support for Professional Development	Emotional Exhaustion
Support Recognition and	0.412**	0.398**	-0.089

Resource Allocation	0.387**	0.356**	-0.076
Positive School Culture	0.423**	0.401**	-0.201*
Professional Growth	0.445**	0.467**	-0.092
Addressing Burnout	0.356**	0.334**	-0.084
*Note: **p<0.01, p<0.05			

T-test analysis revealed that only support and recognition showed a statistically significant difference between teachers and school heads ($t=2.345$, $p<0.05$). This indicates that school leaders may think they are providing adequate recognition, but teachers do not perceive it the same way.

Thematic analysis revealed two major themes. First, "A Typical Day and Workload Management" captured how participants described days filled with multiple responsibilities. One participant shared: "As a teacher in charge of the school, at the same time, handling a chair is a typical day for me. I used to do my teaching tasks and after class hours proceeded with the admin task." Second, "Primary Challenges Contributing to Burnout" identified systemic stressors including excessive workload, administrative demands, working beyond regular hours and weekends, balancing multiple roles, and lack of resources. A participant noted: "As a lone teacher handling four grade levels... it is a big challenge... I must prepare 4 lesson plans."

Three themes emerged regarding coping mechanisms. "Supportive Environment" included emotional and moral support from colleagues. One respondent stated, "I feel very happy to have supportive peers." "Stress Reduction" included recognition programs and team-building activities. "Acknowledgement and Recognition" included administrative appreciation, with one teacher noting, "When my boss/supervisor praised my work/output or even small achievement."

DISCUSSION

The importance of this finding is that the highest rating was given to resource allocation while the lowest rating was given to addressing burnout, which indicates a gap in the priorities of school leadership in the Cantilan District. The head teachers seem to be good managers of the tangible, visible resources and not so good in the psychosocial support they provided. This is consistent with the findings of Berkovich and Eyal (2021) who found lower occupational stress in schools with more resources, but Collie (2022) notes that resource adequacy alone cannot compensate for the lack of emotional support. The low positive scores on depersonalization (2.12) indicate that teachers in the Cantilan District are capable of maintaining positive relationships with their students and colleagues, even if they have a moderate level of emotional exhaustion. This finding is inconsistent with studies showing high rates of depersonalization during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sokal et al., 2020) and suggests that the district's focus on professional development might be protective. Gender differences in burnout dimensions are of considerable interest. Female teachers reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion, workload pressure and personal accomplishment at the same time. This duality implies that women are exposed to extra stressors at the workplace, possibly because of caregiving responsibilities or gendered assumptions about emotional labor (Martínez-León et al., 2025), but they also derive much meaning and pleasure from teaching. Interventions should be gender-sensitive, addressing gender-specific vulnerabilities, while remaining professionally effective. A key finding from the correlation results is that the primary practices have strong relationships with positive outcomes (personal accomplishment, professional development) and weak relationships with negative outcomes (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization). Principals are typically more effective at "building up" than "wearing down" – that is, they amplify what makes teaching rewarding rather

than directly reducing what makes it draining. This is in line with the JD-R model proposition that job resources mainly buffer the effects of demands rather than eliminate demands per se (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This misperception of support and recognition is problematic as feeling valued is a contributing factor to teacher retention (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Principals think they do enough, but teachers don't feel that way. That disconnect likely occurs because principals overestimate the visibility of their actions or they employ recognition formats that don't resonate with teachers. Qualitative findings indicate that burnout in Cantilan District is a function of structural conditions (systemic underfunding, understaffing, gaps in policy implementation) and not individual deficits. Teachers in small, multi-grade schools do reports on weekends and without resources, describing conditions that no individual resilience can overcome. This is in line with Viac and Fraser (2020) who argued that teacher well-being needs to be addressed at the systemic rather than the individual level.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that principals in Cantilan District are effective in the management of tangible resources and ineffective in the provision of psychosocial support for the well-being of educators. This study reveals a significant gap between operational effectiveness and human sustainability. Teachers reported low depersonalization, implying positive interpersonal engagement despite experiencing challenges. Demographic characteristics, especially sex, age, marital status and type of school, were significant predictors of the different dimensions of burnout, which confirms that burnout is not experienced in the same way. Principals' supportive practices are strongly related to positive outcomes (personal accomplishment and professional development) but not to the reduction of negative burnout dimensions (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). The only major difference is between the teachers and school heads in their perceptions on support and recognition. This shows a perceptual gap where the administrators over-estimate their effectiveness. The key systemic drivers of burnout are high workloads, administrative demands, role juggling and resource constraints. The proposed "Thrive Together" program aims to fill these gaps by providing a multi-level framework combining systemic leadership, peer support and individual interventions based on SDG 3 and SDG 4.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department of Education may advocate for systematic workload management reforms, such as simplifying reporting systems and additional staff for small schools. School heads should establish structured and meaningful recognition program, prioritize mental health and psychosocial support activities and adopt open-door policies for teacher concerns. Well-being programs should be actively participated in and teachers should continue to use peer support networks and stress management strategies. Future research recommendations include longitudinal studies of burnout dynamics, expanding research into multiple districts, and evaluating the effectiveness of the "Thrive Together" program.

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