A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON EXPERIENCING BURNOUT IN TITLE I RURAL APPALACHIAN SCHOOLS GRADES 4–9

By Kara Jean Howard

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe and explore the burnout experiences of teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 in southern Ohio. The theoretical framework guiding this study is Maslach's burnout theory. The central research question was "What are the burnout experiences of teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9?" Convenience sampling was employed to select the 12 participants, all of whom are teachers teaching in Grades 4–9 within Sunshine County, a rural Appalachia-based school qualifying as a Title I institution in southern Ohio. The data presented in this study were collected through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. The survey was conducted using a Likert-type scale developed Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators. Researcher-developed interview and focus group transcripts were analyzed by using an open-coding approach to identify themes. Triangulation was employed across the survey, focus groups, and individual interviews. During the study the four themes arose: (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalization, (c) decreased sense of personal accomplishment, and (d) stress. The implications of this study underscore the imperative to adapt and reform educational policies and practices to address teacher retention, mitigate burnout, and bolster recruitment efforts, ultimately impacting student outcomes, school climate, professional development, and future research in teacher burnout. These adjustments are crucial for retaining teachers and reducing burnout rates, particularly in Title I rural Appalachian schools.

Keywords: Title I, teacher burnout, teacher retention, teacher turnover rates, attrition, low socioeconomic.

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this to my loving husband, whose unwavering support has illuminated countless hours and late nights. In moments when self-doubt crept in, you stood as my constant motivator and encourager, steadfast in your belief in me. Your presence has been a beacon, consistently reminding me not only of my identity but also of the dreams I hold dear. Your unwavering encouragement and continual reminders extend beyond acknowledging who I am and what I have accomplished. They reach into the realm of potential, inspiring me to embrace the possibilities of who I can become and what I can achieve. Thank you for your enduring belief in my potential.

To my darling daughters, who infused me with strength and confidence to tackle challenges I once feared, may you forever venture beyond your comfort zones and fearlessly embark on extraordinary endeavors.

To my family, who have given me support and unwavering love throughout this process, believing in me every step of the way.

In the loving memory of my mother, Rhonda, and papaw, Allen, whose enduring belief in my abilities serves as a guiding light. I strive to make you proud.

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I am also deeply appreciative of Dr. Talada, a distinguished member of my committee. Your thoughtful contributions and scholarly insights have enriched the depth and quality of this dissertation.

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Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the heart of our educational system, an urgent matter demands our attention: the pervasive issue of teacher burnout in Title I rural Appalachia schools, Grades 4–9. Research indicates that teacher burnout is a significant concern, with studies consistently showing high levels of stress and dissatisfaction among teachers (Johnson et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2010). As one delves into the intricate fabric of these institutions, research illuminates the toll that this phenomenon takes on the teachers who play a pivotal role in shaping the future. Studies have found that burnout negatively impacts teacher effectiveness, job satisfaction, and overall well-being (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). In the present moment, dedicated teachers are grappling with overwhelming challenges, navigating through the complexities of under resourced environments and shouldering the weight of societal disparities. Research underscores the detrimental effects of working in under resourced schools, including higher levels of stress and lower job satisfaction (Ingersoll & May, 2012). The ramifications extend far beyond the classroom, influencing the very foundation of our students' learning experiences. It is in this crucible that the imperative to understand and address teacher burnout in Title I schools emerges as a pressing call to action, resonating not only for the well-being of teachers but for the betterment of the entire educational landscape.

Background

This section provides literature support related to the historical, social, and theoretical contexts of burnout and teacher burnout. The historical section provides an account of the chronological development of burnout as a concept in general and in the education context. The social context describes the setting of the demographics and culture of high poverty rural

Appalachian Title I schools is presented. The theoretical section includes a discussion on Maslach's burnout.

Historical Context

Burnout remains one of the most challenging issues that employees and employers must deal with in the fast-paced 21st century (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). The most widely accepted definition of burnout is a prolonged reaction to chronic interpersonal and emotional job stressors (Maslach, 1982; Maslach et al., 1996). It is believed that Freudenberger (1974) introduced burnout as a concept, and Maslach and Jackson (1981) introduced it into the educational realm.

Over the years, the term *burnout* in the workplace has been frequently used as the number of stresses that one must endure added up over time. Freudenberger (1974) stated that burnout is the inability of a person to effectively function in their job setting because of prolonged job-related stress. While burnout affects many employees across multiple occupations, burnout rates are much higher for people working in the public sector, such as nurses, teachers, and police officers (Maslach, 2015). Maslach (2015) conducted interviews with teachers, health care workers, nurses, doctors, and other employees in the public sector to discover three crucial commonalities of employees experiencing work-related stress. Maslach's (1982) three common findings were that (a) individuals feel disconnected, (b) they feel exhausted, and (c) they question if their career choice was the right one for them. Employees who suffer from exhaustion have experienced emotional overload, physical fatigue, feelings of being overstretched, and a depletion of both their physical and emotional resources (Maslach, 2015).

Teaching can be an intrinsically rewarding career, but it is also a challenging profession. Besides the typical day-to-day responsibilities such as taking care of their students and delivering meaningful complete lessons, teachers also face many district, state, and federal legislative

requirements by which they must abide (Herman et al., 2020). Teachers are in a profession where they care for their students every day. Teachers often find themselves worrying about their students, including the students' well-being, hygiene, safety, and whether their basic needs are being met. The added responsibilities, workload, and stressors lead to teaching burnout, which is also linked to teacher turnover (Manuel et al., 2018; Tummers & Bakker, 2021; Yoon & Kim, 2022).

Understanding the causes of burnout and how to curb teacher burnout/turnover is vital for the survival of the education industry. The task and everyday responsibilities underscore the emotional demands of the job (Maslach et al., 2001), which are predictive of attrition, burnout, and a subsequent shortage. The teacher shortage is an ongoing global problem. The shortage of qualified teachers is a result of teachers leaving the profession due to the stress of class sizes that are too large, student discipline problems, a lack of support from the administration, and workload (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). These concerns are the same issues that cause burnout in the first place. For some teachers, burnout results in them leaving the profession altogether, which causes more work for the teachers who stay. The teacher shortage is arguably a byproduct of a complex set of challenges that require comprehensive and proactive policy solutions These solutions must support teachers and prepare them and their workplaces in ways that motivate teachers to adequately meet the needs of their students. Certainly, retaining quality teachers is central to student achievement, as teachers impact students' maximization of their full potential (García et al., 2009).

The teacher turnover rate, the rate at which teachers are leaving the profession, in the U.S. is at 16% each year (Donley et al., 2019). Cross and Thomas (2017) discovered that nine out of every 10 new teacher hires are replacing teachers who left voluntarily. More than two

thirds of those teachers quit before retirement (University of Massachusetts Global, 2020). The teacher turnover rate is much higher for Title I schools than for those not teaching in a Title I school. In a study by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019), the turnover rate for Title I schools was 31%, nearly double the turnover greater than turnover rates in non-Title I schools. Title I schools are schools where a substantial proportion of the district's student population lives under low socioeconomic status (SES) conditions with families who receive some form of financial assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Social Context

Teacher burnout in rural Appalachia Title 1 schools Grades 4–9 is a critical aspect when considering the health and well-being of the teachers and the students. Teachers who suffer from burnout become mentally and physically ill from emotional exhaustion, heavy workloads, and feeling unaccomplished (Maslach et al., 2001). Most middle school teachers were in high stress/low coping profile and registered higher burnout levels coupled with lower self-efficacy (Herman et al., 2020). When teachers experience burnout, they tend to lack motivation, become unattached from their job, and have an overall negative outlook of their workplace (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Teachers suffering burnout tend to begin missing more workdays and withdraw from coworkers and even their students. Burnout impacts tend to lead teachers to leave the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Teachers facing burnout and leaving the profession impacts the classroom and the students (Yu et al., 2015). School districts have difficulty finding replacements for the teachers who leave the profession. Even though teacher shortages are affecting schools across the nation, communities in rural low SES are struggling to retain teachers more than others (Holmes et al., 2019). Teachers being unmotivated from burnout or even leaving the profession creates gaps in

the learning environment (García-Carmona et al., 2019). Instead, the teachers who stay in the classroom are expected to take on the work of missing staff members. These teachers may become unmotivated and unattached to their work, leaving the profession altogether. According to the Nirogra (CITE) organization, the impacts of teacher burnout flows over into the school, leading to a lack of interest in their classes, causing students to fall behind and lack motivation, leading to increased dropout rates.

Researchers have gathered data from teachers, students, and parents to quantify schools' organizational contexts and examine the relationship between teacher turnover and students' academic success (Ansley et al., 2019; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Harrell et al., 2019). They found that when schools incorporated organizational contexts, which were both teachers' working conditions and students' learning environment, they reduced teacher turnover and increased student achievement (Henry & Redding, 2018).

In the wake of the pandemic, the primary focus to mitigating the education predicament is to ensure that education is tailored to allow the continuation of learning activities online to allow instruction to continue. One of the greatest concerns is that the new radical shift to e-learning may be a suboptimal alternative to the conventional face-to-face model in the physical classroom (Parte & Herrador-Alcaide, 2021). This concern intensifies for middle school learners, especially those learners with special needs and difficulties. On the other hand, this shift also presents newer challenges for middle school teachers who now must deal with another model of instruction with little resources and minimal time to adjust (Pressley, 2021a). Teacher burnout is not talked about enough, even though society places many expectations on teachers. Many teachers contemplate leaving the profession altogether because of burnout, workload, and lack of support (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021).

Teacher burnout is undoubtedly an important issue that plagues many teachers and students alike. When teachers face burnout, it impacts their lives, and the students suffer. When students feel left out as their teachers give them less attention, they fall behind in their academics. It becomes a vicious cycle of the system failing our teachers and students (Romijn et al., 2020). If teachers can resist burnout altogether, they can ensure their students continued success. However, the teachers' environment could impact their potential burnout (Parveen & Bano, 2019).

Theoretical Context

While the teaching profession offers intrinsic rewards, it is not without its formidable challenges. Teachers grapple not only with day-to-day responsibilities, such as student care and impactful lesson delivery but also contend with numerous district, state, and federal legislative mandates (Kamenetz, 2015). The cumulative effect of these added obligations, coupled with heightened workload and stressors, gives rise to teaching burnout—a critical factor linked to teacher turnover (Tummers & Bakker, 2021; Yoon & Kim, 2022). Recognizing the causes and implementing strategies to mitigate teachers' burnout and potential turnover is paramount for the sustainability of the education sector and the delivery of exceptional education. The emotional demands inherent in daily tasks underscored by previous research (Maslach et al., 2001) are predictive of attrition, burnout, and subsequent shortages. Addressing the ongoing global teacher shortage necessitates comprehensive, proactive policy solutions supporting teachers and preparing programs that motivate them to meet their students' needs adequately.

The goal of this research is to bridge a literature gap by exploring teachers' perspectives on burnout in rural Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. Utilizing Maslach's burnout theory (Maslach et al., 2001) as the theoretical framework, the study seeks to uncover factors

influencing job satisfaction. Building upon Maslach and Jackson's (1981) foundational work, which identified feelings of disconnection, exhaustion, and career doubt as common burnout indicators, the research employs the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (MBI-ES) to measure teachers' experiences through a 22-item questionnaire. Maslach's extensive research underscores the physical and emotional toll of burnout, highlighting its detrimental impact on health and well-being (2015). Teachers experiencing burnout not only suffer individually but also negatively influence their coworkers, fostering a disconnected, hostile environment. Over 2 decades of workplace burnout research, Maslach identified six critical domains—workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values—that significantly impact burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). This study aims to contribute new insights to the existing literature, extending and refining our understanding of burnout factors among teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 Title I middle schools.

Problem Statement

The problem is that teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 experience higher levels of burnout compared to teachers in non-Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. A growing body of research underscores the pressing issue that middle school teachers in rural Appalachia Title I schools face significantly elevated levels of burnout in comparison to their counterparts in non-Title I rural Appalachia middle schools. Smith et al. (2010), Tan (2021), and Wicke and Nelson (2021) independently delved into the distinct challenges and stressors encountered by middle school teachers in Title I settings, revealing a consistent pattern of heightened burnout. These findings collectively emphasize the urgent need to address the unique factors contributing to burnout in Title I schools, shaping the discourse on teacher well-being and retention in educational research.

In the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher burnout has risen to high levels and could lead to teacher attrition. Such burnout-triggered attrition can disproportionately impact schools that serve a vast array of students from low socioeconomic households and those of color such as those in Title I schools. (Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021). Factors such as difficulties in the working environment and excessive job demand that trigger turnover, diminishing work engagement, and poor performance have been associated with burnout (M. B. Russell et al., 2020). In the U.S., teacher burnout has been studied among Title I school elementary teachers in an Eastern state (Harrell et al., 2019) and a comparative study between Title I and Title II elementary school teachers in Virginia (S. A. Russell, 2019). However, teacher burnout among Title I Grades 4-9 teachers remains either understudied or not studied altogether. Moreover, calls for further research into the factors behind teacher stress and ways to prevent them as a means for supporting teachers have been made (Thompson, 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe and explore the experiences of burnout of teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 in southern Ohio. In this research, teacher burnout was defined as a psychological syndrome resulting from a prolonged reaction to chronic stressors of an interpersonal nature on the teaching job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

To understand teacher burnout among Title I middle school teachers, an investigation and description of the underlying factors or the reasons behind burnout is vital. Further, a solutions-oriented approach to the problem of burnout among Title I middle school teachers necessitated an inquiry into the coping individual and institutional strategies that are likely to reduce burnout. The purpose of utilizing a sample from Title I schools Grades 4–9 is to bring out the role that

special socioeconomic traits of Title I schools play in teacher burnout. The complex nature of organizational dynamics in human service occupations such as teaching, is often defined as economic, social, and political factors that yield low-resource and high-demand work settings (M. B. Russell et al., 2020).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is rooted in its potential contribution toward theoretical, practical, and policy advancement. In terms of theory, I use this study to demonstrate the application of Maslach's burnout theory in the context of teachers experiences with burn out within Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. Further, I use this study to pioneer the use of the MBI-ES to measure teacher burnout that work in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9.

Practically, the findings of this study are likely to enhance the understanding of burnout as an experience of teachers working in rural Title I schools, Grades 4-9. Accordingly, this research could contribute to helping teachers in Title I schools better understand and possibly manage the triggers of burnout and the levels thereof. As for policymaking, school, district, and county education boards can refer to the findings of this study to understand the unique circumstances under which 4-9 teachers working in rural Title I schools work and how this experience contributes to burnout. More importantly, policymakers and decision-makers could rely on the findings of this research to develop tailormade mechanisms for preventing and dealing with teacher burnout in rural Title I schools.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical significance of this study was used to contribute to the theoretical finding of Maslach's burnout theory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) by studying and analyzing

phenomenological experiences of teachers in a Title I rural Appalachia school, Grades 4–9, who are experiencing burnout. By exploring the experiences of teachers who are experiencing burnout in Title I rural Appalachia schools, common themes emerged, which led to a theoretical understanding of burnout theorized by Maslach (date).

Empirical Implications

The empirical significance observed in this study mirrors previous research findings on teacher burnout (Garwood et al., 2018; Lee, 2019; Maslach, 2015; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Robinson et al., 2019; Wang & Hall, 2018;). Our research endeavors to shed light on the heightened prevalence of teacher burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools encompassing Grades 4–9. This phenomenon is largely attributed to the challenging environment of teaching in poverty-stricken areas, resulting in elevated stress levels among teachers, which manifest in psychological and physical health issues.

The findings of this study underscore the critical impact of inadequate support, limited resources, and overwhelming workloads on teacher turnover rates (Ahola & Hakanen, 2007; Herman et al., 2020; Umpierrez, 2021; Wicke & Nelson, 2021). Given the scarcity of qualitative phenomenological research focusing on teachers experiencing burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools, our study aims to bridge this gap through a comprehensive approach utilizing surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews.

Practical Implications

The practical significance and findings of this study are likely to enhance the understanding of burnout as an experience of teachers who work in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. Accordingly, this research would contribute to helping teachers in Title I schools better understand and possibly manage the triggers of burnout and the levels thereof. As

for policymaking, school, district, and county education boards can refer to the findings of this study to understand the unique circumstances under which teachers working in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 work and how this experience contributes to burnout. More importantly, policymakers and decision-makers could rely on the findings of this research to develop tailormade mechanisms for preventing and dealing with teacher burnout in rural Title I schools.

Research Questions

This study was guided by a central research question and a subquestion.

Central Research Question

This research occurred in a rural county consisting of four Title I schools Grades 4–9 in southern Ohio using the transactional model of stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the MBI-ES (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 1986). This research focuses on the burnout experiences of teachers working within Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. As such, the central research question was, What are the burnout experiences of teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9?

Subquestion 1

What are the perceptions of the factors contributing to burnout experiences of teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9?

Definitions

The following terms and definitions were used in this study:

1. *Attrition*—The act of voluntarily or prematurely leaving a profession (Mastrantuono, 2015).

2. *Burnout*—a prolonged reaction to chronic interpersonal and emotional job stressors (Maslach, 1982; Maslach et al., 1996).
3. *Central Appalachia* is the area of Appalachia that contains Virginia, Kentucky, and southern counties in West Virginia (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2021).
4. *Depersonalization*—An aspect of burnout that occurs when one doubts the importance of his or her work or its contribution to anything of value (Maslach et al., 2001).
5. *Emotional exhaustion*—Feeling emotionally overwhelmed by work conditions (Maslach et al., 2001).
6. *Low socioeconomic status*—Little income or wealth (Leonard et al., 2017).
7. *North Central Appalachia*—The area of Appalachia that contains Western counties in West Virginia and southern counties in Ohio (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2021).
8. *Personal accomplishment*—The feeling of achievement in one's work with others (Maslach et al., 2001).
9. *Phenomenon*—A case or topic to investigate (Smith, 2023).
10. *Poverty*—Deficiencies prevalent in students' lives, homes, and school settings, including food, water, shelter, and supplies (Miller et al., 2019).
11. *Rural*—A nonurban territory that classifies as fringe, distant, or remote based on the updated, Census-defined description of the (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022?).
12. *Teacher burnout*—a psychological syndrome that is an outcome of prolonged reaction to chronic stressors of an interpersonal nature on the teaching job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016)

Teacher retention—A field of educational research that focused on how factors such as school climate and demographics affected teachers' decisions to stay in their schools, move to

completely different schools or leave the profession all together (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Teacher turnover—The yearly rate of departure of teachers (Claflin et al., 2019).

Title I Schools—schools that fall under the classification of Elementary and Secondary Education Act with the subsequent amendment of the Every Student Succeeds Act to receive financial aid through local education agencies to ensure children from low-income families overcome the problematic state academic standards (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Summary

This chapter provided background information about burnout, teacher burnout, and Title I schools from historical, social, and theoretical contexts, respectively. This chapter has also presented the problem statement and the purpose statement for this research. The significance of study from a theoretical and practical perspective has also been explained. The central research question about the burnout experiences of teachers working in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 and tone corresponding subresearch questions have been outlined. The next chapter contains a review of previous, related literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions teachers have on burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. This chapter provides a review of previous literature in relation to teacher burnout in Title I schools from both a theoretical and an empirical perspective. The chapter comprises three major sections. The next section is an introduction of Maslach's burnout theory as the theoretical framework underpinning this research. The subsequent section features the review of related literature in the domains of rural areas and rural education traits, comparison of U.S. rural schools to urban ones, a review of Title I schools, the concept of teacher burnout, and a focused review of teacher burnout in the U.S. in general, among middle school teachers, in rural schools, and measuring teacher burnout. The last section of this chapter is a summary of the review of literature and the signposting of the next chapter.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework constitutes the blueprint for the entire inquiry. It acts as the guide upon which the researcher supports and builds their work from a structural epistemologically, philosophically, analytically, and methodologically (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). In this research about exploring the perceptions teachers have on burnout in Title I schools Grades 4–9 in rural Appalachia, this section provides an account of the theoretical framework based on Maslach's burnout theory.

Maslach's Burnout Theory

The use of the term *burnout* in reference to a mental state was introduced by Freudenberger (1974). He described burnout as the inability for one to function effectively in their job setting because of prolonged job-related stress. In his view, burnout manifests

physically in the form of health-related symptoms of fatigue, exhaustion, sleeplessness, shortness of breath, gastrointestinal disorders, and headaches among other symptoms. People suffering from burnout may also experience and present with behavioral symptoms such as anger, frustration, feeling overwhelmed, and depression (Freudenberger, 1974; Rumschlag, 2017). Cherniss (1980) continued work in the exploration of burnout and identified three stages of burnout that included job stressors, emotional response to anxiety and exhaustion, and depersonalization (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Following in the footsteps of Freudenberger (1974) and Cherniss (1980), social psychologist Christina Maslach studied the phenomena of experiences of burnout that individuals have in the workplace (Maslach et al., 2001). Maslach et al. (2001) conducted interviews with teachers, health care workers, nurses, doctors, and other employees in the public sector to discover three crucial commonalities of employees experiencing work-related stress. Maslach's three common findings were that (a) individuals feel disconnected, (b) they feel exhausted, and (c) they question if their career choice was the right one for them (Maslach, 1982). Maslach's burnout theory established that burnout was a form of job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Maslach et al., 2001).

The works of Maslach on burnout underscore the feeling of disconnection, which she termed depersonalization (Maslach, 1982). Depersonalization can cause individuals to have negative attitudes toward others, cause one to disregard the feelings of others, and even become self-destructive (Maslach, 2015). Exhaustion can come in two forms: mental and physical. Typically, both forms of exhaustion are present together in the experience of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Teachers who experience burnout are ones who have high levels of anxiety which had led them to strong intentions of quitting the teacher profession all together (Wang &

Hall, 2018). The third commonality of the burnout experience is questioning one's worth and abilities in their current career. Individuals begin to assess themselves and others negatively (Maslach, 2015) Teachers who feel disconnected struggle to find meaning in their profession and begin to wonder if they have chosen the right profession.

Maslach and Jackson (1981) developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) as an instrument of measurement to assess the level of burnout one experiences in the workforce. Later, these researchers created a second version of MBI that was geared towards those who work in an educational setting. The MBI-ES is a psychometric instrument tool that measures the level of burnout one has in an educational setting through a 22-item questionnaire (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This instrument became a way to empirically examine the theoretical links of burnout characteristics and the work experiences of teachers across the world (Garwood et al., 2018; Lee, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). Over 20 years of research on burnout in the workplace, Maslach identified and formulated six critical elements of the workplace environment that impact burnout: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values (Maslach et al., 2001).

Maslach et al. (2001) explained that workload can result in burnout when the workload becomes daunting when completing a task entails too much with too few resources or too little support. This idea suggests that the amount of work to be done is excessive relative to the resources or support available. The impact of one's workload can lead to burnout, especially if one is also experiencing exhaustion, which can negatively impact an individual's well-being and performance. Workload is important because if an individual's workload becomes too much and more than they can handle in the time frame and they lack resources to complete the tasks being assigned, the employee begins to feel overworked and unaccomplished (Maslach, 2015).

The second element is control which highlights how employees sensing a lack of control over their abilities, tasks, and outcomes, can create a sense of helplessness, leading to job dissatisfaction (Maslach et al., 2001). Control is closely related to an individual's perception of their ability to influence their daily decision-making in the workplace. Maslach (2015) emphasized the significance of professional autonomy and access to necessary resources in ensuring effective job performance.

A third element that can contribute to burnout is the perceived lack of rewards proportional to the effort and work invested in the job (Maslach et al., 2001). Excessive workloads without commensurate rewards or recognition can result in exhaustion and disengagement (Artha & Hidayat, 2019). The third domain focuses on rewards and how a perceived lack of rewards is proportional to the effort and work invested in the job. The perceived lack of rewards proportional to the effort and work invested in the job can also erode employees' motivation and contribute to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). When individuals consistently put in substantial effort but receive little recognition or compensation in return, it can lead to feelings of frustration, resentment, and disillusionment (Ahola & Hakanen, 2007; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The absence of tangible rewards or acknowledgement for their hard work can undermine employees' sense of value and worth in the organization (Ballantyne & Retell, 2020). As a result, their level of commitment and dedication to their job may diminish over time (Maslach, 2015).

The absence of rewards and recognition can negatively impact the trust employees have in their organization. When individuals believe that their efforts go unnoticed or unappreciated, it can create a sense of betrayal or unfair treatment (Shuck et al., 2013). The lack of acknowledgment for their contributions can breed a toxic work environment where employees

feel undervalued and unimportant (Leiter & Maslach, 2016; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 1996). Consequently, this can lead to decreased morale, increased cynicism, and a decline in overall job satisfaction (Maslach, 2015).

The fourth element that impacts workplace burnout is community. When the sense of community is fractured and employees lack positive relationships, support, and trust, the risk of burnout escalates (Maslach et al., 2001). In such environments, where employees perceive a lack of care, high turnover rates are to be expected. This high turnover rate is because employees are more likely to feel disconnected from their work and colleagues, leading to decreased motivation and increased feelings of isolation. As a result, they may seek new job opportunities where they feel more supported and valued. The erosion of trust significantly heightens the risk of burnout (Hills, 2015). Building a sense of community in the workplace, as described by Maslach (2015), involves fostering positive social interactions, mutual support, closeness, and effective teamwork.

The fifth element affecting workplace burnout is fairness. Maslach (2015) described as emerging literature that is related to social justice and equity. Additionally, fairness is about whether a person feels that they are being treated with respect and treated fairly. In most cases, burnout likely occurs when a person perceives an imbalance in effort and reward, absence of reciprocity, and inequity. An imbalance in effort and reward can exist for those who feel they may not be compensated or acknowledged for their effort. Absence of reciprocity occurs when someone feels that they are contributing more than their peers. Inequality can result from a person feeling that they are held to a different standard. The sixth element is values, which are the ideals and motivations of what originally attracted an individual to the job (Maslach, 2015). The conflict involving values can occur when an individuals' views are not in line with the

values of the workplace resulting in feelings of dissatisfaction, stress, and burnout (Umpierrez, 2021).When values no longer align between the employer and employee, a gap begins to form, and employees begin making a trade-off between the work they want to do and the work they must do (Maslach, 2015). When an individual's work values do not align with their personal values, they may feel inconsistent and burnt out resulting in feelings of dissonance, purposelessness, and frustration, which can ultimately lead to burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) stated that conflict in values is related to all three dimensions of burnout. The domain of values, encompassing an individual's ideals and motivations regarding their job, plays a crucial role in Maslach's burnout theory. When there is a misalignment of values between the employee and the workplace, a gap emerges, leading to a trade-off between desired work and necessary work (Maslach, 2015). It is important to note that conflicts in values have a profound impact on all three dimensions of burnout, as highlighted by Maslach et al.

Related Literature

This section provides a review of the literature related to rural school settings and teacher burnout. This section comprises eight sections. They include a highlighted focus on rural areas and the unique rural education traits, a comparison of U.S. rural schools to urban ones, followed by a discussion of Title I schools, and another section on teacher burnout from a general and global perspective. Four subsections on teacher burnout in the U.S., burnout among middle school teachers in the U.S., and teacher burnout in U.S. rural schools, and measuring teacher burnout appear under the teacher burnout section. This literature review discusses the implications of teacher burnout for rural education and the importance of addressing this issue to ensure that rural students receive the high-quality education they deserve.

Rural Areas and Unique Rural Education Traits

Appreciating the huge disparities in the rural school and education landscape has been described as "necessary for future policy proposals aimed at improving rural educational outcomes" (Stoddard & Toma, 2021, p. 2). The definition of what rural entails in this research is based on the National Center for Education Statistics' (2016) characterization of rural as being less dense in terms of population and based on the county boundaries than with respect to nearness to the urbanized area. The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) classification contains three categories. These categories include fringe, distant, and remote. A territory qualifies as fringe if the distance is 5 miles or less from an urbanized area. Distant territories are those whose proximity to an urbanized area is less than 25 miles or more than 5 miles. Finally, remote territories are over 25 miles from an urbanized area (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The location can have an impact on the challenges faced by a rural school. For example, a rural school located in a fringe area may have access to more resources and support than a school located in a remote area. Additionally, the challenges facing rural schools can vary greatly depending on the specific location and context (Stoddard & Toma, 2021).

According to Stoddard and Toma (2021), the circumstances in which a school exists define its rural context. Curtin and Cohn (2015) distinguished rural and urban contexts based on higher unemployment rates, poverty, and underemployment. With a focus on children from rural areas, Lavalley (2018) contested that most of these children live in poverty conditions than was the case in the past. Schaefer et al. (2016) emphasize that children from rural areas are more likely to experience poverty than their urban counterparts. Consistent with this view by Lavalley, Schaefer et al. estimated that 64% of rural counties are characterized by high child poverty rates compared to 47% in the urban counties. Moreover, children from rural areas often have limited

access to resources such as healthcare, technology, and educational opportunities, this lack of resources can result in a significant gap in educational outcomes between rural and urban students (Curtin & Cohn, 2015).

In terms of racial distribution, Stoddard and Toma (2021) stated that the American rural population remains, and has been historically, predominantly White. Showalter et al. (2017) argued that a quarter of rural students in America are non-White, but this fraction differs considerably by state and by region. However, Stoddard and Toma noted that the focus on schools with predominantly Black populations are typically in urban contexts. However, some states defy this trend. For example, Williams et al. (2021) focused on the State of Georgia whose history of rural segregated schools is long, and they found that over 50% of the rural schools exceed 20% Black population enrollment. Furthermore, about 25% of Georgian rural schools are predominantly Black (Williams et al., 2021). Moreover, the racial disparities in rural schools are not limited to the South, as similar patterns can be observed in other regions such as the Midwest and the West. Williams et al.'s findings highlighted the importance of considering the racial diversity of rural schools and the need to address the unique challenges faced by non-White students in these contexts.

Comparing U.S. Rural to Urban Schools

Various authors (Combs & Foster, 2021; Curtin & Cohn, 2015; Goldhaber et al., 2020; Lavalley, 2018; Nguyen, 2020; Showalter et al., 2017; Stoddard & Toma, 2021) have conducted studies whose findings are helpful in drawing comparisons between U.S. rural and urban schools. These range from studies drawing comparisons across multiple issues (e.g., Curtin & Cohn, 2015; Lavalley, 2018; Stoddard & Toma, 2021) to those addressing issues more specifically (e.g., Combs & Foster, 2021; Goldhaber et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2020). In this section, the studies

reviewed are categorized into general comparisons issues, staffing issues, and financial issues under respective subsections. The studies reviewed provide valuable insights into the similarities and differences between rural and urban schools and can inform policies and practices to support student success.

Comparison Based on Multiple Issues

Stoddard and Toma (2021) found that rural schools differ from their suburban and urban counterparts in terms of their political and economic trends, history, demographic characterization, inequities, and geographic barriers. Curtin and Cohn (2015) argued that these variations between rural and urban schools affect academics and academic settings, highlighting the need for tailored approaches to address the unique challenges faced by rural schools. For instance, Stoddard and Toma underscored that rural students and rural communities must overcome profound academic hurdles. They stated that rural contexts are plagued by lower rates of literacy and constrained access to advanced technologies and coursework.

Paradoxically, Lavalley (2018) contested that the rate which students from rural contexts are achieving high school diplomas is higher than that of students from urban settings. Nevertheless, Lavalley found that high school graduates from rural schools do not attain as many postsecondary degrees as their urban counterparts. In contrast, Showalter et al. (2017) found that rural school students often perform equally to or better than their counterparts from urban and suburban counterparts in the various National Assessment of Educational Progress tests. The findings of these studies highlight the complexities and nuances of rural education and underscore the importance of considering the unique challenges and strengths of rural schools when developing policies and interventions. The authors of these studies also emphasize the need for more research on rural education to better understand the factors that contribute to the

academic success and struggles of rural students, and to identify effective strategies for improving educational outcomes in rural contexts (Showalter et al., 2017).

Staffing Issues

Rural and urban schools have also been compared in the past based on staffing issues. For example, Nguyen (2020) built on literature that projects the negative association between teacher attrition and student outcomes. The author provided a national outlook on this based on the administration of a four-wave School and Staffing Survey study. These four waves included samples of public schools, teachers, and principals that were nationally representative of the United States. The findings showed that, on average, rural schools have lower teacher turnover rates compared to suburban and urban schools. Altogether, it was found that teachers working in sparsely populated states exhibited higher chances of exiting in comparison to their counterparts in states with denser populations (Nguyen, 2020). Furthermore, research has shown that rural schools often have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, particularly in certain subject areas such as mathematics and science. This difficulty in recruiting can lead to a lack of consistency in the quality of education that students receive, as well as a lack of opportunities for advanced coursework and extracurricular activities (Nguyen, 2020).

Williams et al. (2021) focused on rural schools' teacher turnover in a study based in the state of Georgia. Using 10 years of administrative data about teachers, the authors found that the school climate perceptions of teachers in rural schools were better than those of their urban school counterparts. This finding was consistent with the findings of the national survey by Nguyen (2020) that the retention rates for rural schoolteachers were higher than that of suburban and urban schoolteachers. Even then, it is important to be cautious that this rural advantage does not apply uniformly across the board, and that the experiences of teachers in rural schools can

vary greatly depending on the specific context. For example, Stoddard and Toma (2021) reported lower teacher retention in rural schools that had higher low income and Black students. Moreover, they also indicated that Black teachers who exit rural schools often transfer to suburban and urban schools more than they do to rural districts.

Goldhaber et al. (2020) linked district administrative data spanning the 2013–2014 and 2018–2019 school years with the traits of the districts, students, and teachers to job postings at district level. Their findings showed that the challenges reported in rural schools concerning staffing were also applicable to the state of California, which is more urban than rural. Goldhaber et al. highlight the importance of considering the unique challenges faced by rural schools in the context of teacher recruitment and retention. Goldhaber et al. conceded that rural districts report higher vacancy rates of teachers compared to other types of districts. This disparity aligns well with the view by Stoddard and Toma (2021) that classifying as an urban state does not necessarily eliminate the challenge of teacher recruitment to remote rural areas. These authors proposed hiring more emergency-credentialed teaching staff as a means for dealing with this teacher recruitment challenge in rural districts. While emergency-credentialed teachers are often from the community and may be more likely to stay in their position, this approach is not without its challenges. These teachers may not have the same level of training or experience as traditionally trained teachers which could impact the quality of education (Stoddard & Toma, 2021).

Teacher staffing issues in rural schools have also been approached from the angle of school principals. In the state of Wisconsin Yang et al. (2021) found that 36% of schools in the state were in rural settings with rural school student enrollment standing at 23%. Yang et al. argued that the state of Wisconsin can be considered representative of the upper Midwest states

with respect to smaller fractions of minority and low-income student enrollment in rural schools compared to the national average. The authors used statewide application and vacancy data for the years 2014 through to 2016 and drew out the characteristics of teachers and districts. On average, it was found that there was no meaningful difference between applications for principal jobs in coarse rural and urban areas. However, the applications for principal positions differed by the magnitude of a school district's rurality (Yang et al., 2021). This study suggests that rural schools face unique challenges in attracting and retaining principals, which can negatively impact teacher recruitment and retention.

Educatory compensation pay is one other important factor concerning staffing issues in the comparison of rural and urban schools. The disparity between the urban and rural school districts with respect to salaries projects a huge disadvantage for rural context schools. For example, Rude and Miller (2017) reported that the average teacher salary in the most affluent urban district in Colorado was USD 46,000 higher than that of the smallest rural district in the same state. The disparities in educator compensation can also affect the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural schools. With lower salaries and benefits, rural schools may struggle to attract and retain top talent, leading to a shortage of qualified teachers and a lack of stability in the educational workforce. The most recent statistics on the mean per-year salary for principals in public schools reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) based on data obtained from the U.S. Department of Education also shows disparate salaries between states that are largely rural and those that are considered predominantly urban. For example, the average annual salary for public school principals in the U.S. was USD 90,500 during the year 2011–2012. Compared to this U.S. national average, principals from states such as Montana and Colorado had lower annual salaries at USD 65,800 and USD 85,700, respectively. On the other

hand, public school principals from predominantly urban states such as California and Connecticut earned comparatively higher annual average salaries at USD 103,600 and USD 123,700 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). While these statistics are more than a decade old, they are helpful in illustrating the educator compensation disparities that exist even at the state level based on urbanity or rurality of the state.

Financial Issues

Several concerns have been raised around the issue of financial resources in rural schools compared to urban and suburban schools. An example is the cost of education provision in rural areas based on the fundamental presumption that smaller districts and smaller schools imply fewer economies of scale to run the operations of the schools and to transport the students to school and back home (Stoddard & Toma, 2021). Longer bus routes and smaller class sizes can both impact the financial resources available to rural schools. Longer bus routes can increase transportation costs which can be a significant expense for rural schools that may not have access to public transportation like urban schools may have. Additionally, a lack of access to resources and services, such as special education services can result in higher costs as schools must seek outside support (Stoddard & Toma, 2021). Rural schools may not have the same level of access to special education services as urban schools, which can result in higher costs for things like speech therapy, occupational therapy, and other support services. Additionally, rural schools may need to hire outside consultants or experts to provide professional development for teachers, which can also be a significant expense (Stoddard & Toma, 2021). It is noteworthy, though, that the formula used to arrive at school funding differs by state. Thus, it is important to consider state-level studies to comprehend the rural nuances around financial resources in education. Some states may provide more funding for rural schools to account for the unique challenges

they face, while others may provide less funding, leaving rural schools with even fewer resources (Dhaliwal & Bruno, 2021).

Kolbe et al. (2021) provided a framework for the estimation of the cost variations for rural schools. They noted that some 13 states had formulae that offered cost adjustment for rural districts depending on population density and geographic location when arriving at state funding while others adjusted for the driving distance between schools and districts. About 26 states recognized economies of scales' loss in their rural district funding and 43 offered supplementary funding for transport (Kolbe et al., 2021). Even with these formula adjustments, Stoddard and Toma (2021) decried the inadequacy of scholarly works with respect to the actual cost variations in urban and rural schools or in the context of rural schools specifically.

Kolbe et al. (2021) illustrated the importance of context by comparing Vermont's 2009–2018 finance data to that of other national datasets based on the characteristics of communities, students, and schools. The authors used the rural state of Vermont where over 50% of students attend rural schools in isolated rural districts. Their findings showed that both the population and economies of scale are relevant cost factors when considering financial resources and funding for rural districts. This finding suggests that rural schools with smaller student populations may face higher costs per student compared to urban schools, which can negatively impact their ability to provide quality education. However, population density and school size were independent factors with notable influence over education provision costs (Kolbe et al., 2021), which means that even in rural districts there are variations in cost depending on the density of the population and the size of the schools. For instance, rural schools located in areas with lower population density may have higher transportation costs due to longer bus routes, while schools with smaller populations may have higher costs per student due to the inability to benefit from economies of

scale. Overall, Kolbe et al. (2021) contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of rural education and the importance of considering context when addressing financial challenges faced by rural schools. The findings suggest that policymakers and administrators must be attuned to the diverse needs of rural schools and tailor their approaches to address the unique cost factors that affect these schools (Kolbe et al., 2021).

Conversely, Dhaliwal and Bruno (2021) examined California's school funding formula with a view to generate in-depth insights into the financing of rural schools with an explicit focus on expenditure allocation by districts. The authors investigated 15 years of finance data to evaluate the distribution and expenditure levels between nonrural and rural districts and their differences after implementing the formula. They found that California's local control funding formula was designed with the aim of improving equity and increasing local flexibility on funds' usage. The formula extended increased funding for disadvantaged students while eliminating restrictions on funding categories at the same time (Dhaliwal & Bruno, 2021). This policy allowed districts to allocate funds according to their specific needs and priorities. For rural schools, the increased funding provided by the formula enabled rural districts to offer more competitive teacher salaries and benefits, which helped to attract and retain qualified teachers. Furthermore, the formula's emphasis on local control allowed rural districts to tailor their expenditures to address the unique needs of their student populations.

Like Dhaliwal and Bruno (2021), Rauscher (2020) examined a change in the funding formula albeit in Kansas where 64% of the districts are rural. The background of their work was Kansas' switch from block grant funding in 2015 after the reduction of funding for K–12 schools for 6 years that saw the freezing of levels of funding and cuts for districts with increased enrollment. The authors compared nonrural and rural student outcomes subsequent to the block

funding transition using within-state and between-state comparisons. The findings showed that the block funding formula affected districts with increased enrollment negatively the most. It was also reported that the reduction in the revenue base fraction was considerably lower in nonrural than in rural schools although the revenue reduction in terms of dollar amounts was similar for both contexts (Rauscher, 2020). Rauscher findings spotlighted the importance of state funding designs and formulas in determining education outcomes especially for rural schools.

Combs and Foster (2021) focused on Kentucky by looking at the homestead exemptions policy. The policy comprises property value reductions to households with disabilities or to seniors without direct reimbursement to localities for the resultant revenue loss. In most instances, both senior and disability households are largely found in rural counties in Kentucky and nationally (Stoddard & Toma, 2021). Combs and Foster used 1999–2013 panel data to measure the extent to which homestead exemptions affected school expenditures. Their findings showed no significant alteration of the resource distribution between nonrural, and rural districts given how the state and districts react to the bigger base erosion in the rural districts. Additionally, Combs and Foster found that the homestead exemption policy had a negligible impact on the distribution of resources between rural and nonrural districts in Kentucky.

Nguyen-Hoang (2021) investigated the Iowa State's tax increment financing (TIF) and its potential impact on rural districts compared to urban districts. Notably, the TIF entails a designation of zones that are accorded special tax breaks and are applicable in all states apart from Arizona (Stoddard & Toma, 2021). Using school district data for the years 2002 to 2017 to estimate the effects of TIF, Nguyen-Hoang's findings complemented those reported by Combs and Foster (2021) that the local TIF effects are interlinked with state policy details. Nguyen-Hoang also found that the policy on the calculation of property value increments in Iowa affected

rural school districts' revenue allocation that are necessary for funding capital and operating expenditures.

Educational Achievements

Educational achievement in the rural versus urban areas remains a contentious topic of discussion in the U.S. and in global contexts. The basis for such contentions is the strong relationship between educational achievement and the economic prosperity of a region. For instance, rural counties in the U.S. that have the least educational attainment levels tend to have higher poverty levels, population loss, child poverty, and unemployment compared to urban and other rural counties (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2017). Even though the overall rural educational attainment in the U.S. has improved remarkedly with time, urban areas still have considerably more adults with bachelor's degrees. For instance, only 40% of adults in rural areas aged at least 25 years had a high school diploma in 1960. This percentage had risen to 89% by 2019. In 1960, only 25% of adults in rural areas had a bachelor's degree and this percentage decreased to 21% in 2019. Comparatively, though, 35% of urban adults had at least a bachelor's degree (Economic Research Service, 2021) The persistence of educational attainment disparities between rural and urban area is not only a concern for the individuals living in these areas but also for the broader economy. Regions with lower educational attainment may struggle to attract businesses and industries that require a highly skilled workforce, which can further exacerbate economic disparities. Additionally, the lack of access to quality educational opportunities in rural areas can contribute to the brain drain, where talented individuals leave their communities to pursue better opportunities in urban areas (Petrin et al., 2014).

According to the USDA (2017), most rural areas are characterized by high poverty rates that contribute to school dropouts. Furthermore, children with poor family backgrounds also tend

to record lower test scores than their counterparts from higher-income families. Counteractively, poor education achievement and dropping out often contributes to poverty with rural areas often suffering this cyclic relationship the most. USDA's Economic Research Service (2021) demonstrated correlation between poverty and low education attainment in rural counties for the period 2011 to 2015. They noted that around 40% of the U.S. counties that were classified as rural low education were persistent-poverty counties whose rates of poverty were at least 20% since 1980 (USDA, 2017).

Besides getting into school and underachieving, children from poor backgrounds almost always start school about 1 year behind their peers from high-income backgrounds (García, 2015). This achievement gap can be observed in the early years of education, with studies showing that children from low-income families tend to start kindergarten with lower levels of academic skills compared to their more affluent peers (García, 2015). Conversely, in a study using achievement data concerning 840,000 students from 8,800 U.S. public school that was measured in the kindergarten fall and spring, Johnson et al. (2021) contradicted the view that rural kindergartens start behind their nonrural counterparts. In fact, the authors found that rural students commence kindergarten slightly ahead. However, they often fall behind by the time they reach middle school. The authors attributed this disparity to larger summer losses that rural students experience as a result of limited access to resources, limited opportunities for extracurricular activities, and limited access to libraries and other cultural institutions (Johnson et al., 2021).

Miller et al. (2019) argued for the importance of considering how poverty trends change by geographical region when dealing with inequalities related to poor development of children. The issue of geography and its implication on education achievement has also been linked to

how far schooling institutions are in a region and were found to affect the percentage of rural adults with postsecondary education compared to adults in urban areas who are closer to postsecondary institutions (Stoddard & Toma, 2021).

Typically, students in rural areas have been found to travel long distances to attend school and this contributes to both fatigue and decreased learning time. Where transportation may be considered, the costs of running such transport systems weigh heavily on district or school budgets thereby hampering such efforts (Johnson et al., 2021). Statistics from the USDA (2017) indeed confirm this possibility by demonstrating that 33% of urban adults held bachelor's degrees compared to 19% from the rural areas during the period 2011 to 2015. Even then, there are indications that the gap between urban and rural enrollment could be shrinking following increased postsecondary enrollment in remote rural counties (Sorensen & Hwang, 2021).

Title I Schools

Title I schools fall under the classification of Elementary and Secondary Education Act with the subsequent amendment of the Every Student Succeeds Act to receive financial aid through local education agencies to ensure children from low-income families overcome the difficult state academic standards (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). In other words, they are schools where a large proportion of the district's student population lives under conditions of low SES with families who receive some form of financial assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The allocation formula for Title I funds varies on the basis of the proximity of a district to an urbanized area, the predefined poverty quarter, and the population density. Based on this per formula-eligible child, children from densely populated areas such as large cities received the highest allocation in the most recent statistics that were

released in 2015 (USD 1,466) those students from remote areas received the second per-child allocation (USD 1,313).

Teacher attrition is one of the primary negative outcomes of teacher burnout (Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). For Title I schools, the teacher turnover rate is considerably higher than in non-Title I schools. In a study by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019), the teacher turnover rate for Title I schools was around 31%, which is nearly 50% greater than the rate reported for non-Title I schools. Diliberti et al. (2021) found that most of the teacher resignations were in public schools. Moreover, they reported that 62% of the teachers who quit were working at Title I schools immediately before their resignation. This study suggests that teaching in Title 1 schools may contribute to the higher rate of teacher burnout and turnover in these schools. Furthermore, the constant need to recruit and train new teachers can be a drain on resources for the school and district.

Teacher turnover has detrimental effects on the profession of teaching, schools, and education (Cohen-Vogel et al., 2016). The turnover rate in Title I schools could be traceable to the unique challenges that teachers in those schools face due to the unique traits of this category of schools. For example, Title I schools' working conditions are centered around the factors of high poverty such as low income, low performance, low attendance, lack of parental involvement, and learning gaps (García & Weiss, 2019a). Additionally, teachers in Title I rural schools tend to deal with more responsibilities outside of the typical education that needs to be taught such as limited resources and students dealing with hunger, abuse, troubles at home, and homelessness (Garwood et al., 2018).

Occupational Burnout

Burnout in the workplace is not confined only to education. Burnout in any occupation has similar physical effects. Occupational burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress in the workplace. It can result in feelings of hopelessness, detachment, and cynicism towards work, and can negatively affect a person's performance and overall well-being. Individuals suffering from burnout often suffer from physical and emotional symptoms, all of which impact their health and wellbeing negatively (Freudenberger, 1974; Rumschlag, 2017). People suffering from burnout may also experience and present with behavioral symptoms such as anger, frustration, feeling overwhelmed, and depression.

It has been shown that individuals suffering from burnout suffer from physical and emotional symptoms that are detrimental to their health and wellbeing, which can also impact their coworkers negatively. For instance, they can exhibit disconnect from coworkers and students, suffer from depression, create a hostile environment, and lack the desire to fulfill job obligations (Salvagioni et al., 2017). Consistent with findings reported in more recent literature (Afulani et al., 2021; Violanti et al., 2018), Freudenberger (1974) expressed that those workers who tend to be most dedicated and fully committed to their jobs are more likely to experience burnout in the workplace. Cherniss (1980) continued work in the exploration of burnout and identified three stages of burnout that included job stressors, emotional response to anxiety and exhaustion, and depersonalization (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Employees who suffer from exhaustion have been shown to experience emotional overload, physical fatigue, feeling overextended, and having a general depletion of their physical and emotional resources (Maslach, 2015). When one becomes mentally and physically exhausted, they separate themselves from the workplace and those in it (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

When depersonalization occurs, employees may feel they cannot successfully perform their jobs, and with the levels of exhaustion they feel, they may no longer care about doing an effective job. Maslach and Jackson (1981) continued their studies on burnout in the workplace and embarked on creating a system of measurement for burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) stated that an individual who begins to experience burnout in the workforce would likely begin to experience job withdrawal.as an outcome of burnout. Job withdrawal may manifest in absenteeism, declining job performance, and in some cases, high intention to leave and increased turnover. Burnout decreases motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment to the current job (Maslach, 2015). Over 20 years of research on burnout in the workplace, Maslach identified and formulated six critical domains of the workplace environment that impact burnout: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout research has found that the social and organizational conditions in a workplace are the primary components of burnout across many occupations (Maslach et al., 2001).

Teacher Burnout

The concept of burnout has spurred interest since Freudenberger (1974) first drew attention to it. According to Parte and Herrador-Alcaide (2021), burnout comprises feelings like being unpleasant, unsatisfactory, or unrewarding. Park and Shin (2020) contested that burnout has a longstanding association with people who suffer constant exposure to hostility, maladjustment, discouragement, fatigue, restraint, and discomfort. Burnout is also described as a psychological syndrome involving an extended reaction to chronic interpersonal and emotional stressors associated with the job (Maslach et al., 1996). Based on their definition of burnout, Maslach et al. (1996) characterized it as three dimensions. These include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a personal self-efficacy loss coupled with no personal accomplishment

(Leiter & Maslach, 2016; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 1996). Over the years, researchers (Iancu et al., 2018; Kariou et al., 2021; Parte & Herrador-Alcaide, 2021) investigating burnout in the teaching profession have endorsed the three dimensions, with emotional exhaustion being described as a main component of burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). The studies still foreground the personal psychology of the experience of burnout, but the social conditions need to be articulated as a part of one's experiences. This parameter requires researchers to look at burnout in specific workplace conditions.

Teaching as a profession has been regarded as stressful across all education modalities (Parte & Herrador-Alcaide, 2021). It has been argued that teachers present with comparatively higher stress levels that lead to burnout than individuals in other occupational groups (Shackleton et al., 2019). Based on the three burnout dimensions, emotional exhaustion, which is characterized by feelings of hopelessness, detachment, and irritability, in teacher burnout has been associated with a lack of resources to enable teachers to handle emotional events, such as insufficient support from colleagues or administrators, inadequate training, or unmanageable workloads. As a result, teachers may feel overwhelmed and unable to cope with the demands of their job, leading to emotional exhaustion. Depersonalization has been synonymously referred to as cynicism and traced to cynical attitudes and detachment towards teaching as a profession (Iancu et al., 2018). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) expounded on the depersonalization dimension in the context of teaching. They argued that it could be because of teaching-related emotional demands that can deprive teachers of the ability to respond to students' needs. Concerning the third dimension, personal efficacy loss or degradation was linked to the intense feelings of being professionally inadequate or ineffective (Iancu et al., 2018). In teaching, consistent dismal accomplishment could trigger negative self-assessment and loss of job

meaningfulness in line with the third burnout dimension (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Teachers are likely to suffer from burnout due to the stressful nature of the teaching profession, which can lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal efficacy loss. Additionally, the constant need to respond to students' needs, the pressure to be effective, and the lack of autonomy and control over their work can also contribute to burnout. Teachers may feel overwhelmed by the demands of their job and lack of the support and resources they need to succeed.

Teacher burnout has been investigated from various dimensions and in combination with other concepts. For instance, Ballantyne and Retell (2020) conducted a study in Australia to explore the connection between burnout and the concepts of teacher well-being, praxis shock, and self-efficacy. Their findings showed that praxis shock could predict reported burnout. In a Finnish study involving subject-matter teachers, Salmela-Aro et al. (2019) examined teacher well-being concerning burnout and work engagement. They profiled 70% of the teachers in the engaged-burnout category whom they found to face more work demands. Pyhältö et al. (2021) also conducted a similar study to that of Salmela-Aro et al., whose aim was to investigate the unique variations in socio-contextual burnout risk profiles of primary and lower secondary in-service teachers from Finland. They identified five socio-contextual teacher burnout profiles: no, minor, high burnout risks, increased exhaustion, and increased exhaustion and cynicism.

Conversely, a study on teacher burnout in Spain among higher education teachers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic did not show high tutor burnout levels before and after the Pandemic (Parte & Herrador-Alcaide, 2021). These findings reported in the previous paragraph demonstrate the potential role that country and context could have on teacher burnout characterization; understanding teacher burnout is unachievable without considering the context.

Indeed, various authors have pointed out the importance of such factors as contextual and socio-contextual elements (Pyhältö et al., 2021; Shackleton et al., 2019), organizational climate (Perrone et al., 2019), the working (school) environment (Shackleton et al., 2019), and cultural context (Atmaca et al., 2020) among others. A comparative study of teacher burnout across multiple countries revealed important variations across countries (Aboagye et al., 2018). As such, reviewing the teacher burnout literature from the context of the U.S. education system, in general, is vital in isolating the unique nature of the phenomenon, as presented in the next section.

Teacher Burnout in the U.S.

Increasing turnover rates in education are causing a struggle for schools across the United States of America to find enough staff to operate their schools (Rodriguez-Delgado et al., 2021). Schools across America are facing staff shortages, as the teacher retention rate is at a record high for teachers leaving the profession (García & Weiss, 2019a) and this has been linked to burnout and stress as its principal antecedent (Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found that nine out of every 10 teacher hires are replacing educators who left voluntarily. In addition, more than two thirds of the teachers retire creating another teacher shortage (University of Massachusetts Global, 2020). A recent survey-based report (Diliberti et al., 2021) showed that stress ranked highly and above insufficient pay in the reasons that informed teacher quitting even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Title I teachers become emotionally exhausted with all the added stress and begin feeling that they are lacking personal accomplishment. In turn, this emotional exhaustion leads to disconnection from other staff and students (Rumschlag, 2017). Factors such as workload, depersonalization, stresses of job responsibilities, emotional exhaustion, and a lack of personal

accomplishment causes burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). There is a clear link between burnout and turnover rates with various studies (Cross & Thomas, 2017; Perryman & Calvert, 2019). showing new teachers leaving the profession at considerably high rates mainly due to burnout. Although there are many teachers who cite retirement as the reason for leaving the teaching profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019), it is possible that teacher burnout contributes to the increasing rate of attrition in the field. Burnout is an ongoing challenge for schools in terms of staffing and quality of instruction, especially in low-socioeconomic level schools where attrition rates are highest.

In the U.S. education system, numerous studies have been conducted to investigate teacher burnout. On the one hand, some U.S. studies (Chang, 2020; Costa et al., 2021; Perrone et al., 2019) were general because they included all teachers of diverse education levels drawn from various subjects and disciplines/specialties in their samples. On the other hand, other studies were focused on specific teacher levels, such as K–12 teachers (Pressley, 2021b), high school (Lee, 2019), and middle school (Berg & Cornell, 2016; Wicke & Nelson, 2021). In terms of subject matter, teacher burnout was also investigated from teachers who offered physical education (Lee, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019) and special education (Robinson et al., 2019). In these studies, teacher burnout was acknowledged as a problem in the U.S. today and required an in-depth investigation.

Richards et al. (2016) conducted a cross-sectional study where U.S. teachers were drawn from elementary and secondary schools in the Midwest region. Their findings showed that role ambiguity, overload, and conflict were mediators of the relationship between a teacher's resilience and the three dimensions of teacher burnout. Within the context of special education, Harrell et al. (2019) found that the teacher's accomplishment as a component of burnout is

directly associated with individualized education program outcomes in children diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder. Job satisfaction and teacher burnout negatively correlated to the study utilizing the three burnout dimensions. Robinson et al. (2019) administered a survey to special education teachers from public schools across 34 U.S. states and reported a negative correlation between job satisfaction and teacher burnout. A nationwide cross-sectional survey involving U.S. special education teachers showed that the teachers felt unsupported by their administrators and that teaching adversely affected their quality of life (Hester et al., 2020).

In the wake of the pandemic, several U.S.-based studies have shown an increase in teacher burnout. A recent cross-sectional survey involving 165 U.S. language teachers revealed a spike in teacher burnout since the pandemic (Powers, 2022). The findings also reported decreased access to some coping strategies, the inefficacy of previously effective coping strategies, and an adverse decline of the energy and time for engaging in the coping strategies. The increase in teacher burnout is not surprising, given the unprecedented nature of the crisis and the immense pressure on teachers to ensure the continuity of education while also prioritizing the safety and well-being of their students. Researchers acknowledge the rise in teacher burnout factors such as longer working hours, the need to learn new technology, and difficulty in accompanying each student. Teachers had to adapt to a new paradigm of teaching, where the traditional classroom setting had often been replaced by virtual classrooms and remote learning. This shift required a significant amount of time and effort from teachers, who had to develop new skills and strategies to effectively teach in a virtual environment. A study investigating K–12 teachers' struggles and success during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that teachers were getting support from school and state systems to navigate the said challenges (Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021). Pressley (2021b) administered a survey to K–12 teachers to investigate the

factors contributing to teacher burnout during the pandemic. The results acknowledged a rise in burnout levels and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, anxiety about COVID-19, administrator support issues, and anxiety concerning communicating with parents emerged as the primary teacher burnout factors (Pressley, 2021a). Moreover, teachers had to contend with a range of challenges related to the pandemic, including increased workload, reduced resources, and concerns about the safety of themselves and their students. These challenges added to the already high levels of stress and burnout that teachers experience and have made it more difficult for them to cope with the demands of their profession (Pressley, 2021b).

Instead, the educator experiences burnout and leaves the profession or remains in their current position. The longevity of their exhaustion, stress, disconnectedness, and other physical and behavioral traits of burnout is buckling for the educator and the well-being and education of the students they are teaching (Harrell et al., 2019). The impact of teacher burnout is critical and raises a level of concern for both the educator and their students (Yu et al., 2015). A teacher experiencing burnout becomes unmotivated and unattached to their work, which can lead to a lack of interest in their classes, causing students to fall behind and lack motivation, which can then lead to increased dropout rates (Haydon et al., 2018)

Burnout Among U.S. Middle School Teachers

Despite the numerous studies on teacher burnout, empirical studies concerning burnout among middle school teachers exclusively remain scarce. The lack of empirical teacher burnout studies among middle school teachers for the intersection of professional and personal stress. Middle school teachers have been studied as study samples among other teacher-level groups in various studies. These studies include a focus on middle school teachers and elementary school teachers (Perrone et al., 2019) and elementary and high/secondary school (Garwood et al., 2018;

Robinson et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Middle school teachers are often included in studies on teacher burnout, but these studies do not exclusively focus on this group.

Altogether, there have been some empirical studies from outside the U.S. and in the U.S. concerning teacher burnout among middle school teachers exclusively. In the Turkish context, Öztürk et al. (2021) investigated the extent to which self-efficacy and school culture could predict teacher burnout among middle school teachers from 12 middle schools. They found that school culture affected both self-efficacy and teacher burnout. A job burnout study among Chinese middle school teachers (Jiahui, 2021) revealed that most middle school teachers coped with stress by being positive and optimistic. While the findings showed that the job burnout level was mild/moderate, they also found that the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout was the most severe.

Middle school teachers face burnout due to various factors specific to their professional context in which they work. The transitional nature of middle school, combined with the unique needs and characteristics of early adolescence, can contribute to increased stress levels among middle school teachers (Öztürk et al., 2021). During Grades 4–9 students experience significant physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes, which can create demanding classroom dynamics for teachers (Perrone et al., 2019). Middle school students are going through rapid physical changes, and they also are learning to navigate more complex social relationships, manage their emotions, and develop a sense of self-identity. These changes can lead to increased peer pressure, emotional volatility, and behavioral issues, which can create a challenging and stressful classroom environment for teachers (Perrone et al., 2019). Dealing with the challenges of early adolescence, such as heightened behavioral issues, peer pressure, and emotional volatility, can contribute to increased stress levels among teachers. Teachers often face the

challenge of balancing the need to provide structure and support for their students while also fostering independence and self-reliance (Perrone et al., 2019).

Middle school teachers often face heavier workloads compared to elementary school teachers due to the need for subject specialization and the greater number of students they teach (Garwood et al., 2018). Balancing the demands of multiple subjects, lesson planning, grading, and extracurricular activities can lead to increased job demands and time pressure, resulting in burnout. Another aspect of heavier workloads in Grades 4–9 can be the added disruptive behavior, conflicts, and disciplinary issues. Middle school students are at an age where they are still learning how to regulate their emotions and behaviors, and they may act out in class or engage in disruptive behavior (Robinson et al., 2019). Managing classroom disruptions and maintaining discipline while fostering a positive learning environment can be mentally and emotionally draining for teachers, leading to burnout.

Despite the limited number of empirical studies exclusively focused on burnout among middle school teachers, the available research and findings provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to their burnout. The unique context of middle school education, which involves the transitional nature of early adolescence and the associated challenges, plays a significant role in increasing stress levels for teachers.

Teacher Burnout in U.S. Rural Schools

Only a handful of studies focused on teacher burnout in rural schools Within the last few years. In the U.K. rural context, Shackleton et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between teacher burnout and various contextual and compositional school environment aspects based on a teacher sample drawn from 40 schools. Based on the three burnout dimensions of the MBI (Maslach et al., 2001), it was reported that schools affect the personal accomplishment

dimension more than the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions. As with some previous studies outside and in the rural context, Shackleton et al. associated teacher burnout with school safety (Berg & Cornell, 2016), support (Berg & Cornell, 2016; Pressley, 2021a), and student attitudes toward learning (Garwood et al., 2018).

Garwood et al. (2018) studied teacher burnout in rural education contexts of a U.S. south-eastern state using survey and focus group interviews on collecting data. Among other factors, emotional exhaustion as a dimension of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001) was a major contributor to teacher perceptions of stress and burnout among rural special education teachers. As with Shackleton et al. (2019), managing student behavior was one of the essential strategies for preventing burnout among the teachers; this strategy was mostly attained through effective classroom management. Embracing challenges and turning them around through positive strategies was also an effective coping strategy, as was the case with the findings reported on middle school teacher burnout studies (Jiahui, 2021; Wicke & Nelson, 2021).

Still, in the U.S. rural context, Rumschlag (2017) attempted to quantify teacher burnout experiences from a psychological perspective based on data from teachers in rural Ohio. Based on the three dimensions of the MBI-ES, they compared teachers based on their gender. They found that males had higher depersonalization scores while emotional exhaustion and personal achievement scores were relatively the same for male and female teachers. Even then, the personal accomplishment score was considerably lower than the threshold defined in the MBI-ES (Rumschlag, 2017). Hitherto, none of the studies reviewed in this or the previous section have investigated teacher burnout in the context of rural middle school teachers. This lack of research on teacher burnout in rural middle schools highlights the need for more studies in this area to better understand the unique challenges and experiences of teachers in these contexts.

The need for more research is particularly important because teacher burnout has been shown to have negative impacts on teacher retention and student success. Additionally, Rumschlag's findings suggest that teacher burnout may be more prevalent in rural areas, which could have implications for teacher retention and student success in these regions.

Although conducted in the Chinese context, the cross-sectional study by Tan (2021) was perhaps the closest to the current study conceptually. The researchers investigated teacher burnout and social support based on questionnaire responses from 170 middle school teachers in the rural setting of Shaoguan City. Their descriptive analysis described the teachers' burnout levels as being modest while correlation tests revealed an inverse relationship between social support and teacher work burnout (Tan, 2021). Even then, the findings of their research are not transferable to the rural middle school context in the U.S., given the marked context-specific teacher burnout variations (Berg & Cornell, 2016; Leiter & Maslach, 2016; Perrone et al., 2019; S. A. Russell, 2019; Shackleton et al., 2019). Furthermore, the unique traits and context of Title I school that the current study focuses on would render Tan's findings inapplicable despite their recency and relatable conceptualization with the current study.

The few studies (Braun et al., 2020; Damico et al., 2018) involving stress-related burnout in Title I schools corroborate the evidence that the school environment and school traits that influence teacher burnout levels and coping strategies. Although these two Title I studies were conducted in urban contexts, they speak to the unique traits of this category of schools and how school (poverty, climate, and environment) factors affect teachers as professionals and teaching as a profession. The results of an uncontrolled pilot study by Braun et al. (2020) on mindfulness among prekindergarten teachers from a U.S. Pacific Northwest school revealed low MBI-ES scores on the dimension of personal accomplishment before the mindfulness intervention.

However, the depersonalization and emotional exhaustion scores remained relatively the same (and high) pre- and postintervention, as did the levels of job stress regardless of the intervention (Braun et al., 2020), as was the case in the study by Rumschlag (2017). These findings were based on an urban context of Title I schools, likely to differ from rural Title I schools. Furthermore, the studies were not specific to grade levels. As such, the current study would bridge the gap in knowledge about teacher burnout in the context of rural Title I schools Grades 4–9 in the U.S.

Effects of COVID-19 on Teacher Burnout

Education changed drastically in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools across the nation and even worldwide had to shut down and change the educational format for their students. In-person learning was halted, and whether districts were ready or not, virtual learning became the only source of contact for teachers and students (World Economic Forum, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools struggled with setting up successful virtual formats due to a lack of resources, time, and training (García & Weiss, 2019b). Some rural schools did not have access to the internet, and students from poverty-stricken homes did not have the proper equipment (Hash, 2020). While remote teaching initially had its challenges, the stresses of returning to in-person instruction added additional layers of stress due to the increasing daily COVID cases and lack of personal protective equipment resources (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2020). Regrettably, certain educational administrators failed to adequately safeguard the rights and well-being of these teachers (Corpuz, 2023).

According to Ni (2022), access to the technology and materials needed to continue learning when schools close is desperately unequal; therefore, many students in low-income families have fallen behind academically, emotionally, and socially. This difference makes

equitable learning access for disadvantaged and marginalized children critical for creating a sustainable educational future. The success or failure of academic progress now depends on digital access. Teachers tend to have other workloads and stressors because students from rural low-socioeconomic environments have additional stress, increased negative emotions, and increased illness. Students from low socioeconomic homes tend to have more psychological stress than those not from a poverty-stricken home (Singh et al., 2019).

Measuring Teacher Burnout

Teacher burnout has been an elusive concept to measure, given the nature of self-reporting burnout. Self-reporting as a research method can be prone to issues such as bias, inconsistency, and inaccuracy, as individuals may not always provide truthful or accurate information about their own experiences and behaviors. Teacher burnout literature features three main scales. These include the MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Kristensen et al., 2005), and the burnout measure (MBI) (Pines & Aronson, 1988). Of these scales, the MBI has been used the most in teacher burnout studies across various contexts, including in the recent past and mostly in its adapted form of the MBI-ES (Aboagye et al., 2018; Atmaca et al., 2020; Öztürk et al., 2021). Indeed, an earlier comparative review of the three scales for measuring teacher burnout around the world revealed that nine out of ten studies that involve measuring teacher burnout have used the MBI (Platsidou & Daniilidou, 2016, p. 166). Given this research and the fact that the MBI-ES aligns with the theoretical framework for the current study, the MBI-ES was deemed most suitable for measuring teacher burnout among rural Title I middle school teachers. In line with the Maslach burnout theory, the MBI-ES measures teacher burnout from the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (Maslach et al., 1986; Platsidou & Daniilidou, 2016).

During the search, only three U.S.-based studies (Berg & Cornell, 2016; Herman et al., 2020; Wicke & Nelson, 2021) addressing middle school teachers' burnout were founded within the last 5 years or so. Berg and Cornell (2016) used data from the Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey of 389 middle school teachers to examine whether student support and high disciplinary structure were linked to less distress and less aggression. Their findings confirmed the notion that supportive and structured schools translated into more safety for teachers, reducing their distress and preventing teacher burnout (Berg & Cornell, 2016). These results are particularly important for middle school teachers, who often work with students during a critical period of development and may face unique challenges in managing classroom behavior and academic expectations.

Herman et al. (2020) researched middle school teachers' stress and stress-coping mechanisms with a sample comprising both teachers and students. They developed teacher burnout profiles using a latent profile analysis, including high stress/low coping, low stress/high coping, and high stress/high coping teacher categories. Their findings revealed that most middle school teachers were in high stress/low coping profile and registered higher burnout levels coupled with lower self-efficacy. The findings of the study are concerning, as they suggest that middle school teachers are experiencing high levels of stress and are struggling to cope with it. This struggle can have negative impacts on both the teachers and their students. Teacher burnout can lead to decreased motivation, lower quality teaching, and increased absenteeism, which can ultimately affect student learning and well-being (Herman et al., 2020).

Wicke and Nelson (2021) conducted a single qualitative case study to investigate how middle school teachers from 10 public schools Grades 4–9 in central Florida described professional and personal stress in their lives. Besides the work- and student-related stressors that

led to teacher burnout such as managing classroom behavior, meeting curriculum demands, and dealing with parents, the middle school teachers, expressed that some other factors included personal stresses, including financial stress, the safety of loved ones, and the volatility caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Burnout among teachers is a complex issue that cannot be attributed to a single factor. Similar to Jiahui (2021), Wicke and Nelson found that teachers cope with stress issues in their personal and professional lives that lead to burnout by being positive and coming up with coping strategies. These studies suggest that teacher burnout is a complex issue that can be influenced by a range of factors, including personal and professional stressors, as well as school and context-specific factors. Personal factors can include factors such as health problems, family responsibilities, and financial stress, which can impact a teacher's ability to manage the demands of their job. Professional stressors can include factors such as heavy workload, lack of autonomy, and poor communication with colleagues and administrators.

Additionally, school and context-specific factors, such as a lack of resources, poor infrastructure, and high poverty rates, can also contribute to teacher burnout (Wicke & Nelson, 2021). Addressing the complexities of teacher burnout requires a comprehensive approach. These studies did not specifically focus on rural schools or Title 1 schools, which may have different stressors and coping mechanisms for teacher burnout. Of the few teacher burnout studies conducted on middle school teachers, none were set up in the rural schools' context or Title 1 schools. There is a need for more research on teacher burnout in rural schools and Title 1 schools, as these contexts have unique challenges that may not be addressed in studies conducted in more affluent or urban settings. However, some studies have been conducted on teacher burnout in rural schools, as reviewed in the next section.

Summary

The review of rural schools' and teacher burnout literature demonstrates interest in the topic globally. Notably, there is widespread consensus that teacher burnout can be conceptualized from the three MBI dimensions, which include emotional exhaustion, lack of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (Iancu et al., 2018; Kariou et al., 2021; Parte & Herrador-Alcaide, 2021). However, the emotional exhaustion dimension seems to be the most domineering in teacher burnout studies (Jiahui, 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Although teacher burnout has been studied in the U.S., existing studies are either too general in nature (Chang, 2020; Costa et al., 2021; Perrone et al., 2019) and only a few focus on middle school teacher burnout (Berg & Cornell, 2016; Herman et al., 2020; Wicke & Nelson, 2021), rural schools (Garwood et al., 2018; Rumschlag, 2017), and Title I schools (Braun et al., 2020; Damico et al., 2018).

To address these limitations, future studies on teacher burnout in rural schools and Title 1 schools must be conducted. It is vital to collect and gather information based on the perceptions of teachers who are experiencing or have experienced burnout in Title I rural schools Grades 4–9 to understand better how the workplace conditions are entangled with the experiences of burnout. Researchers must explore the unique challenges and stressors faced by middle school teachers in rural Appalachian Title 1 schools. Through the proposed study, rural U.S. Title I middle school teachers had the opportunity to explore their experiences of/with burnout for better understanding of how those experiences shape or affect their perceptions towards the teaching profession. This study could help researchers to gain a deeper understanding of how teacher burnout is shaped by the workplace conditions and stressors in these schools. Additionally, the study provides insights into the ways in which teachers are affected by burnout. Overall, the

study contributes to the existing literature on teacher burnout by providing a more nuanced understanding of the issue and its impact on teachers in rural Appalachian Title 1 schools Grades 4–9.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore teachers' experiences with burnout in rural Title I middle schools. This study consisted of experiences from 12 teachers from a Title I Appalachia rural school buildings Grades 4–9 located in Sunshine County in southern Ohio. Data was collected through one-on-one interviews, MBI-ES with focus on education methodology through research design, statement of research questions, participants and setting, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis.

Research Design

A qualitative design was chosen for this study because the purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions of the factors leading to teachers' experiences with burnout Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "Researchers typically select the quantitative approach to respond to research questions requiring numerical data" and "the qualitative approach for research questions requiring textual data" (p. 65). Because this study was based on experiences as opposed to numerical data, qualitative data was the most appropriate for this study. Qualitative data analysis may be used to discover, evaluate, contrast, and understand basic patterns or themes. According to Anfara et al. (2002), a qualitative method enhances "openness in a rebuttable and impartial way" by increasing the visibility of data analysis (p. 28). For this study transcendental phenomenology was appropriate because transcendental phenomenological studies adopt an inductive methodology, aimed at uncovering shared experiences among participants to discern a central essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This essence encapsulates the collective or unifying experience of all participants (Moustakas, 1994). While the specific steps for data analysis may vary and evolve throughout the research process,

they generally follow a coherent sequence, as articulated by Creswell and Poth (2018). They characterize this process as a spiral, iterating and refining data until key insights emerge. Moustakas (1994) delineated the process as columnar, beginning with horizontalization, where equal weight is assigned to all participant statements. Subsequently, meaning is attributed to these statements and organized into themes, with redundant statements being streamlined to enhance clarity and coherence in the analysis.

The source of data collection was one-on-one interviews, MBI-ES, and focus groups. Teachers were interviewed and prompted on the phenomenon of firsthand experiences with burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9.

Research Questions

This research was conducted in a rural county consisting of three buildings in one Title I school district Grades 4–9 in southern Ohio. Using the transactional model of stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the MBI-ES (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 1986), this research focuses on the burnout experiences of Title I teachers who teach Grades 4 through 9 in rural areas of southern Ohio.

Central Research Question

What are the burnout experiences of Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 of teachers?

Subquestion

What are the perceptions of the factors contributing to burnout experiences of Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 of teachers?

Setting and Participants

The setting for this study took place in Sunshine County (pseudonym), which is a southern county in the state of Ohio. Participants were selected from one of the three school buildings in one district Grades 4–9 in the county that are all in the rural district and qualify for and receive Title I funding. Participants were all teachers who are or have experienced burnout.

Setting

The site for this research study took place in three different public Title I Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 located in Sunshine County, pseudonym used to protect identifies, which is a small rural county in southern Ohio. The school district consisted of three schools: one elementary school that consists of Grades K–5, one middle school with Grades 6–8, and one high school building with Grades 9–12. The district has one superintendent. The elementary building has one building principal and one assistant principal. The middle school and high school building only has one principal for each school building. According to the Ohio Department of Education, Sunshine county has approximately 1,200 students; 606 elementary students, 367 middle school students, and 227 high school students.

The goal of this research is to explore teachers' experiences with burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9, specifically in Sunshine County. These sites were chosen because they are Title I school districts in an area with high levels of poverty. In Ohio, the top 12 counties with the highest rates of child poverty are in Appalachia (Appalachian Children Coalition, 2022). All four schools in Sunshine County qualify and are identified as a Title I school because over 40% of students come from low-income households (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Sunshine County is located in North Central Appalachia. Sunshine County has a population of 57,445. The per capita income for Sunshine County is $24,733 with

19.8% living in poverty. When just looking at children, 26.9% of Sunshine County Children live in poverty. This percentage is 7.1% higher than the state average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). In Sunshine County, 45% of children receive SNAP/Food Stamps and 84% of students are considered economically disadvantaged (Children's Defense Fund, 2019). Additionally, 69.9% of children are enrolled in Medicaid (Children's Defense Fund, 2019). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2021), only 17.9% of residents in Sunshine County were employed as of 2020. Sunshine county is 95.2% White. These statistics help show that Sunshine County is overwhelmingly White, low-income or in poverty and underemployed. According to the Appalachian Children Coalition (2022), if Appalachian counties were combined into a separate state, it would be the second-most economically distressed state in the country.

In addition to high rates of poverty, counties in Appalachian Ohio, like Sunshine County, suffer from higher rates of drug abuse and parental imprisonment. Babies born in Appalachian Ohio are almost twice as likely as the Ohio average to be diagnosed with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (Appalachian Children Coalition, 2022). Beyond neonatal exposure, children who are born to drug-involved families often have a parent in prison or who has overdosed and are often left to be raised by grandparents or other caregivers and often face challenges because of their living arrangements (Appalachian Children Coalition, 2022). Ten percent of Ohio children have had an incarcerated parent, which is the third highest incarceration rate for parents in the country (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). The challenges facing families in Appalachia also affect teachers. Teachers often perceive themselves as bearing the responsibility for all facets of a student's well-being, a sentiment that has been substantiated by various studies. Johnson and Johnson (2018) highlighted the multifaceted role teachers assume in student care, emphasizing the potential impact on their well-being. Similarly, Corbin et al. (2019) underscored the

association between the extensive responsibilities teachers' shoulder and the heightened risk of burnout. These findings collectively affirm the notion that the perception of comprehensive student care responsibilities significantly contributes to the prevalence of teacher burnout, shedding light on the complex dynamics in the educational landscape. For the purpose of this study, permission was accessed through a site permission form to the County Superintendent (Appendix B).

Participants

The 12 participants for this study consisted of both male and female teachers who are employees of one of the three Title I schools Grades 4–9 in Sunshine County in southern Ohio. Teachers were selected based on their own claims that they are experiencing burnout and an employee of a Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Researcher Positionality

The motivation for this study developed from students not being successful in the classroom. I currently work and live in a rural low -socioeconomic community in the Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia tri-state area. I have lived in the same area and attended the same school where I am currently employed. The area has always suffered from poverty since the local factories shut down 40 years ago. All students who are a part of Sunshine County qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. Ninety percent of the staff live in the local community, and the other 10% commute from another state. Being from a small area, all staff in the community and in the school know each other on both professional and personal levels. I am a personable individual, and I know all my coworkers in one way or another. Being from the same school where I work, some of the staff members were my teachers when I was in school.

There are students in my classroom who I am not able to motivate or engage in the lessons even though I plan highly engaging lessons. Unfortunately, I see many students throughout the day who have many obstacles in their home lives. Our school is filled with students who are going through and coping with many different traumas. With students coming in with so many underlying traumas, it becomes difficult for the teacher to motivate as well as understand their psychological needs. Self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci (2000) holds that students cannot be successful in a classroom unless they are motivated, and for one to be motivated, the individual must first have autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Since I am from the same community and school district, I do have positive relationships with the participants. Throughout this study, I assumed a position as a relative insider due to my familiarity with the individuals involved and my awareness of the phenomenon under investigation. This insider perspective presents a unique advantage, creating a conducive environment for participants to openly share their experiences with the phenomenon. It is crucial to note that all participants were colleagues, ensuring a balanced power dynamic where I hold no authoritative influence over them. This deliberate approach aims to mitigate potential biases and foster an atmosphere of trust and candidness, essential for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon under study.

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework that is most appropriate for this study was social constructivism. Social constructivism is an interpretative framework where individuals are trying to understand the world around them and develop meanings that correspond with their experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). This study is socially situated where knowledge was constructed through the interactions of teachers describing their experiences of burnout in rural Title I rural

Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. The zone of proximal development shaped the study because others can learn from the lived experiences of the teachers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Philosophical Assumptions

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) a philosophical assumption is the theoretical framework used by researchers to collect, analyze, and interpret the data that is collected in a particular field of study. The three philosophical assumptions used in this study are ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption ofthe study is based on embracing the idea that there are multiple realities when it comes to teachers experiencing burnout in rural Appalachian Title I schools Grades 4–9. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that "multiple realities require multiple forms of evidence," which is why this study includes MBI-ES, individual interviews, and focus groups. The various forms of data collection allowed different presentations of the shared phenomenon of the teachers' experiences of burnout in rural Title I schools. My assumption was that psychological realities play a role in motivation. I also assumed that teachers can recognize the needs of their students.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption through social constructivist supports that reality is constructed between the researcher and the researched, which is shaped by individuals' experiences (Flick, 2018). In this study, teachers were considered experts of their own experiences. I am assuming that the teachers who share the phenomenon of burnout in Title I rural schools Grades 4–9 know their own subjective experiences and that they can also talk about these experiences. Subjective knowledge claims emphasize the participants capacity to be honest

and sincere about their subjective experiences. As the researcher, I lessened the distance between the researcher and research and collaborate with the teachers to be able to fully collect informational data on their shared phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption describes the values that I brought to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this qualitative phenomenology study, I bracketed my values to be open to the experiences of the participants. Bracketing my values for this study allowed a better understanding of the experiences that the teachers who were a part of the phenomenon had. Being open and nonbiased during the study allowed me to understand the experiences of the teachers from their personal perspectives.

Researcher's Role

Participants for this study are from the county where I currently teach. Being from a small community, the likelihood of knowing my participants is high. Throughout this study I recruited participants through email. After obtaining informed consent, I distributed MBI-ES to the participants. To facilitate the study, I conducted interviews in a one-on-one setting and gather additional data through focus groups. As a facilitator, I helped participants reflect on their experiences throughout the study. As a relative insider, I have established positive relationships with the participants and am familiar with the community and phenomenon under investigation. This insider perspective enabled me to collect and analyze data more effectively.

All participants were coworkers, and I hold no power over the participants whatsoever. As an educator who has not only grown up in a low SES area but has also taught in the area at a Title I school for 13 years, I have seen many gaps and needs from my students. As teachers, we all see the struggles students face and must overcome. We also see weaknesses in a certain

subject matter, or they are not strong in certain ways of learning. As teachers, we find ways to bridge gaps and use various skills and techniques to better meet the needs of our students. My research provided real experiences that came firsthand from teachers in rural Appalachian Title I schools on recognizing students with various physical and psychological needs. These students deserve our help, but teachers have many jobs to do in the classroom setting and have many students and recognizing all needs can become a challenging task. As a researcher, it is crucial to conduct my research in an ethical manner. The truth must be shared and be the foundation of the study. I must set aside my own views and present the true findings of the study. In this study, my role is that of a coworker, intimately acquainted with the participants who have firsthand experience with burnout. This insider perspective may introduce a potential bias, as my preexisting knowledge of the individuals and their experiences could influence how I interpret the data and conduct the analysis. To address this, I am committed to maintaining objectivity throughout the research process. I acknowledge the need for transparency regarding my relationship with the participants and the potential impact it may have on the study's findings, and I employed rigorous methods to mitigate any undue bias in data interpretation and analysis.

Procedures

I conducted this study by first obtaining permission through Liberty University; once access was granted through institutional review board (IRB) review, I obtained permission via email with the Sunshine County Superintendent. After permissions were granted, I began recruitment of teachers who were employed in one of the Title I rural schools Grades 4–9 in Sunshine County who were experiencing burnout. Individuals was be chosen through a volunteer selection, and a convenience sampling process was used.

Recruitment Plan

To secure an adequate pool of participants requests for volunteers was advertised in a private email (Appendix C) was sent out to teachers in the school email platform. All volunteers who replied to the email and fit the requirements of this study stated in the initial email (Appendix C) and wished to volunteer to participate in a survey, focus group, and individual interview, were sent a consent form (Appendix D) to print, provide a signature, and return. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of teachers who are or who have experienced burnout in Title I rural Appalachia schools, Grades 4–9. Using the purpose of this study as a guide, participants qualified by:(a) being a current educator; (b) having taught a minimum of 1 year; (c) currently teaching or having taught in Grades 4–9; (d) currently teaching or who have taught in a Title I rural Appalachian school. In order to achieve saturation for a qualitative study, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended five to 20 participants. This study recruited 12 volunteers to participate in this study. Prior to their acceptance into the study, potential participants were briefed on the study's specifics, including its requirements, measures taken to ensure their anonymity and safety, voluntary participation options, and the use of digital consent forms.

Data Collection Plan

Three data collection methods was used for this phenomenological study. The three methods that were used were MBI-ES survey, individual interviews, and focus groups as methods of data collection.

Individual Interviews

One of the ways that I was able to begin a collection of informational data about teachers' experiences with burnout in rural Title I schools Grades 4–9 was through a one-on-one

interview. Individual interviews are important because they can help one understand and explore the opinions of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For interviewing individual participants, I used an in-depth semi-constructed list of questions. In the method of phenomenology, interviews are a conventional method of data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During this interview, I asked open-ended questions to engage in interaction with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career in your current position. CRQ
2. Tell me about how economic challenges in the area effect your students CRQ
3. Describe your challenges when working in a Title I School. CRQ
4. Describe your challenges when working with lower SES school district. CRQ
5. Describe your workload and responsibilities in your position. CRQ
6. Describe the motivation that your students have. CRQ
7. Describe the challenges your students face and how you believe that may impact their behaviors or academic performance in the class CRQ
8. Can you describe any economic challenges that COVID brought to light that impacted your students and their ability to participate in class? CRQ
9. What do you do to manage and motivate difficult students? SQ 1
10. Describe your experiences of recognizing students who are not focused because they are bothered by something else. CRQ
11. Describe the community in your workplace? CRQ
12. Describe your challenges when working with lower SES students in your classes. SQ1
13. Describe experiences where you have lacked a sense of belonging and connection with

others (relatedness). SQ1

14. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with working in a Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9? SQ1

The interview questions in this protocol are strategically designed to gather comprehensive insights into the experiences of teachers working in a Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9, particularly focusing on the challenges, motivations, and dynamics affecting both teachers and students. The questions aim to align with the research goal, addressing key aspects such as educational background, career trajectory, economic challenges, and workload responsibilities. Each question is carefully crafted to explore the impact of economic challenges on students, challenges specific to Title I schools and lower SES districts, as well as the motivational factors and challenges faced by students.

Additionally, the protocol delves into the unique circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, seeking to understand how economic challenges during this period affected student participation. Questions also touch upon strategies employed by teachers to manage difficult students, recognize and address students' external concerns affecting focus, and the sense of community in the workplace. The inclusion of these questions serves to enrich the qualitative data by providing a nuanced understanding of the intricate factors influencing the educational landscape in a Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. They align with the overarching research questions, aiming to uncover the complexities of teacher and student experiences in such settings, ultimately contributing valuable insights to the broader discussion on education in underresourced environments.

Focus Groups

Focus groups can be a great asset to data collection when "the interactions among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After I initiated the study through one-on-one interviews, I then held focus groups where participants can interact with one another. Focus groups can enable participants to engage with one another through their shared phenomenon. Focus groups interacting with one another in context to the study topic allowed me the opportunity to observe attitudes and hear experiences in a less formal manner (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). Focus groups took place at an approved location, which was easily accessible to all participants. I conducted one focus group. I was able to facilitate the focus group by using semi-structured group interview questions to keep everyone on topic. I was also able to use a tape recorder to record the focus group meeting to ensure myself the capabilities to review and analyze meetings at a broken-down pace.

The following are the primary questions that were used to initiate the focus groups. Additional ideas and questions may emerge based on the answers given to these questions.

Focus Group Questions

1. Why did you choose education as a profession? CRQ
2. Discuss what it means to be a teacher at a Title I school. CQ1
3. Describe how you feel when a student is unmotivated in your room. SQ1
4. When are you alarmed by a student's lack of enthusiasm/motivation? SQ1
5. Discuss what it means to teach at a Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. CRQ
6. What do you do when you sense something is bothering a student? SQ1
7. Discuss experiences on workload. CRQ

8. Discuss experiences on your job responsibilities. CRQ
9. Discuss the atmosphere of your work environment. CRQ

Maslach's Burnout Inventory

MBI (Appendix E) is a self-administered survey that has a 22-item questionnaire. Each question is measured with a Likert Scale, 0 = never, 1 = a few times a year or less, 3 = a few times a month, 4 = once a week, 5 = a few times a week, 6 = every day. The questions in the survey pertain to one of the following subscales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. A digital version of the MBI-ES was distributed to the MBI-ES, which allowed the comparison of burnout among the participants. The survey license and consent were be obtained through MindGarden.com. The license was purchased from Mind Garden, permission was granted to use the surveys. Mind Garden requests that the instrument not be published in full, but that three sample questions be used to represent the survey. The questions are included in the permission form. Maslach's Burnout Inventory is copyright protected and not available to be included in its entirety in published research. MBI is a widely utilized survey tool designed to measure burnout among individuals, particularly in professional contexts. The MBI was developed by Maslach and Jackson in the late 1970s and has undergone subsequent revisions to enhance its validity and reliability.

Over the years, the MBI has been refined and adapted to different contexts, resulting in variations such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) and the MBI-ES, each tailored to specific professional settings. The development of the MBI involved rigorous psychometric testing, factor analyses, and criterion-related validity studies to ensure its validity and reliability in measuring burnout. Continuous refinements and adaptations have contributed to its widespread use as a reliable tool for assessing burnout across various professions.

Data Analysis

In this section data analysis procedures are delineated, identified, and include a concise rationale.

MBI Educational Survey Data Analysis Plan

The development of the MBI involved extensive research and psychometric testing to ensure its effectiveness in assessing burnout across various professions. The initial version consisted of three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Reduced Personal Accomplishment. Emotional Exhaustion measures feelings of being emotionally drained and depleted, Depersonalization assesses an impersonal reaction and negative attitudes toward recipients of care, and Personal Accomplishment gauges feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people.

To establish the validity of the MBI, Maslach and Jackson (1981) conducted factor analyses and criterion-related validity studies. These analyses aimed to confirm that the survey items indeed measured the intended constructs of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Criterion-related validity studies involved comparing MBI scores with external criteria related to burnout, such as absenteeism and turnover rates, to validate the instrument's effectiveness. Reliability of the MBI was established through internal consistency measures, including Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This statistical analysis assesses the extent to which items in each subscale correlate with each other, ensuring that the survey items consistently measure the same underlying construct.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis involves the meticulous process of coding, organizing thematic elements, and initiating the synthesis and interpretation phases. Individual interviews were recorded

digitally and subsequently transcribed. To ensure accuracy, each participant was given the opportunity to review their personal transcript prior to analysis, following the recommendation by Creswell and Poth (2018). As noted by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), transcription errors can occur, particularly with automated voice-to-text programs, underscoring the importance of participant verification to enhance reliability.

Upon receipt of the transcripts, I diligently reviewed any modifications, supplemented with memos as necessary, and employed horizontalized coding to identify distinct data contributions. This facilitated the organization of thematic clusters, ultimately leading to comprehensive descriptions of events and their underlying mechanisms (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Notably, the emergence of overlapping invariants, representing the essence of the experience, became increasingly apparent.

For triangulation purposes, each interview transcript, along with associated notes and horizontalizations, was color coded to correspond with individual interviews. Coding cycles were documented in chart format, facilitating a systematic approach to data analysis. Throughout the study, the need to refine interview questions became evident, although these adjustments did not compromise the integrity or substance of the research.

Transcendental phenomenological studies employ an inductive approach to analyze data, aiming to uncover shared experiences among participants to identify a central essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This essence represents the common or unifying experience of all participants (Moustakas, 1994). While the specific steps for data analysis in phenomenological studies may evolve throughout the research process, they generally follow a logical sequence, as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018). They described this process as a spiral, iterating and refining data until key findings emerge. Moustakas (1994) characterized the process as columnar, with the

initial step being horizontalization, wherein all participant statements are treated with equal importance. Meaning is then assigned to these statements and clustered into themes, with duplicate statements being eliminated to ensure clarity and coherence in the analysis.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

To interpret the data gathered from the focus group, a thematic analysis was used. This form of analysis provides a description and interpretation of the recurring experience from the respondents. In other words, it is the analysis of the experience. Therefore, thematic analysis is a method used to analyze qualitative data. Normally, it is applied to a set of texts such as interviews and transcripts. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes—topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly because thematic analysis is flexible to produce any purpose of the study (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The interview data was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher. The data were analyzed, seeking to code and categorize information into specific themes based on the participants' responses to the questions. Categorizing the data made it easier to form a generalized perspective of the data and allowed me to develop theories while organizing and retrieving data to show evidence and support for the concepts (Bickman & Rog, 2009). From the research, some examples of categories that emerged from the interviews are "responsibilities," "sense of belonging," "student behavior," and "relationships."

Data Synthesis

The data collected from the study was analyzed though Qualitative Data Analysis Software. I used NVivo to manage the data collection. By using the MBI-ES Survey, focus groups, and interviews I triangulated data in this phenomenological exploration study. A triangulation of data is when multiple sources of data collection are used to lead to a fuller

understanding of the phenomena being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Information was collected from individual interviews, focus groups and Maslach's burnout inventory.

Trustworthiness

This section elucidates the trustworthiness considerations pertinent to my research. In qualitative research, the credibility of data is paramount, signifying the extent to which it is conceptually sound and valued by fellow researchers (Carcary, 2020; Connelly, 2016). Enhancing the rigor of qualitative inquiry involves addressing dimensions such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Connelly, 2016). While there has been historical skepticism regarding the reliability and validity of qualitative investigations in comparison to quantitative counterparts (Carcary, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018), Lincoln and Guba (1985) broadened the concept of trustworthiness. They introduced criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, aligning with the conventional quantitative standards of validity and reliability (Nowell et al., 2017). In adhering to the foundational principles outlined by Lincoln and Guba, this study aims to furnish trustworthy findings characterized by sensitivity, perceptiveness, and richness (Nowell et al., 2017).

Credibility

I was able to use the triangulation of interviews, focus groups, and the MBI-ES Survey to ensure credible research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Triangulation allowed or multiple data collecting methods, which allow for a "completeness with which the phenomenon of interest [is] addressed" (Krefting, 1991). Using multiple data sources provides credibility and thus provides one avenue of credibility. In interview research, establishing credibility is a fundamental aspect often achieved by incorporating specific, concise quotes from participants into the results and discussion sections of the report (Webb & Welsh, 2019). By directly sharing participants' exact

words, the potential for faulty assumptions is mitigated, allowing readers to draw conclusions based on the participants' authentic expressions. To further enhance credibility, this study adopted a member checking, a collaborative process where the researcher and participants jointly engaged in the discussion and analysis of the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This approach sought a balanced account that respected the credibility of interviewees while permitting interpretive liberties by the researcher. Member checking, aligned with Creswell and Miller's (2000) recommendation and supplemented by peer debriefing, served as a critical step in maintaining credibility in the presented descriptions. Following the transcription of MBI-ES, interviews, and relevant segments of focus group discussions, member checking ensured precision and accuracy by allowing each participant to verify the fidelity of their intended meanings. Additionally, peer debriefing, as explained by Marshall and Rossman (2015), involved informal exchanges among colleagues during the research process. This was employed to address any challenges encountered throughout the study, leveraging insights from fellow teachers who have experienced teacher burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools.

Transferability

Transferability, as emphasized by Lincoln and Guba (1985), underscores the potential applicability of research findings in diverse contexts. Achieving transferability hinges significantly on employing thick descriptions when presenting research outcomes, as advocated by Geertz (2017). In essence, transferability denotes the capacity for findings derived from one study's context to be relevant and applicable in another context or in the same context at a different point in time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study delved into the experiences of burnout among teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9

Dependability

Dependability, denoting the consistency and replicability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), is substantiated through a thorough description of the study's procedures. At Liberty University, this is achieved via an inquiry audit, involving a comprehensive review of the research process and its outcomes by both the dissertation committee and the Qualitative Research Director. Researchers aspiring to establish dependability in their studies must ensure logical, traceable, and well-documented research processes (Nowell et al., 2017). The transparency of the study, allowing readers to assess its dependability, is paramount (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Conducting an audit of the study's procedures serves to ascertain its trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). The rationale behind the researcher's decisions on theoretical and methodological matters throughout the study must be clearly articulated, underscoring the necessity of auditing (Nowell et al., 2017). Consequently, an inquiry audit, led by the dissertation committee at Liberty University and the director of qualitative research, was conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This audit encompassed a thorough examination of the collected data and an assessment of the study's methods (Carcary, 2020).

Confirmability

Confirmability, addressing the degree of neutrality in study findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was diligently ensured through three key techniques. First~~ly~~, a comprehensive audit trail was established, transparently documenting procedures, raw and analyzed data, and the final report. Second~~ly~~, the employment of triangulation, as outlined earlier, further fortified confirmability. Third~~ly~~, reflexivity played a pivotal role throughout the study, embodying an approach that systematically attended to the researcher's impact on knowledge construction (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Reflexivity was facilitated through the creation of numerous memos,

acting as a reflexive journal to bracket biases and maintain openness to varying perspectives. Memoing and bracketing were crucial in assuring accurate and unbiased data presentation (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation, involving three distinct data collection methods, was pivotal in preventing individual analyses from overshadowing collective themes. Additionally, ongoing self-reflection, as emphasized by Cohen and Crabtree (2006), permeated the research process. Reflexivity, tailored to the researcher's relationship with the phenomenon of interest, allowed for nuanced interpretation of implied content in stories, ensuring sensitivity to aspects of the data that might be less comprehensible to an external observer (Berger, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

Once IRB approval was granted, I was able to obtain site and/or participant access, consent, or assent letters, if applicable. I was also able to obtain informed consent from participants, informing participants of the voluntary nature of the study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and informing participants about the confidentiality of the site and participants (e.g., use of site and participant pseudonyms, and discussing how both physical and electronic data are secured and how long it will be stored). These measures might include data storage (e.g., locked filing cabinets and password protection for electronic files).

Permissions

The first step of this process was to secure approval from the IRB through Liberty University (see Appendix A). Once approval was given, the next step was to seek written permission from the district superintendents a (see Appendix B). Teachers partaking in this study received recruitment forms (see Appendix C) included the purpose of the study, procedures,

associated risks, benefits, compensation, as well as the promise to protect and respect confidentiality and the privacy of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Other Participant Protections

For this research study participants were informed via email that this study is all voluntary and they have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime. Confidentiality of site and participants was maintained through the use of site and participant pseudonyms. All data was stored electronically on a laptop which will have password protection for all electronic files, the laptop was stored in a locked cabinet. Per Liberty University IRB, all data will be destroyed in 3 years.

Summary

In this chapter, I discuss transcendental phenomenological qualitative design. This study was designed to explore the experiences of burnout of teachers who teach in Title I rural middle richer understandings rather than attempting to address large-scale societal problems (Webb & Welsh, 2019). Opting for this design enables the synthesis of various data collection methods to derive overarching themes and commonalities from participants' shared experiences. As articulated by Crowther et al. (2017), transcendental phenomenology studies employ an inductive approach to analyze data, aiming to uncover shared experiences among participants to identify a central essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The central research question and subquestions furnish substantial data for analysis in Chapter 4. Phenomenological research, in its essence, not only extracts valuable insights from shared experiences but also holds the potential to contribute improvements to the field as a whole (Farrell, 2020).schools. I was able to use various methods for data collection, such as thematic analysis as a method used to analyze qualitative data. I also discussed in this chapter how I was able to establish trustworthiness and

ethical considerations. Phenomenological research proves highly suitable for delving into teachers' experiences with burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools (Grades 4–9).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe teachers' perspectives on experiencing burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools in Grades 4–9. A phenomenological design allowed me to focus on 12 teachers who experience a shared phenomenon and explore what they have in common as they experience that phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I examined the lived experiences of Grades 4–9 teachers who work in Title I rural schools. This chapter includes a description of 12 purposefully criterion-selected participants. The findings are presented as themes, and outlier data is identified. The research questions, aligned with the theoretical frameworks, are answered.

Participants

The 12 participants in this study were selected from the same Title I rural Appalachian school district by using a purpose sampling procedure that included criterion sampling. All participants were full-time public-school teachers who have taught or are currently teaching in Grades 4–9 and have experienced educator burnout. Due to the sample size, I used convenience sampling for this study as I work in the district the participants were selected from. Convenience sampling allowed me as the researcher to select the participants based on convenience criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Polkinghorne (2005) recommended qualitative sample sizes to range from 5 to 25. With the research covering all three buildings in the district, I selected 12 participants from each of the buildings in the school district for my study. The selection criteria for this study included teachers who have taught for a minimum of 2 consecutive years in the Title I school. I was able to include participants of various ages and genders. I gathered information on participants by sending out a recruitment letter and email to the mailboxes of all

teachers who work in the district Grades 4–9 in Sunshine County (see Appendix C). From the letters I received of interest and ones who qualify by experiencing burnout, I selected 12 teachers of those who met participant criteria. After a permission email was sent and consent was received from the district's superintendent (See Appendix B), a recruitment email was sent out to teachers who are teaching or who have taught in Grades 4–9 (See Appendix C). After teachers responded back stating they have experienced burnout and are willing to participate, a copy of the IRB approval papers (Appendix A) were presented as well as consent forms (See Appendix D). Once consent forms were collected the initial MBI-ES survey was sent out via email (Appendix E). After the MBI-ES survey, individual surveys were conducted, then a zoom call meeting was scheduled and performed for the focus group interview portion of the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants and the school involved in this phenomenological study. See Table 1 for the demographic data of each participant.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Name*	Gender	Age	Content area	Grade level(s)
Bethany	Female	53	Language Arts & History	4–6
Samantha	Female	53	Science & Gifted	4–6
John	Male	42	Science	6–8
Rachel	Female	58	Math & History	4–8
Lana	Female	54	Language Arts	4
Brandon	Male	25	Math	5
Allison	Female	41	History & Language Arts	6–8

Evelyn	Female	40	Language Arts	4–9
Susan	Female	58	Language Arts	4–5
Vincent	Male	45	History & Math	6–8
Veronica	Female	28	Art	6–9
Karen	Female	45	Language Arts	4–9

Note. *Pseudonyms

A detailed description of each participant is provided below. All participants were provided with a pseudonym that is used throughout this study to protect their identities.

Bethany

Bethany, a seasoned educator with three decades of teaching experience, brings a wealth of knowledge to the classroom. Her educational journey began with a 5-year tenure at a private school before she transitioned to her current role in a public rural Appalachian Title 1 school, where she has dedicated 25 years of her career. She has plans to retire in 7 years and is actively pursuing a master's degree to further enrich her teaching skills. Bethany reflects on her extensive career and notes the evolving nature of her students, observing that each year, they come with increasingly complex "outside" challenges that often extend beyond academic matters. She acknowledges that some days can be emotionally draining due to the multitude of nonacademic issues she must address in her role as an educator.

Samantha

Samantha, a dedicated teacher with an impressive three-decade career in the public education system, finds herself at a unique crossroads in her profession. Her journey has been a remarkable one, spent entirely in a Title 1 rural Appalachian school. As she looks ahead,

Samantha realizes she has just 4 more years until retirement, a prospect that is both exciting and bittersweet. She genuinely loves teaching and is passionate about her students' success, but she cannot help but acknowledge the changing dynamics in the classroom. Over the years, she has witnessed a shift in student behavior and attitudes, with a noticeable decline in the respect and discipline she once enjoyed. What is even more disheartening for Samantha is the growing disconnection between parents and their children's education. She feels that parents are no longer as supportive as they once were and are failing to hold their children accountable for their actions and responsibilities, making her journey as an educator an increasingly challenging one. Despite these challenges, Samantha remains committed to her calling and continues to make a difference in the lives of the students she serves.

John

John, an experienced educator with 23 years in the field, has worked with students in Grades 6–8. Over the course of his career, he's witnessed a profound transformation in the classroom environment. Not only have behavior and attendance issues among students shifted, but he has also noticed a decline in respect and support from parents. In addition, the lines of communication with administrators have frayed, leaving John feeling less supported than he once was. Teaching has always been a deep-seated passion for him, but the demands of the job have taken a toll, leaving him drained, overworked, and describing his work life as nothing short of exhausting. The challenges escalated with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, which further strained the teacher-student relationship. John often finds the job to be unending, with the growth and progress of his students occasionally proving disheartening. The daily workload can feel overwhelming, and the extra effort he invests sometimes appears futile, as though it won't bring about any meaningful change. Despite these challenges, John's love for his students and

his unwavering passion for teaching keep him going, even though each year presents an array of new obstacles to navigate.

Rachel

Rachel, a nontraditional teacher who embarked on her teaching career at the age of 36, brings a unique blend of life experiences to the classroom. Having previously worked in the oil industry and explored various career paths, she made a significant decision to return to school and become an educator. Throughout her teaching journey, Rachel has navigated a wide range of grade levels, from fourth to eighth grade, all in the context of rural Appalachian Title 1 schools. While she genuinely enjoys teaching and is driven by a passion for helping others, she openly acknowledges the growing challenges that have emerged over the years. The stress stemming from day-to-day responsibilities has intensified, at times making her feel overwhelmed and nearly pushed to her limits. Rachel's dedication to her students can be a double-edged sword, as she occasionally finds it tough to take a break without feeling guilty, knowing that the workload will only continue to accumulate. She has also observed a concerning disconnect between parents and teachers, as well as among teachers themselves, which adds an additional layer of complexity to her work. Despite her unwavering commitment to making a positive impact, each passing year in her career becomes more exhausting and overwhelming, signaling the demanding nature of the teaching profession in modern times.

Brandon

Brandon, a relatively new teacher with 3 years of experience under his belt, has a deep affection for his students and takes great pleasure in his role as an educator. However, as he navigates the intricate world of education, he's come to recognize that the profession involves more than just imparting academic knowledge. The demands of the job can be emotionally

draining, and he's encountered a noticeable gap in collaboration and unity among his fellow teachers, which sometimes leaves him feeling isolated in his workplace. To cope, he often goes about things in his own way, not interacting with others outside of the classroom. Brandon also grapples with the indecisiveness and lack of support from administrators, which adds complexity to his work. This lack of support can trickle down to student behavior, making it challenging for teachers to maintain control in their classrooms. Brandon's determination to make a difference in the lives of his students is evident, but the hurdles he faces underscore the multifaceted nature of the teaching profession and the need for stronger support and teamwork in the education system.

Lana

Lana, a seasoned teacher with 28 years of experience, is on the final stretch of her career, counting down the years until retirement. Over the course of her long tenure, she's observed a significant shift in the dynamics of education. Lana laments the challenges posed by parents who, in her view, have become less inclined to hold their children accountable for their academic responsibilities. Instead, they often expect teachers to shoulder this burden, and this disconnect between home and school can lead to frustration and misunderstandings. She feels that the teaching profession has seen a decline in respect, and teachers like her find themselves pulled in multiple directions, constantly juggling a myriad of responsibilities. The stress associated with the job has become increasingly intense and overwhelming. Lana fondly reminisces about a time when teachers received stronger support from administrators and parents. Today, she finds the days to be long, with insufficient time to address all the demands of her role. Lana's concern for her students is unwavering; she is often preoccupied with their well-being, from their basic needs to their emotional struggles. This concern sometimes leaves her feeling that there's not enough time to adequately meet their academic needs, which can be disheartening. Despite these

challenges, Lana continues to devote herself to her students, even when she occasionally questions whether her efforts make a meaningful difference.

Allison

Allison, a dedicated teacher with 23 years of experience in both Social Studies and Language Arts, has always found joy in teaching and helping her students develop into successful adults. She takes immense pride in the care and support she provides her students, striving to assist them in any way possible. Nevertheless, she has noticed a remarkable shift in her profession over the years, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges have grown increasingly daunting, and the demands of her job have added to her stress levels, leading to anxiety. Allison has observed a concerning lack of accountability among her students and a shortage of resources that exacerbates the daily demands of her work. She not only has to manage her own classroom but often sacrifices her planning periods to cover other classes due to a shortage of substitute teachers. Some days, she feels like she's drowning under the weight of it all and is overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness when students resist academic engagement. Many of them face overwhelming external issues, such as poverty, illness, and homelessness. When she tries to get help for these students or remove them from their dire circumstances, the system often lets them down, perpetuating a cycle of disappointment. Exhaustion has become a constant companion as the demands of the job continue to mount. With a lack of substitutes, low staff numbers, and challenging schedules, teachers no longer have the opportunity for common planning or collaboration, which leaves Allison feeling isolated and unappreciated. The accumulated pressures have at times made her feel unapproachable, and she concedes that a sense of futility can cloud her outlook, despite her unwavering commitment to her students.

Evelyn

Evelyn has spent the last 18 years teaching in the same Title 1 rural Appalachian school. She has a master's degree in teaching and a master's degree in English. She also teaches classes at a local branch of a university. Evelyn has only ever wanted to be a teacher and came to the job with a sense of purpose and passion. Over the last 18 years, she feels that she has changed drastically. As a result of the burnout, she feels from the various requirements of the job, she has begun to think of the job as just that, a job. She no longer feels the sense of purpose or passion she had in her earlier years of teaching. Student behavior and inconsistent discipline throughout the building have caused her frustration and a feeling of isolation. She feels that she just needs to take care of student behaviors herself without the support of her administration or parents. Evelyn feels that she has turned into a strict disciplinarian when she used to be a more engaging and enthusiastic teacher. Evelyn attempts to emotionally detached herself from the job. She often encourages younger teachers to not get too caught up in the work and to not volunteer for anything because they will burn out as well.

Susan

Susan is a seasoned teacher who has dedicated her entire career to a Title 1 rural Appalachian school, specializing in students from Grades 5 to 8. Her love for her job and her students is palpable, and she considers teaching her true calling. Being there for her students is her top priority, and she's passionate about their growth and well-being. Susan has, however, noticed some significant changes in her newer students, particularly a lack of empathy. To address this issue, she invests a substantial amount of her academic time in redirecting students and providing basic social-emotional lessons to instill kindness, acceptance, and respect. The constant need for redirection can be draining and exhausting. Additionally, she finds it

discouraging when coworkers aren't all aligned and when communication barriers or a lack of collaboration hinder creating positive experiences for the students. At times, this leads to a negative environment, and Susan can feel somewhat isolated. Nevertheless, she remains unwavering in her belief that teaching is her main purpose, and despite the overwhelming days, she understands the importance of her presence for her students. With retirement just 2 years away, she is eager to see what the next chapter in her life holds.

Vincent

Vincent's experience as an veteran math teacher highlights the pervasive issue of teacher burnout. Over the past 5 years, he has observed a concerning decline in student behavior, parental support, and administrative backing. The constant demands of addressing nonacademic issues have left him physically and emotionally drained, with a sense of helplessness due to the lack of accountability for student behavior. The absence of respect, coupled with the additional burden of covering other classes due to the shortage of substitute teachers, has taken a toll on his workload. The lack of common planning time has created a sense of isolation among colleagues, and administrative demands, coupled with a lack of empathy, contribute to a negative work environment. This has resulted in heightened anxiety and even depression for Vincent. Teaching, once a rewarding and exciting profession, has become an exhausting and daunting endeavor, underscoring the urgent need to address the issue of teacher burnout in education.

Veronica

Veronica, a dedicated teacher with 5 years of experience and a master's degree in education, finds immense fulfillment in her role working with students in Grades 6–12. Her passion for teaching shines through her commitment to her students' growth and development. However, she faces numerous challenges on a daily basis, primarily stemming from the

overwhelming class sizes she encounters. Large classes often translate to behavior issues and a lack of respect among students, leading to poor academic performance. The frustration intensifies when parents, seemingly unaware of their children's behavior and work ethic, expect better grades without considering the consequences of their actions. Veronica sometimes grapples with feelings of helplessness, as she strives to balance the educational needs of her students with the constant disruptions caused by unnecessary behavior issues. The weight of these challenges can be demoralizing, making her wonder whether her tireless efforts truly make a difference. Despite the significant time and energy, she invests in her students and her class, Veronica often feels undervalued and underappreciated, yearning for a better understanding of the complexities of her role as an educator.

Karen

Karen, a dedicated teacher with an impressive 25 years of experience, is a true exemplar of the passion that fuels the teaching profession. Armed with a master's degree, she has been unwavering in her commitment to teaching language arts to students in Grades 6–8. Karen's love for her job is undeniable, and she has always been driven by the profound impact she can make on her students' lives. However, she acknowledges that the landscape of education has shifted significantly over the years, with a particularly noticeable transformation since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Karen expresses concern about the changes she has observed in her students, citing a substantial lack of support both from parents and the students themselves. These shifts highlight the evolving challenges in the teaching profession, and Karen's enduring dedication to her students underscores the crucial role that teachers play in navigating these changes and ensuring the best possible education for their students. While her commitment to teaching remains strong, she finds herself grappling with exhaustion, a significant portion of

which is attributed to the negativity that sometimes permeates her interactions with coworkers. The underlying causes of this negativity are not always clear; it could stem from a lack of support, high levels of stress, or varying professional backgrounds. Regardless of the cause, some of her coworkers come across as unapproachable, contributing to a sense of discord and discomfort in the work environment. For Karen, it is a reminder that, amidst the many demands of teaching, fostering a positive and collaborative atmosphere is crucial to the well-being of teachers and the overall success of the educational community.

Results

The following are the results of this phenomenological study. Individual interviews, focus groups interview, and MBI-ES were analyzed to identify significant. Statements that were grouped into themes and subthemes. From data analysis there were four themes emerged along with seven subthemes and are presented in Table 2. The major themes were emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, decreased sense of personal accomplishment, and stress. The research questions are answered throughout the themes and subthemes presented through the data analysis.

Table 2

Four Themes

Theme	Subtheme	Code
Emotional exhaustion	Feeling overwhelmed	Decompress
		Pressure
		Numb
		Zone out
		Exhausted
		Worn out
		Headaches
Depersonalization	Hopelessness	No point
		Alone
		No progress
		Doesn’t matter
		Won’t change
		Defeated
	Negativity	Disconnect
		Unapproachable
		Short
		No extra energy
		No Time
		Not in the mood
		Stopped caring
	Communication barriers	Can’t express myself
		Not personable
		Not friendly
		Not in the loop
		Not having a say
		Not having a voice

Decreased sense of personal accomplishment	Underappreciated	Lack of respect Not valued Ignored Replaceable Parents not holding children accountable
Stress	Exhaustion	Anxiety Depression Draining Weight gain Headache Tired Worn out No energy Sick days
	Workload	Extra work Covering classes First responders Taking it home

Theme 1: Emotional Exhaustion

The first major theme was emotional exhaustion which is also the first indicator in Maslach's burnout theory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Maslach (1982) stated that feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and weary where the demands of the job feel far greater than one is able to give. The subtheme of feeling overwhelmed emerged from the theme of emotional exhaustion. Participants shared their experiences with pressure, workloads, not having enough time, and constantly feeling overwhelmed.

Feeling Overwhelmed

When exploring the theme of emotional exhaustion, the subtheme of feeling overwhelmed emerged as a prominent topic, with the phrase “feeling overwhelmed” being cited a total of 20 times in individual interviews and focus groups. Teachers in my study shared that the numerous daily demands they face result in a pervasive sense of exhaustion stemming from this overwhelming feeling. For instance, Allison candidly revealed, “I often feel like I’m drowning; the constant struggle to keep up with job demands creates an unending cycle of stress, making me question the impact of my efforts.” Brandon described going home every day feeling physically and mentally drained, while Rachel confessed that certain days leave her both physically exhausted and emotionally detached due to the relentless pressures. Samantha vividly expressed, “The emotional toll is substantial. I’ve witnessed students change, and it’s not always for the better. Managing behavior consumes so much of my time that it becomes challenging to focus on actual teaching. At the end of the day, I simply need to sit and decompress.” In the course of the focus groups, individual interviews, and the MBI-ES survey, the term *exhausted* surfaced 17 times, decompress 1 time, pressure five times , zone out two times, worn out 10 times, and headaches was mentioned eight times. Within the Maslach’s MBI-ES survey that was given to the group of participants and the average score was 3.8 was scored in the category of emotional exhaustion scored. This score suggests that, on average, the participants experienced a moderate level of emotional exhaustion according to the parameters of the survey. Maslach’s MBI-ES survey is commonly used to assess burnout levels among individuals, particularly in professional settings.

In the profiles and patterns of the survey results participants scored abnormally high range in the category of emotional exhaustion under its subsection of burnout.

The recurring theme of feeling overwhelmed due to the relentless daily demands faced by teachers is a resounding concern among the teachers in this study. Their candid reflections on the emotional toll it takes on them, as demonstrated by Allison, Brandon, Rachel, and Samantha, reveal a pressing need for comprehensive support and systemic changes in the education sector. The extensive use of various terms to express their exhaustion and distress underscores the urgency of addressing these issues and prioritizing the well-being of our dedicated teachers.

Theme 2: Depersonalization

The next major theme is depersonalization. Depersonalization is a psychological phenomenon in which an individual experiences a sense of detachment or disconnection from themselves, their thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations. It can lead to feeling as though one is an outside observer of their own experiences, often accompanied by a lack of emotional responsiveness or feeling "numb" (Phillips & Sierra, 2003). Depersonalization can be distressing and is typically associated with various mental health conditions, most notably depersonalization disorder, anxiety disorders, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Maslach (2015) described depersonalization as a loss of enthusiasm, "impersonal response towards one's students, and how the job feels like a burden or a chore." On the MBI-ES the group of participants scored a 2.2 under depersonalization.

Hopelessness

The first subtheme to emerge under depersonalization was hopelessness. Throughout the interviews and focus group the comment about feeling hopeless in their jobs came up 9 times. The teachers who were experiencing hopelessness often grapple with a profound sense of despair and futility, and continually blamed it on persistent challenges in their educational roles. " I feel hopeless, sometimes I feel my job is hopeless and that there is no way of it getting better… lack

of adequate resources, unruly student behavior, overwhelming workloads, and systemic issues in the education system," Allison exclaimed.

Susan said that "challenges accumulate over time, and sometimes I feel close to reaching my breaking point and then I just feel hopeless and even start questioning if I am good enough for this job anymore." Vincent said that there is an ongoing struggle to make a positive impact, and when coworkers, students, parents, and administrators are not all on the same page it can lead to a deep emotional and psychological burden." Evelyn said, sometimes "I wonder if my dedication is in vain, and none of it matters, and I'm afraid there isn't going to be change." Additionally, participants all seem to agree that external pressures and demands, both from administrators and parents, can contribute to feelings of hopelessness, as the relentless weight of these expectations leaves teachers feeling as though they are constantly falling short.

Teachers facing hopelessness often find it increasingly difficult to motivate themselves and their students. Participants used other ways of expressing their feelings of hopelessness such as saying there is "no point," which was mentioned 12 times during the focus groups. During the interviews the feeling of being "alone" was brought up four times, "no progress" was brought up twice, feeling that their job "doesn't matter" anymore was mentioned nine times, feeling of things "won't change" three times and "defeated" was brought up five times.

Negativity

The second subtheme to emerge under depersonalization was negativity. Several participants mentioned feeling disconnected from their work and claimed that their career had made them "unapproachable" and negative in the workplace. The words "unapproachable" was mentioned eight times and the word "short" was brought up three times during the interviews as teachers were describing their negative attitudes. Veronica said, "I used to be so passionate about

teaching, but the constant negativity from both students and some colleagues has left me feeling isolated and drained."

Participants continued sharing negative emotions how their jobs and took a toll on their life and they tend to feel unapproachable and catch themselves in bad moods quite often. Lana said she felt she is more short with students and coworkers she said, " I have no extra energy and honestly somedays I am just not in the mood." The teachers said the lack of "togetherness" and low staff morale takes a toll and with lack of discipline from administration the days drag on and sometimes. During the interviews, teachers shared their experiences of feeling disconnected in the educational system, whether from administrators, fellow teachers, or even parents. These disconnects seemed to amplify their feelings of frustration, loneliness, and exhaustion. It highlighted a need for improved communication, collaboration, and support mechanisms to address the myriad of challenges they face daily in the classroom. Re-establishing these connections and bridging the gaps can potentially alleviate some of the emotional exhaustion and hopelessness many teachers experience, offering a more conducive environment for teaching and fostering student success. Brandon shared his frustrations and said, "I want to help my students, but the lack of resources and support from parents and administrators is suffocating. It's hard to keep going some days."

Several of the teachers brought up "not having extra energy" and sometimes find themselves isolating themselves and separating themselves from their job and find themselves "not caring" anymore. Rachel hesitantly said, "It is hard, the job is hard, sometimes I feel like I am in survival mode and in order to survive one has to just stop being connected and disassociate, I know this sounds bad but I have to stop caring, in order to survive."

Under the results of the MBI-E the highest score of 3.1 was recorded in the depersonalization category claiming that those whose selected that during the survey felt “more callous toward people” since they took their current job. Other categories presented itself in the survey where participants felt their job was hardening them emotionally, students blame them for their problems, and feeling a disconnect with students.

Communication Barriers

The next subtheme to emerge from depersonalization was communication barriers. The participants discussed how they suffered from a sense of detachment from their work and the people involved, primarily due to communication barriers that exist between coworkers, parents, and administrators. John stated that the field of education is demanding, and effective communication is paramount” “When communication is lost, everything begins to quickly fall apart. “Throughout the interview “can’t express myself” was mentioned once. “Not personable” was mentioned 7 times and “not friendly” was mentioned 3 times. The teachers stated that they often experience feelings of frustration and disconnect when their interactions with school administration are characterized by a lack of personability and unfriendliness. These professionals play a crucial role in the education system, and when they perceive administrators as distant or unapproachable, it can contribute to a sense of isolation and heightened stress. “Sometimes I just feel like a body, and my concerns are not even being listened to” stated Allison. In conclusion, the pervasive communication barriers highlighted by the teachers, not only hindered their professional interactions but also fueled a profound sense of isolation and frustration, emphasizing the urgent need for improved communication strategies in the educational system.

Throughout the interviews the term not in the loop was mentioned 12 times. The lack of communication across the board was a common topic across all the participants who stated "students know more about what's going on here than we do" Brandon stated. Claiming that the students seem to know all the schedule changes, or how different things are going to be set up on not normal days leaving the teachers out of the loop and not feeling aware of their situation.

Karen said, "When coworkers are unapproachable or when there's a lack of cooperation among colleagues, you begin to feel not in the loop."

Participants stated in the focus group that not only do they feel out of the loop, as then they do not know plans such as impromptu day to day schedule changes, but they also feel that they do "not have a say" which was mentioned 7 times and "not having a voice" which was mentioned 9 times. The group of teachers often expresses a collective sentiment of "not having a say" or "not having a voice" in the workforce, reflecting their concerns about a lack of influence on the decisions and policies that directly impact their professional lives. This feeling of voicelessness can stem from a variety of sources, such as limited participation in administrative decisions, a lack of inclusion in important discussions, or ineffective communication channels. When teachers believe their opinions are disregarded or their experiences are undervalued, it can lead to frustration and disengagement. In education, where collaboration is crucial for student success, addressing this issue is pivotal for creating a supportive and empowering environment where teachers feel heard and respected.

During the focus group the participants continued stating that the breakdown in communication between parents and teachers exacerbates these feelings, as parents are no longer as involved in their children's education or as supportive as they once were. This shift puts an added burden on teachers, who often bear the brunt of responsibility for students' academic and

behavioral issues. Finally, the lack of understanding and support from administrators can further exacerbate depersonalization, leaving teachers feeling undervalued and overwhelmed.

In the context of the depersonalization profile, the MBI-ES survey data reveals that 5 participants exhibited signs of disengagement, while 4 participants scored within the burnout range. On the survey, the item of "I've become more callous toward people since I took this job" garnered the highest score on the depersonalization scale of 3.1. The Disengaged profile is characterized by a notable elevation in Depersonalization scores, indicating a potential conflict in values or a decline in confidence regarding managerial practices. Individuals within this profile may possess energy and self-assurance in their abilities but struggle to fully commit to their work tasks

Theme 3: Decreased Sense of Personal Accomplishment

The third major theme is decreased sense personal of accomplishment. The subtheme in this section is underappreciated. Maslach (2015) stated that a decreased sense of personal accomplishment is, "feeling low levels of competence and effectiveness, and not having a beneficial impact on people." Decreased sense of personal accomplishment is the third factor in burnout. In the category of personal accomplishment on the MBI-ES the group scored a 4.6 on the average scale.

Underappreciated

Underappreciated is the subtheme for decreased sense of personal accomplishment. Feeling underappreciated was a common theme amongst the group of teachers. These teachers have dedicated their time and efforts to nurturing young minds and express a sense of undervaluation stemming from various sources. Teachers also feel a "lack of respect" which was mentioned 10 times throughout the interviews and "parents don't hold their children

accountable" was mentioned 3 times. Veronica said, "parents don't hold children accountable, and typically don't even care to communicate with her, and when I does have communication with parents, she feels that they treat her inadequately and there is a "huge lack of respect."

Teachers stated that they felt "not valued", which was mentioned 15 times throughout the interviews. The lack of recognition for their tireless work, insufficient support, and minimal acknowledgment of their contributions becomes "frustrating and disheartening". This feeling can be particularly disheartening in a profession where teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the future.

The term *ignored* was mentioned 10 times throughout the interviews. Many of the participating teachers expressed a profound sense of being ignored or overlooked in the educational system. They often feel that their valuable insights, concerns, and recommendations go unheard or unheeded. Susan said, "As educators, we have been around the block a time or two and we see things that have worked and things that have not worked, I feel we can really help with administration just by using the resources of the teachers' experience. A lot of the time that is now how it is, and our suggestions are ignored, and we tend to be in total chaos."

Throughout the interviews "replaceable" was mentioned 7 times, and Bethany said that it is tough when there are many concerns and when you finally get up the courage to say something, you feel ignored and "replaceable". The recurring theme of feeling "ignored" by teachers underscores a deep-seated sentiment of being undervalued in the educational framework. As Susan passionately emphasized, leveraging the wealth of teachers' experiences could significantly contribute to smoother administrative practices, yet the prevailing sense of being ignored leaves these valuable resources untapped, perpetuating a cycle of frustration and chaos. The frequent mention of feeling "replaceable" further accentuates the emotional toll on

teachers, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and appreciative approach that recognizes and values their expertise.

Underappreciation can lead to decreased motivation and hinder morale, which, in turn, may impact the overall quality of education. Recognizing and appreciating the vital role teachers play in society is essential for retaining a motivated and dedicated workforce that can continue to inspire and educate the next generation. In essence, acknowledging and addressing these feelings of underappreciation among teachers is not merely a matter of personal fulfillment; it is crucial for the resilience and effectiveness of the entire educational system. By fostering a culture of recognition and appreciation, we not only elevate the morale of individual teachers but also fortify the foundation upon which quality education for future generations is built.

Theme 4: Stress

The fourth and final theme, stress, unveils the intricate facets of teachers' emotional well-being. Delving deeper, the two subthemes that intricately weave into the tapestry of stress are exhaustion and workload. This exploration illuminates the profound challenges teachers face, shedding light on the toll that the demands of their profession can take on both their physical and mental resilience.

Exhaustion

The first subtheme for stress is exhaustion. Throughout the individual interviews, focus group and the MBI-ES, the term *anxiety* was mentioned 12 times, and *depression* was mentioned 6 times.. Several teachers even openly talked about being medicated for their depression, that they had to inquire due to mental and physical demands of their jobs. Vincent said that his anxiety is "through the roof" at the end of his workdays. Karen also said that she feels the job takes so much from her as a teacher and describes her anxiety and depression as "crippling," she

says during the summer she feels like a completely different person but once she is back at work it quickly returns.

Draining was mentioned 15 times throughout interviews and the focus groups. “The demands of the job go far beyond what meets the eye” stated Bethany. John said that “Our daily routine often involves planning lessons, managing classrooms, addressing individual student needs, and dealing with administrative tasks.” On top of that, Evelyn explained that “ teachers must navigate complex relationships with students, parents, and colleagues, balancing academic and emotional support.” The teachers said that the weight of high expectations, from standardized testing to meeting curriculum standards, can be overwhelming. Beyond academics, the teachers frequently find themselves providing emotional guidance, resolving conflicts, and acting as a source of stability in their students’ lives. Their relentless effort and emotional investment can often lead to exhaustion, both physically and mentally.

During the focus group, “weight gain” was mentioned 2 times, “headache” was mentioned 10 times, “tired” want mentioned 12 times within the individual interviews . The teachers claimed that the exhaustion from stress has dramatically impacted their physical life, leaving them with weight gain, having constant headaches, and always being left tired. “Worn out” want mentioned 12 times during the individual interviews and “no energy” was mentioned 10 times during the focus groups, as all of the participants say that the exhaustion from the job leaves them with no energy and at the end of each days they are completely worn out.

“Sick days” was mentioned two times during the focus group, a couple of teachers stated they feel the need to truly use their sick days, however by taking off they are only compiling the workload for themselves to first plan for their sub and then have to return to school and catch up on all the work they were unable to attend to during their time off creating a “vicious cycle”

stated Bethany in the individual interview , leaving the teachers more stressed and exhausted than before they even took time off.

Emotional exhaustion was one of the profiles measured by the MBI-ES survey. The MBI-ES survey data reveals that five participants exhibited characteristics of the overextended profile, indicating high Emotional exhaustion despite feeling fulfilled and involved in their work. These individuals likely experience emotional exhaustion due to long work hours and limited recovery opportunities. Additionally, five participants scored low in engagement, indicating reduced involvement likely resulting from emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, five participants scored high in both the Overextended and Burnout profiles, suggesting heightened emotional exhaustion and disengagement, with Burnout characterized by problematic scores in both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

Workload

The second subtheme for stress is workload. Teaching is a profession that involves a substantial workload. Teachers' workload is defined as the combination of tasks, responsibilities, and activities they must undertake in the course of their profession. This workload encompasses a wide range of duties and expectations that teachers are responsible for in and outside the classroom. "Extra work" was mentioned in the individual interviews 11 times. The teachers said they often find themselves struggling to keep up with additional tasks that extend beyond the core responsibilities of lesson planning and instruction. These extra duties might include attending meetings, participating in professional development, grading assignments, and assessments, and managing administrative paperwork. The cumulative effect of these supplementary responsibilities can be overwhelming, leaving teachers with limited time and energy for their primary role in the classroom.

"Covering classes" was mentioned in the interviews 4 times during the focus group. Due to factors such as the shortage of substitute teachers, the participants said that they frequently have to step in and cover classes for their colleagues. This means that they not only have to manage their own students but also those of the absent teacher, leading to increased workloads. Covering for others can disrupt lesson plans, impact the quality of instruction, and add to the stress of the teachers who already have their hands full. During the focus group Samantha stated that "keeping up on my day to day work and responsibilities is almost impossible when I am expected to not only do my job, but also cover for others and take on the responsibilities of others as well.

The term *first responders* was mentioned in the interviews once. "Teachers often serve as first responders when it comes to addressing students' emotional and behavioral issues" stated Evelyn. She that they need to provide support and guidance to students who may be experiencing difficulties, and this can be emotionally taxing. Handling various student concerns, from conflicts with peers to personal crises, adds to their responsibilities and emotional burden.

"Taking it home" was mentioned twice throughout the individual interviews. Karen said, "The job is never ending and I am not only bringing papers home to grade every night but I am also constantly worrying about various situations of my students." The job of a teacher doesn't always end when the school day is over. Many teachers find themselves taking work home, whether it's grading assignments, preparing lessons, or responding to emails from parents and colleagues. This blurs the boundaries between work and personal life, making it challenging for teachers to disconnect and recharge.

These themes and subthemes collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of the teaching profession and the extensive workload that teachers must navigate, often leading to feelings of exhaustion, stress, and burnout.

The MBI-ES measured the extent of burnout experienced by teachers through various dimensions, including workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. In this study, within the profiles of personal accomplishment and effectiveness, the collective scoring was notably low, suggesting that elevated workload levels may impede their ability to feel accomplished or effective in their roles. Furthermore, this finding underscores the importance of addressing workload concerns as a potential contributor to teachers' diminished sense of personal accomplishment and effectiveness.

Outlier Data and Findings

Throughout the data collection process, the information collected from participants aligned with the research questions of the study. Two participants qualify as an outlier in this study.

Outlier Finding 1

Bethany and Samantha qualify as an outlier, at only 53 years old both educators only have 3–4 years left to full retirement, due to starting in theducation field at an early age. Both Bethany and Samantha are close to retirement.

Bethany and Samantha, both seasoned educators with years of experience in the field, find themselves at a unique crossroads in their teaching careers. They have spent decades in the education sector, witnessing various shifts and changes, particularly when it comes to teacher burnout. Despite feeling burnt out and overwhelmed by the daily demands of their profession, they approach survey questions and discussions with a gentle tone, not wanting to rock the boat

by saying anything negative that may make the school look negative in anyway. Bethany has dedicated a substantial portion of her life to teaching, with a wealth of knowledge to offer. She is counting down the years until retirement and is actively pursuing a master's degree to enhance her teaching skills. While the weight of nonacademic challenges and emotional exhaustion is palpable, she answers survey questions gently, knowing that her career is nearing its end. She may have reached the point where she doesn't want to disrupt the system with her insights, but her experiences are a testament to the toll teaching can take on dedicated educators.

Samantha shares a similar perspective. Her three-decade career in a Title 1 rural Appalachian school has been both rewarding and challenging. With just a few more years until retirement, she genuinely loves teaching and is passionate about her students' success. Yet, she can't help but acknowledge the changing dynamics in the classroom and the growing disconnection between parents and their children's education. Her gentle approach to survey questions reflects her wisdom and understanding that the end of her teaching journey is in sight. Samantha's experiences are a testament to the resilience and determination of educators who have weathered the storms of teaching but continue to make a difference, even when they are feeling burnt out.

Research Question Responses

The main research question and subresearch question were answered using data from the participants' open-ended individual interviews, focus groups, and MBI-ES. A detailed explanation of the data in the central research question and the subresearch questions is provided in the following section.

Central Research Question

The central question presented was: "What are the burnout experiences of Title I rural

Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 teachers?" Throughout the individual interviews, focus groups, and the MBI-ES, the four primary themes that emerged while answering the central question were exhaustion, negativity, underappreciated, and workload.

The exploration of burnout experiences among Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 has uncovered a multifaceted landscape of their professional journey. This inquiry, conducted through individual interviews, focus groups, and the MBI-ES, has illuminated four overarching themes that encapsulate their experiences.

First and foremost, the prevailing theme of exhaustion underlines the profound emotional and physical fatigue teachers encounter on a daily basis, often stemming from the multitude of challenges in their profession. Brandon stated that he leaves work every day at 3:00 exhausted with no energy to plan or prepare for the next day. Bethany stated: "As an educator, you have many roles you must play, but as an educator teaching in a Title I school, the work is even more demanding." Bethany continued on about how as an educator she must help feed starving children who had not eaten since the last time they had school lunch, or constantly be on the phone with counselors, administrators, and even child protective services. All the teachers were in agreement that the many demands of this job leave them exhausted and feeling overwhelmed and burned out.

Negativity emerged as another key theme, emphasizing the adverse impact of discord and lack of support among colleagues. The teachers in the study stated their experiences with burnout in their Title I school often finds them caught in a cycle that fosters a negative work environment, affecting their well-being and ultimately their students. As Vincent lamented, "The emotional toll is substantial. I've witnessed students change, and it's not always for the better." This change in students, coupled with behavior issues and a lack of respect, can be particularly

draining. Another teacher, Karen, reflected on the challenges of feeling overwhelmed, stating, “I often feel like I’m drowning; the constant struggle to keep up with job demands creates an unending cycle of stress.” The lack of support and communication barriers can exacerbate these feelings. While the passion for teaching remains, teachers in these settings can experience a sense of helplessness and frustration, ultimately impacting the overall learning environment. These teachers yearn for recognition and support, as their unwavering commitment to their students endures in the face of burnout.

Furthermore, the teachers express feelings of being “underappreciated,” highlighting the longing for greater recognition and support from their educational communities. The participating teachers stated that a significant contributing factor to their experience with burnout is the pervasive feeling of being “underappreciated”. As Samantha stated, “I’ve seen a decline in respect and support, not only from students but from parents as well.” This shift in the dynamics of teacher-student relationships and the lack of support can leave teachers questioning the impact of their efforts. Another teacher, Rachel, expressed the strain of their profession, saying, “The days are long, and there’s often insufficient time to address all the demands of my role.” This continuous stress and lack of appreciation can take a toll on teachers, impacting their overall job satisfaction. These teachers who devote their careers to Title I schools long for more recognition of their hard work and dedication, seeking support that goes beyond the classroom and reaches the administrative and parental levels.

Last~~ly~~, the theme of workload underscores the relentless and often overwhelming demands that contribute significantly to their sense of burnout. Veronica stated that “Teaching isn’t just a 9-to-5 job; it’s a 24/7 commitment. The workload keeps piling up, from lesson planning to grading, meetings, and addressing students’ needs. It’s a juggling act that can be

incredibly overwhelming." These themes collectively provide valuable insights into the complex journey of Title I rural Appalachian schools, Grades 4-9, offering a deeper understanding of the challenges they face and the need for support and change in the educational system.

Subquestion 1

What are the perceptions of the factors contributing to burnout experiences of Title I rural Appalachian schools, Grades 4–9, teachers? Throughout the interviews and focus group~~,~~ the three common themes emerged, workload, lack of support, and being underappreciated.

These teachers believe that several key elements play a significant role in their burnout. One major factor is the overwhelming workload that accompanies the teaching profession, particularly in Title I schools, which often have limited resources and higher student needs. This includes not only teaching but also handling additional responsibilities like managing students' emotional and social well-being. Lana said, "My workload keeps expanding, and sometimes, it feels like I'm just one breath away from being unable to take it anymore."

Furthermore, lack of support from administrators and parents adds to their burnout. Allison said that she feels lost some days as she is trying to deal with all the emotional trauma from her students and when she reaches out for additional support, it just isn't there. Allison stated, "we need more support to keep our students' and our own well-being intact." Teachers often find themselves as the first responders to students' nonacademic needs, which can be emotionally taxing.

The group of participating teachers all agreed to the feeling of being underappreciated, which stems from both a lack of recognition for their efforts and external factors beyond their control, like student behavior and performance. These perceptions provide valuable insights into the challenges Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9 teachers face and the critical need

for support and recognition to mitigate burnout.

Summary

Chapter four describes the burnout experiences of rural Appalachia teachers working in Grades 4–9 in Title I schools. Twelve participants completed individual interviews, participated in the focus group, and to the MBI-ES. Through the interviews, focus group, and survey, four themes developed during data analysis: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, decreased sense of personal accomplishment, and stress. Through the themes and subthemes, I was able to answer the central research questions and the subquestion using the data collected from participants.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe and explore the experiences of burnout of Title I rural Appalachian schools' Grades 4–9 of teachers in southern Ohio. For the purposes of this research, teacher burnout was defined as a psychological syndrome resulting from a prolonged reaction to chronic stressors of an interpersonal nature on the teaching job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In this study, I collected data from 12 Title I rural Appalachian teachers in Grades 4–9 through individual interviews, a focus group, and MBI-ES. The collected data was then analyzed using several coding cycles, and four themes emerged. In this chapter, I give a summary and interpretation of the study's findings. This chapter outlines implications for policy and practice and delves into the theoretical and methodological consequences. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations and delimitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

Through this transcendental phenomenological study, I explored the lived experience of 12 teachers who teach in Grades 4–9 in a rural Appalachia Title 1 school. I conducted individual interviews, a focus group, and MBI-ES to answer the central research question and subquestion. The following four themes emerged from the analysis: (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalization, (c) decreased sense of personal accomplishment, and (d) stress. In this section, the findings of the study are supported with empirical and theoretical sources.

Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand burnout experiences of teachers in rural Appalachia Title I schools Grades 4–9. The rationale for using Maslach's burnout theory aligns with the four main themes and seven subthemes (see Table 2) by measuring the relationship between teacher burnout on the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, and self-efficacy, and teaching Grades 4–9 in a rural Appalachian Title I school (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The study extends Maslach's work by diving deeper into the phenomenon of teacher burnout in a specific and understudied context: rural Title I Appalachian schools. While Maslach's research provides a comprehensive understanding of burnout among various professions, including teachers, this study focuses specifically on teachers working in schools situated in economically disadvantaged rural areas.

Maslach's framework identifies emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment as key dimensions of burnout. This study extends this framework by uncovering how these dimensions manifest and are influenced by the specific challenges faced by teachers in rural Title I Appalachian schools.

Through surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews, the research study has gathered firsthand accounts from teachers, allowing you to explore the nuances of their experiences. The findings reveal the impact of factors such as limited resources, high workload demands, and the unique socioeconomic context of rural Appalachia on teacher well-being and burnout. By offering insights into the distinct challenges faced by teachers in this context, the research not only validates Maslach's conceptualization of burnout but also expands upon it by highlighting the contextual factors that contribute to burnout in rural Title I Appalachian schools.

This, in turn, can inform the development of targeted interventions and support strategies aimed at addressing the specific needs of teachers in these settings, ultimately contributing to the prevention and mitigation of burnout in this population.

The following subsections discuss the significant interpretations of the implications of this study's four main thematic findings from the analysis of the data sources, as discussed in Chapter 4: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, decreased sense of personal accomplishment, and stress. The seven subthemes of feeling overwhelmed, hopelessness, negativity, communication barriers, underappreciated, exhaustion, and workload all contribute to the interpretations of this section.The results of this phenomenological study shed light on the burnout experiences of teachers who work in Title I rural Appalachian schools Grades 4–9. Through individual interviews, focus groups, and the MBI-ES survey, four primary themes and seven subthemes emerged in response to the central question of "What are the burnout experiences of teachers who work in Title I rural Appalachian schools, Grades 4–9?"

Teachers described feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and fatigued due to the numerous demands of their job. They expressed feeling like they are drowning in the constant struggle to keep up with these demands, leading to emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, and headaches. The term *exhausted* was used repeatedly, highlighting the impact of feeling overwhelmed. These experiences are reflected in their high scores for Emotional Exhaustion in the MBI-ES.

The findings from the MBI-ES survey shed light on several critical themes among teachers, including depersonalization, decreased sense of personal accomplishment, and stress. Regarding depersonalization, the high scores observed indicate a profound sense of detachment and disconnection experienced by teachers. This is manifested through feelings of hopelessness, negativity, and communication barriers, which are exacerbated by challenges such as resource

shortages, disruptive student behavior, and overwhelming workloads. This aligns with Maslach and Leiter's assertion that burnout can lead to breakdowns in workplace communication, thereby straining interpersonal relationships and organizational effectiveness.

Furthermore, the diminished sense of personal accomplishment highlighted in the study underscores the pervasive feeling of underappreciation among teachers. This sentiment is compounded by perceptions of being undervalued, disrespected, and ignored, as well as external factors like parental accountability issues. Consequently, teachers may experience decreased motivation and morale, as reflected in the high scores for this dimension in the MBI-ES survey.

Additionally, the theme of stress emerges prominently, with teachers reporting elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and exhaustion. The demanding nature of their roles, coupled with responsibilities ranging from lesson planning to student support and administrative tasks, contributes to physical and emotional strain. The interconnectedness between mental and physical health, as emphasized by Maslach, underscores the urgency of addressing workplace stress to mitigate adverse health outcomes. Furthermore, the high workload experienced by teachers extends beyond traditional responsibilities, blurring the boundaries between their personal and professional lives and exacerbating their stress levels.

Overall, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of burnout among teachers and emphasize the importance of addressing systemic issues such as workload management, communication barriers, and recognition of teachers' contributions to foster a healthier and more supportive work environment.

Two participants, Bethany and Samantha, stand out as outliers due to their proximity to retirement. With just a few years left before they retire, they approach their burnout experiences with a gentle tone, not wanting to disrupt the system. Their responses reflect their wisdom and

the changing landscape of education over the years.

In response to the central research question, the participants' experiences have unveiled the multifaceted nature of teacher burnout in rural Appalachian Title I schools. The prominent themes and subthemes, such as exhaustion, negativity, feeling underappreciated, and workload, offer a comprehensive view of the challenges these teachers face. Their experiences underscore the urgent need for systemic changes and greater support in the educational system to address teacher burnout effectively.

Summary of Thematic Findings

This study focuses on understanding teacher burnout experiences in Title I rural Appalachian schools among Grades 4–9 educators. The research employed a phenomenological design, examining the shared phenomenon among 12 purposefully selected teachers. Participants were chosen through purpose sampling from a single school district, meeting criteria including being full-time public-school teachers with a minimum of two consecutive years of teaching in the Title I school. Data collection involved recruitment letters, emails, consent forms, and surveys, ensuring confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms.

Chapter four presents the findings derived from individual interviews, focus group discussions, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES). Four major themes emerged from the analysis: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, decreased sense of personal accomplishment, and stress. These themes provide insight into the lived experiences of burnout among rural Appalachian teachers, answering the central research questions and subquestions posed in the study. Through the exploration of these themes and subthemes, the study offers valuable perspectives on the challenges faced by educators in this context, contributing to a deeper understanding of teacher burnout in rural Appalachian Title I schools.

Interpretation of Thematic Findings

The purpose of this study was to describe burnout experiences of in rural Appalachia Title I schools Grades 4–9. The themes and subthemes were utilized to generate a set of significant interpretations of the study's implications. Thus, my significant interpretations are as follows: (a) staffing shortages, (b) teachers feeling as if they do not have a voice, (c) lack of resources.

Staffing Shortages

The teachers in this study articulated their concerns with workload increases due to staffing shortages. The participants went on to describe how the district does not offer competitive substitute pay which results in a lack of substitute teachers. Teachers are then forced to cover classes for absent colleagues. Participants explained that covering for other teachers not only increased their workload but often took away the moments in their day when they could unwind or work on the next day's lessons. Some participants said it was difficult to not feel resentful. The district needs more full-time employees and more substitute teachers to meet the needs of the students.

Teachers Feeling As If They Do Not Have a Voice

The teachers in this study repeatedly lamented that they feel like their voice does not matter to the district. They often feel that the district sees them as replaceable and interchangeable. The conversations highlighted that students are often more informed than teachers about district events and concerns. Teachers feel that communication both in person and through email is often vague and hard to read or understand. People often leave meetings with unclear interpretations of what was said. Teachers feel that when new initiatives begin, teachers' views and opinions are not asked for or considered. The communication barriers in place must be

mitigated, so that teachers feel that their voice matters.

Lack of Resources

Teachers explained that they feel that the district does a good job of providing supplies, but there are a lack of resources in terms of needed programs, including counselors, mental health programs for students, and trauma-informed professional development for teachers. Teachers say they feel like first responders to trauma and that they have to see if students have food, shelter, and mental health services on top of teaching their content and preparing for state testing. Teachers say they are the ones seeking services for students which adds to their feeling of being overworked. In addition, teachers feel undervalued for the extra work because it is often behind-the-scenes work to make sure that students have whatever support the school can offer.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this phenomenological investigation offer valuable insights with far-reaching implications, particularly concerning the challenges faced by educators in Grades 4–9 who have encountered burnout within Title I rural Appalachian schools. These implications are pivotal in guiding policy formulation and practical interventions aimed at supporting teachers grappling with burnout and forestalling its recurrence.

The recommendations outlined herein, tailored specifically for educators in Grades 4–9 who have grappled with burnout within Title I rural Appalachian schools, target a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including public school teachers, administrators, and school districts. Within the ensuing sections, we delineate the implications for policy and practice, illuminating actionable steps to address the multifaceted dimensions of teacher burnout within this context. Implications for policy and practice are derived from the data in this study. Recommendations for educational stakeholders such as administrators and teachers are proposed.

Implications for Policy

This research study has several policy implications for public school districts. The findings of this study is for all teachers in Grades 4–9 who have encountered burnout within Title I rural Appalachian schools and to prevent future burnout. The policy implications regarding prevention of teacher burnout are listed below.

District. Educational stakeholders at the district level need to offer attractive pay for substitute teachers. There are not enough substitute teachers in the district and the substitute pay is not competitive with neighboring districts and states. In addition, the district should consider increasing the number of staff members. Teachers need support in the classroom through intervention specialists and coteachers.

Teachers need to have a say in new programs and policies. Teachers are experts in their field. Their needs and concerns need to be heard in the district. Sunshine County is a small district, and it would be easy to implement teacher focus groups and build teams to help create schedules and programs that benefit everyone, including the teachers.

The district needs to consider hiring more counselors and mental health experts to assist with the large number of students facing trauma and a lack of resources. Teachers cannot bear the burden of trying to provide for every mental health need and personal resource of the students.

In conclusion, fostering a thriving educational environment in Sunshine County requires a comprehensive approach. The district need to provide professional development to administrators to help them implement the district policies. To address the scarcity of substitute teachers and enhance teacher support, it is imperative for educational stakeholders to reassess and augment substitute pay, making it competitive with neighboring districts and states.

Additionally, increasing the number of staff members, including intervention specialists and coteachers, will contribute significantly to alleviating the workload on teachers. Empowering teachers by incorporating their insights into decision-making processes, such as forming teacher focus groups or building teams, ensures that new programs and policies are not only effective but also consider the practical perspectives of those on the front lines of education.

Moreover, recognizing the increasing challenges faced by students, the district should prioritize hiring more counselors and mental health experts. It is crucial to acknowledge that teachers cannot single-handedly shoulder the responsibility of addressing every student's mental health needs and personal resources. In closing, investing in professional development for administrators is essential to equip them with the necessary skills to effectively implement district policies. By adopting these strategic measures, Sunshine County can cultivate a supportive and dynamic educational environment that not only meets the needs of its teachers but also provides optimal learning conditions for its students.

Implications for Practice

Throughout this transcendental phenomenological study, I described experiences of teachers who have taught in Grades 4–9 who have experienced burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools.

Administrators. Administrators need to communicate more with their teachers. Teachers need to know that they are valued. They also need to know that their voice is being heard. Communication also needs to be clearer. In addition, administrators need to streamline the processes and paperwork needed from teachers, which allows teachers to focus more on teaching and less on paperwork, alleviating stress and reducing workload.

Administrators need to clearly define the roles of those working in the school. As a

facilitator to the school, the administrator should help teachers to understand their role and the expectations for that role. In addition, counselors need to know what responsibilities they should handle instead of the teacher. Everyone can work together to help the students, but the teachers and counselors should know what their responsibilities entail so that they are not both trying to fulfill the same role for the student.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The phenomenological study of teachers experiencing burn out in Grades 4–9 in rural Appalachian Title I schools and Maslach's burnout theory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) was the central guide of the study. The findings throughout the study provided support for Maslach's theoretical framework. The phenomenological study aligns with the theoretical framework on burnout theory through the discovered themes and subthemes that emerged throughout the interviews, surveys, and focus group.

Empirical Implications

The findings in this study resonate with previous research, as they underscore the prevalent themes observed in the literature. Participants confirmed that teachers grappling with burnout often contend with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, diminished personal accomplishment, and heightened stress levels. This sentiment aligns closely with Maslach's characterization of emotional exhaustion, which the teachers in this study echoed by expressing feelings of overwhelm, stress, and weariness.

Furthermore, Maslach and Leiter (2016) highlighted how depersonalization can strain interpersonal relationships, leading to challenging interactions with clients, colleagues, or students. This study illustrates depersonalization through themes of hopelessness, negativity, and communication barriers. Teachers articulated a sense of isolation, feeling unapproachable, and

experiencing a disconnection from their work and peers. Additionally, the teachers expressed sentiments of being undervalued and unappreciated, a factor identified by Maslach (2015) as contributing to diminished personal accomplishment and, ultimately, burnout.

Recurring mentions of exhaustion, anxiety, depression, and physical symptoms such as headaches and weight gain surfaced in interviews, focus groups, and the MBI-ES assessments conducted with the teachers. The study highlighted how workload and additional responsibilities exacerbate the stress experienced by teachers. The collective experiences of the participants not only reaffirm but also enrich the existing literature on these specific challenges within the context of teacher burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools catering to grades 4-9. Thus, this study offers valuable insights into the experiences of burnout among teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools, grades 4-9.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework that guided this phenomenological research study was Machlach's (1982) burnout theory. Maslach's definition of burnout encompasses four primary components. Emotional exhaustion, which refers to the sensation of feeling emotionally drained and depleted. Depersonalization, which entails the development of negative or indifferent attitudes towards one's work, clients, colleagues, or students. Reduced personal accomplishment involves experiencing feelings of incompetence and inefficacy in one's work. The last component is stress, which Maslach describes as a result of a perceived imbalance between environmental demands and the individual's resources to cope with those demands. Together, these four components form Maslach's comprehensive definition of burnout, shedding light on its psychological, emotional, and interpersonal dimensions.

Emotional Exhaustion

Maslach's (1982) burnout theory emphasizes emotional exhaustion as a central component, and the study identifies emotional exhaustion as a major theme. Maslach conceptualizes emotional exhaustion as a core component of burnout in her theory. Emotional exhaustion refers to the depletion of emotional resources and feelings of being emotionally drained. It is characterized by a state of fatigue and a sense of being emotionally overextended. According to Maslach, emotional exhaustion is a result of chronic workplace stress that exceeds an individual's ability to cope effectively.

In the context of Maslach's burnout theory, emotional exhaustion is considered one of the three dimensions of burnout, along with depersonalization and decreased personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion is often the initial stage of burnout and can manifest in various ways, such as feeling drained, fatigued, and overwhelmed by the demands of the job. It is a critical aspect of understanding the overall burnout experience, as individuals who experience emotional exhaustion are more likely to develop other symptoms associated with burnout. The teachers in this study reported feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and weary, which resonates with Maslach's description of emotional exhaustion.

Depersonalization

Another key element in Maslach's theory is depersonalization, characterized by a negative, cynical attitude and feelings of detachment (Maslach et al., 2001). Maslach and Leiter (2016) discussed how depersonalization can affect interpersonal relationships, leading to strained interactions with clients, colleagues, or students. This study reflects depersonalization by highlighting themes of hopelessness, negativity, and communication barriers. Teachers in this

study expressed feelings of being isolated, unapproachable, and experiencing a disconnect from their work and colleagues.

Decreased Sense of Personal Accomplishment

Maslach's (2015) theory posits that a decreased sense of personal accomplishment is a critical component of burnout. This dimension reflects an individual's perception of their competence and effectiveness in the workplace. burnout is characterized by feelings of inefficiency and reduced competence (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). They emphasize that individuals experiencing burnout often perceive themselves as less effective in their roles, aligning with the concept of decreased personal accomplishment. Maslach et al. (2001) highlighted the relationship between a decreased sense of personal accomplishment and job satisfaction. Maslach and Leiter (2016) delved into the importance of recognition and valuation in preventing burnout. They emphasize that when individuals feel unappreciated or undervalued, it contributes to a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, ultimately leading to burnout.

This study's identification of teachers feeling underappreciated, not valued, and ignored aligns with Maslach's findings on the significance of recognition and competence in the development of burnout. This correspondence with Maslach's theoretical framework reinforces the validity and applicability of her concepts in the context of teachers experiencing burnout in Title I rural Appalachian schools.

Maslach's theory includes a decreased sense of personal accomplishment, which in this study is the identification through the theme of feeling underappreciated. Teachers expressed a lack of respect, not feeling valued, and being ignored, aligning with Maslach's concept of diminished feelings of competence and effectiveness.

Stress

Maslach's burnout theory acknowledges stress as a significant factor, and the research in this study expands on this by highlighting stress-related subthemes such as exhaustion, anxiety, depression, and physical symptoms like headaches and weight gain. The workload and extra responsibilities contribute to the stress experienced by teachers throughout study.

By capturing these themes and subthemes, this study provides empirical evidence that supports and aligns with Maslach's burnout theory. The experiences shared by the teachers in the study resonate with the dimensions Maslach identified in her theory, reinforcing the relevance and applicability of Maslach's conceptualization of burnout in the context of Title I rural Appalachian schools. The findings of this study confirm Maslach's (1982) burnout theory, support previous research on teacher burnout, and confirm Maslach's theory in the lives of teachers experiencing burnout in Title I rural Appalachia, grades 4-9.

Limitations and Delimitations

Below is an outline detailing the limitations and delimitations of the study. Limitations primarily encompass factors beyond the researcher's control, which were anticipated and mitigated to the best extent feasible during the study. Delimitations refer to predetermined boundaries established by the researcher prior to commencing the study.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses throughout the study, that may have affected the study's outcomes that I could not control (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). This study encountered several limitations. Firstly, the research was confined to a single rural Appalachian Title I school district in southern Ohio, limiting the generalized ability of findings to a specific geographical area. The participant pool was restricted to teachers in this district, warranting caution in extending

conclusions to teachers working in Grades 4–9 in other Title I rural Appalachian schools to draw comprehensive insights into the burnout experiences. Of this population, data from a more diverse range of teachers in various rural Appalachian districts would be essential.

Additionally, the use of convenience sampling posed limitations. The sample size was relatively small, impacting the precision and generalized ability of the data. A larger and more diverse sample would enhance the study's validity and provide a more nuanced understanding of burnout experiences among teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported surveys introduced potential biases. Despite assurances of anonymity, some participants might have responded in a manner that protected their school's reputation, potentially influencing the accuracy of the data. This inherent limitation calls for cautious interpretation of the survey results and emphasizes the need for diverse data collection methods to corroborate findings.

Delimitations

Delimitations are purposeful decisions made by me to set boundaries of this study (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). The first delimitation was only allowing teachers who taught in Title I rural Appalachia Schools. Only allowing teachers from Title I rural Appalachia schools establishes specific boundaries or parameters for the research. By focusing exclusively on these schools, they study intentionally narrows in on the scope of this study to a particular subset of educational institutions. Delimiting the study in this way allows for a more focused investigation into the unique challenges, experiences, and dynamics present in Title I rural Appalachian schools (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Another delimitation was the restriction to teachers who have either taught or are presently teaching in Grades 4–9. This grade range corresponds to the adolescent stage,

characterized by rapid growth and significant developmental changes. The decision to focus on this specific age group reflects an acknowledgment of the distinct challenges encountered by teachers during this critical period of students' lives.

Finally, I opted for a transcendental phenomenological design instead of a hermeneutic one. Transcendental phenomenology aims to comprehend human experiences by centering on the exploration of meaning (Ishtiaq, 2019; Moustakas, 1994), whereas hermeneutic methodology permits researchers to integrate their own experiences and perspectives when interpreting phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). While it might have been tempting to interject my personal viewpoints throughout the study, it was essential for me to remain impartial and observe the burnout experiences of others.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study used a transcendental phenomenological design. I used a qualitative and exploratory design. A quantitative design would be beneficial for future research to provide a broader range of participants from a more diverse demographic. This research could include participants who work outside of the role of teacher. Future research could also include multiple schools across Appalachia. In addition, future research might compare rural Appalachian 4–9 schools to schools from different backgrounds.

Moreover, future research endeavors could benefit from broadening the geographical scope. Including multiple schools across the Appalachian region would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to burnout in this context. Additionally, conducting comparative studies between rural Appalachian Grades 4–9 schools and schools from different backgrounds could offer insights into the unique challenges faced by teachers in specific geographical and socioeconomic settings.

Furthermore, considering the dynamic nature of the education landscape, future research might explore the impact of evolving educational policies, support systems, or interventions on mitigating burnout. Examining longitudinal data could provide a more nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of various strategies in alleviating burnout and enhancing overall teacher well-being.

In conclusion, while this study has shed light on burnout experiences among teachers in a specific context, future research endeavors should strive for methodological diversity, larger participant samples, and broader geographical representation to enhance the generalized ability and applicability of findings. This would ultimately contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of burnout and inform more effective intervention strategies.

Conclusion

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to explore and describe the burnout experiences of teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools, specifically Grades 4–9, in southern Ohio. The study utilized a robust methodology involving individual interviews, a focus group, and MBI-ES. The analysis revealed four central themes: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, decreased sense of personal accomplishment, and stress. The study aligns with Maslach's burnout theory, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these themes with Maslach's dimensions of burnout.

The findings highlighted the exhaustive nature of emotional experiences faced by teachers in this context. Emotional exhaustion, a key dimension in Maslach's theory, manifested as overwhelming stress, fatigue, and a constant struggle to meet job demands. The theme of depersonalization illuminated the negative, cynical attitudes teachers adopted due to feelings of hopelessness, communication barriers, and a sense of detachment from their work.

The third theme, decreased sense of personal accomplishment, revealed teachers' feelings of being undervalued, unappreciated, and ignored. This aligns with Maslach's (2015) emphasis on the importance of recognition and competence in preventing burnout. Stress, the fourth theme, was explored in detail, encompassing anxiety, depression, and physical symptoms. The study expands on Maslach's acknowledgment of stress by delving into specific stress-related subthemes.

The study offers practical implications for educational stakeholders at the district and administrative levels. Recommendations include addressing staffing shortages, providing competitive substitute pay, increasing the number of staff members, and enhancing communication between administrators and teachers. Recognizing teachers' voices in policy decisions and investing in mental health resources emerged as critical practices to mitigate burnout.

The study acknowledges limitations, such as its focus on a single rural Appalachian Title I school district, a small sample size, and the use of convenience sampling. These limitations emphasize the need for caution in generalizing findings and highlight the importance of diverse data collection methods. Future research should consider quantitative designs, expanding participant demographics, and comparing schools across different regions. Longitudinal studies exploring the impact of evolving educational policies on burnout mitigation are also recommended.

In summary, this study contributes valuable insights into the burnout experiences of teachers in Title I rural Appalachian schools. The identified themes align with Maslach et al.'s (2001) burnout theory, reinforcing the relevance of her conceptualization in this specific context. The study's implications for practice and recommendations for future research underscore the

urgency of addressing burnout to foster a healthier and more sustainable educational environment for teachers in rural Appalachia.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 13, 2023

Kara Howard

Judy Shoemaker

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-324 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON EXPERIENCING BURNOUT IN TITLE I RURAL APPALACHIAN SCHOOLS GRADES 4-9

Dear Kara Howard, Judy Shoemaker,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). 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) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

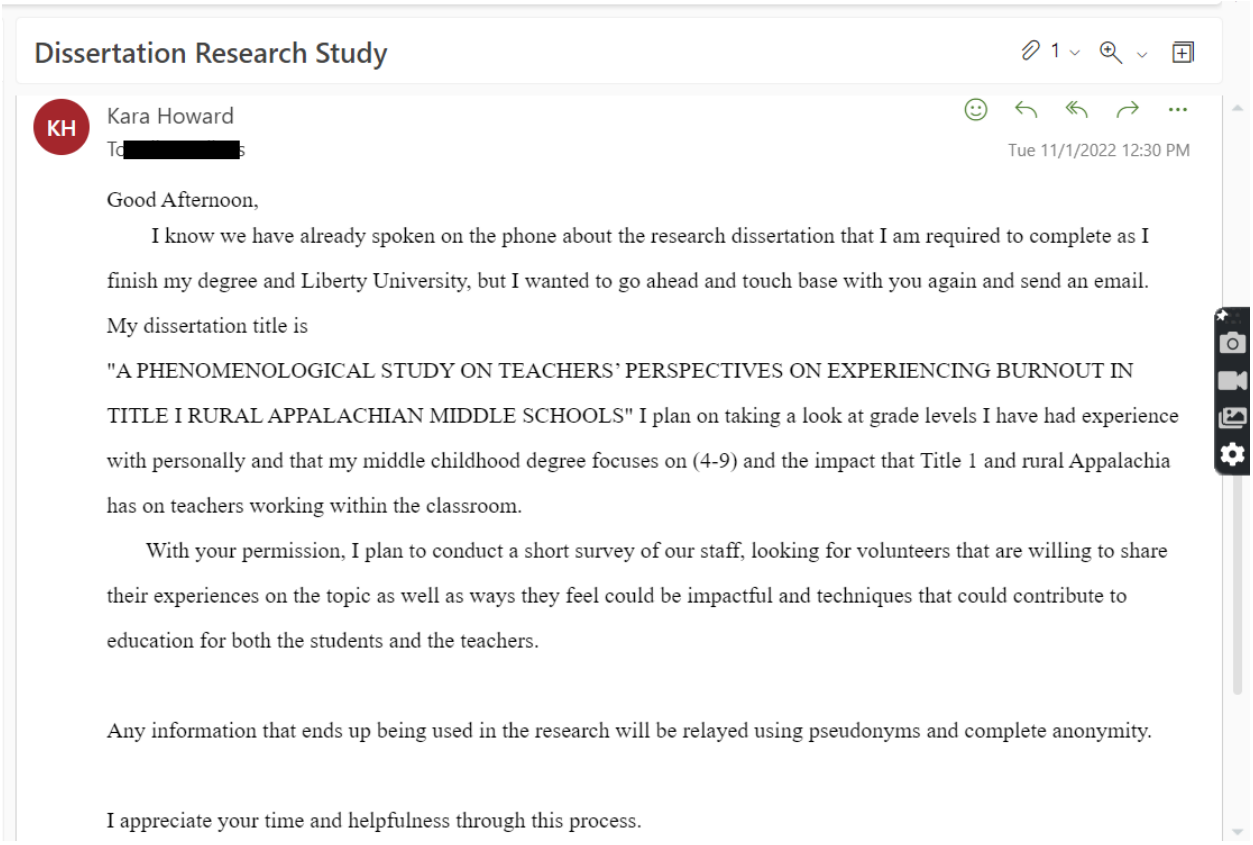
Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: SITE PERMISSIONS



Dissertation Research Study

KH Kara Howard

To [redacted]

Tue 11/1/2022 12:30 PM

Good Afternoon,

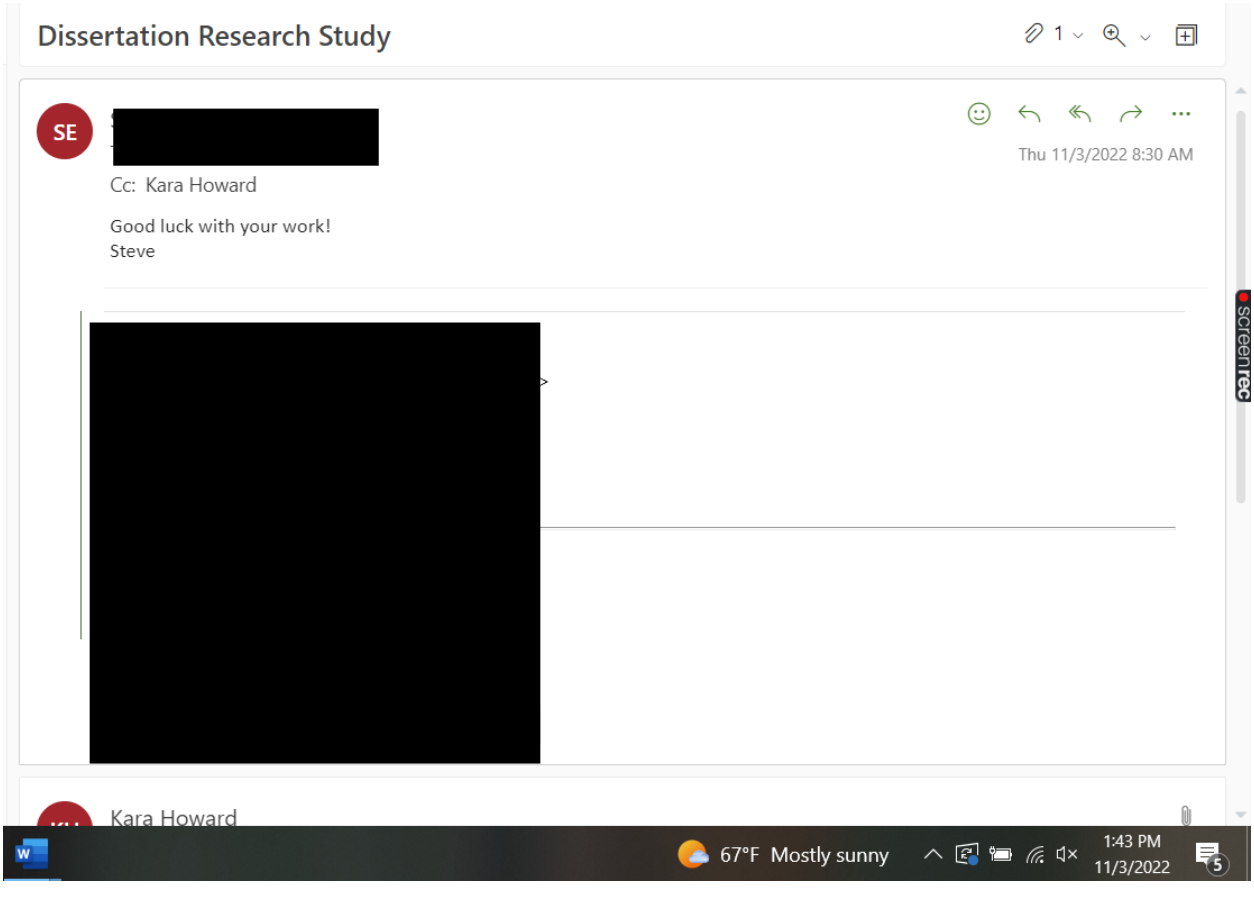
I know we have already spoken on the phone about the research dissertation that I am required to complete as I finish my degree and Liberty University, but I wanted to go ahead and touch base with you again and send an email. My dissertation title is

"A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON EXPERIENCING BURNOUT IN TITLE I RURAL APPALACHIAN MIDDLE SCHOOLS" I plan on taking a look at grade levels I have had experience with personally and that my middle childhood degree focuses on (4-9) and the impact that Title 1 and rural Appalachia has on teachers working within the classroom.

With your permission, I plan to conduct a short survey of our staff, looking for volunteers that are willing to share their experiences on the topic as well as ways they feel could be impactful and techniques that could contribute to education for both the students and the teachers.

Any information that ends up being used in the research will be relayed using pseudonyms and complete anonymity.

I appreciate your time and helpfulness through this process.



Dissertation Research Study

SE [redacted]

Thu 11/3/2022 8:30 AM

Cc: Kara Howard

Good luck with your work!
Steve

[redacted]

Kara Howard

67°F Mostly sunny 1:43 PM 11/3/2022

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Teachers,

As a graduate student in the School of School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to explore burnout experiences of middle school teachers in rural Title I schools and the perceptions of the factors contributing to burnout experiences of Title I rural middle school teachers and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be teachers in Grades 4–9 who work in a rural Appalachia Title I school and who have experienced educational burnout. Participants, if willing, will be asked to partake in Maslach's educational online survey (30 minutes), audio- and video-recorded individual interviews (1 hour), and audio- and video-recorded focus groups (1 hour). Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at or call at [redacted]

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please sign and return via email Once consent is received a survey link will be sent.

Sincerely,

Kara Howard

Doctoral Student

[redacted]

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Consent

Title of the Project: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON EXPERIENCING BURNOUT IN TITLE I RURAL APPALACHIAN SCHOOLS GRADES 4–9

Principal Investigator: Kara Howard, Doctoral candidate Liberty University, School of Education, 2023, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an educator in Grades 4–9 in a rural Appalachia Title I school and have experienced educational burnout. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to take a look at the burnout experiences of teachers in Title I rural Appalachia schools (Grades 4–9) and explore what factors create these burnout experiences due to day to day routines and responsibilities of teachers in a poverty-stricken rural area.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Take MBI-ES survey via online will take no more than 30 minutes.
2. Participate in a one-on-one audio- and video-recorded interview via Teams conference that will take no more than 1 hour.
3. Participate in an audio- and video-recorded group interview via Teams conference that will take no more than 1 hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include helping educational research, administration, and the educational community in efforts to help with teacher burnout.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked drawer After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address

included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you. apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Kara Howard. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Judy Shoemaker, at [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., [redacted]; our phone number is [redacted], and our email address is [redacted].

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

APPENDIX E: MASLACH SURVEY LICENSE

mind garden

www.mindgarden.com

To Whom It May Concern,

The above-named person has made a license purchase from Mind Garden, Inc. and has permission to administer the following copyrighted instrument up to that quantity purchased:

Maslach Burnout Inventory forms: Human Services Survey, Human Services Survey for Medical Personnel, Educators Survey, General Survey, or General Survey for Students.

The three sample items only from this instrument as specified below may be included in your thesis or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument form may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below.
Sample Items:

MBI - Human Services Survey - MBI-HSS:
I feel emotionally drained from my work.
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
I don't really care what happens to some recipients.

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MBI - Human Services Survey for Medical Personnel - MBI-HSS (MP):
I feel emotionally drained from my work.
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
I don't really care what happens to some patients.

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MBI - Educators Survey - MBI-ES:
I feel emotionally drained from my work.
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
I don't really care what happens to some students.

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Cont'd on next page

APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please describe your educational background and career in your current position. CRQ

2. Tell me about how economic challenges in the area effect your students CRQ

3. Describe your challenges when working within a Title I School. CRQ

4. Describe your challenges when working with lower socioeconomic status (SES) school district. CRQ

5. Describe your workload and responsibilities in your position. CRQ

6. Describe the motivation that your students have. CRQ

7. Describe the challenges your students face and how you believe that may impact their behaviors or academic performance in the class CRQ

8. Can you Describe of any economic challenges that COVID brought to light that impacted your students and their ability to participate in class? CRQ

9. What do you do to manage and motivate difficult students? SQ 1

10. Describe your experiences of recognizing students who are not focused because they are bothered by something else. CRQ

11. Describe the community within your workplace? CRQ

12. Describe your challenges when working with lower socioeconomic status (SES) students in your classes. SQ1

13. Describe experiences where you have lacked a sense of belonging and connection with others (relatedness). SQ2

14. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with working within a Title I rural middle school? SQ2

APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why did you choose education as a profession?

2. Discuss what it means to be a teacher at a Title I school?

3. Describe how you feel when a student is unmotivated in your room?

4. When are you alarmed by a student's lack of enthusiasm/motivation?

5. Discuss what it means to teach at a rural middle school?

6. What do you do when you sense something is bothering a student?

7. Discuss experiences on workload

8. Discuss experiences on your job responsibilities

9. Discuss the atmosphere of your work environment