EXPLORING DEPERSONALIZATION TOLL ON EFL TEACHERS' WELL-BEING IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

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Abstract

Relationship and interaction among teacher-student, colleague, school leader, and other workers in the school workplace is one of the building blocks of teacher well-being. Possessing positive social relationship among those parties can increase the quality of EFL teacher's well-being. However, social dynamics in the workplace is often cause friction among those parties. This could lead to depersonalization then causing them to experience burnout, and in some cases job attrition. The nature in which burnout can contagion other EFL teacher has urged further investigation of this matter. Grounded upon narrative inquiry research method, this research fetched narrative frames from three EFL teachers who works at a public junior high school. Thematic analysis specialized for narrative inquiry research revealed that colleagues who possess negative traits in terms of professional development and work ethics as well as poor school leader characteristic are the main cause EFL teachers to experience a sense of depersonalization and motivation loss. Systemic and/or organizational level endeavors to prevent or alleviate depersonalization to maintain EFL teachers' well-being is advised.

Keywords: EFL Teacher; Interaction; Relationship; Well-Being

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there have been an increasing research trend on teachers well-being. Many studies have reported that individual factors such as mind, motivation, and emotion play a pivotal role in regulating one's well-being state (Birchinall et al., 2019; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Ratanasiripong et al., 2022; Sulis et al., 2021). Those studies suggested that individual agencies, mindfulness activities, and resiliency can affect teachers' well-being trajectories, implying the important role of each individual to take care of their own well-being. However, more recent studies have shifted the trend and gained a great momentum from individual focused well-being issues to a more contextual foci on teachers well-being (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Mercer, 2020, 2021). To date, recent studies have shown the vital role contextual factors—especially social relationship with students, colleagues, teaching staffs, and school leaders—hold in maintaining teachers well-being (Babic et al., 2022; Jin et al., 2021; Mairitsch et al., 2021). With that in mind, studies have also reported that teachers well-being is susceptible to disruption such as stress and burnout in the individual and contextual dimensions, which can threaten their well-being in return (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) and causing a decrease in one's teaching career development (Sulis et al., 2022).

The concept of burnout in the context of profession has been popularized by Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001). It comprises of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to the individual state where one is feeling emotionally drained, depleted, and lacking in energy due to prolonged stress and overwhelming job demands. Depersonalization, on the other hand, refers to the development of

cynical or indifferent attitude towards work, leading to a sense of detachment and treating individuals as objects rather than people. Reduced accomplishment refers to the feelings of inefficacy, decreased productivity, and lack of achievement or fulfillment in one's work. The link between these dimensions creates an interrelationship connection (see Figure 1) which is triggered by stressors and disruptions from myriad of sources. In recent years, studies have shown the critical consequences of burnout on the continuation and attrition of teaching profession in which social relationship plays a pivotal role (McInerney et al., 2018; Ratanasiripong et al., 2022; Sulis et al., 2022; Virtanen et al., 2019).
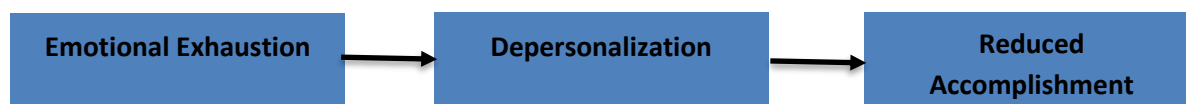
Emotional Exhaustion	→	Depersonalization	→	Reduced Accomplishment

Figure 1. Maslach's (1998) Job Burnout Dimensional Interralationship

Interaction and relationship of teacher with their students has been reported to be in a reciprocal connection which affect both the teachers' as well as the students' well-being. Research has shown that when teachers entered the classroom in a good, motivated, rested, and cheerful state, students' current mood dynamics are fostered and, in return, lower burnout level and create fewer discipline problems both for teacher and students (see Roffey, 2011 for instance). Some studies, however, have also suggested that disruptive student behavior can cause teachers to experience exhaustion which then lead to depersonalization and threatening their well-being in the process (Aldrup et al., 2018; de Ruiter et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022). On the other hand, positive relationship in the workplace can create a sense of belonging among teachers as well as with the school/institution. This sense of belonging, as Deci & Ryan (2000) argued, has become the crux for achieving motivation maintenance. Mercer and Gregersen (2020) also resonate with this argumentation, adding that positive relationship with colleagues, head teacher, school principal, other people in the workplace, and school-related authorities are among the interpersonal relationship that builds EFL teachers' well-being. In addition, Sulis et al.'s (2022) study underlined positive relationship in the school could reduce the attrition rate of teachers. Therefore, it is important to note that contextual factors, i.e. social relationship within the schoolscape, is of paramount importance.

Despite many research haave been established to build both theoretical and empirical underpinnings on teacher job burnout and well-being, there is little contextual evidence on how depersonalization among Indonesian EFL teachers affect their well-being as viewed through socio-contextual lens—in which the current study aimed to investigate such literature void.

METHOD

The current study was grounded upom a narrative inquiry research method (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014). Contextually, this study was conducted at a public junior high school located at West Java, Indonesia. The said school, as reported by one of the EFL teachers there, was reported to be admitting students from various backgrounds in the lower to mid socioeconomic strata. Additionally, she also reported that such phenomenon has caused the teachers there to be dealing with students with disruptive behavior tendency. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the impact of relationship and interaction both in terms of teacher-student rapport as well as collegial relationship, as emotional exhaustion resulted from social interaction often become contagious, to the well-being of EFL teachers.

The current study was grounded upon qualitative data namely narrative frame, as proposed by Barkhuizen and Wette (2008). To fetch this data, three EFL teachers were conveniently

recruited and involved in the study. Consent form to voluntarily participate in this study as well as demographic survey was distributed early before they filled out the narrative frame (see Table 1). Upon signing the consent form and demographic survey, participants filled the narrative frame through digital means. The use of digital technology for narrative frame facilitates longer responses to be embedded in the document, unlike its conventional counterpart (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014).

Table 1. Demographic Data of Participants

	Sex	**Teaching Experience (years)**
P1	Female	20
P2	Male	19
P3	Female	8

Once narrative data were fetched, thematic analysis were carried out using Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik's (2014) analysis technique for narrative inquiry research. Although this analysis procedure comprises of three main phases, the principles of thematic analysis as posited by many methodological experts remain implemented (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2016; Adu, 2019). The first phase, data familiarization, involves reading the participants' stories in a cyclical manner, allowing for deep adaptation with the data. The second phase, coding, involves labelling the participants' bit of story to its respective code. Finally, the third phase, categorization of data extract, involves grouping the underlying code that has been established in the previous phase into a relevant umbrella category or theme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Relationships in the workplace
In the workplace, P1 experienced highs and downs when it comes to relationship with other teachers as well as students. With other teachers, she mentioned that she tried to make friend with everyone in the office. She then emphasized that she has a tendency to get closer with teachers who have determination in teaching and motivation to carry out their work well. She further commented that by doing so she also get motivated to do the same quality of work. However, she also confessed that she avoids some teachers who have a lazy trait in terms of working or teaching. In addition, she also added that she sees teachers who does not embrace innovation in teaching as "conservatives" and "narrow-minded" (narrative frame extract, P1). Although P1 holds such view in her beliefs, she still realized that maintaining relationship with all the teachers regardless of the beliefs or traits they may hold is a necessity. She translated this view of hers into action by not completely avoiding teachers with such negative traits. Additionally, she tried to understand those teachers by understanding and tolerating for what beliefs they hold. Although P1 projected as such, she found it difficult to implement. This was due to the different teaching schedule among EFL teachers. She confessed that one EFL teacher may has a teaching schedule on Monday, the other one on Tuesday and Friday, while the others on Thursday and Friday. This rather scattered schedule hinders P1's intention to build relationship with those teacher who hold negative traits.

P2 and P1 shares a similar outlook upon workplace relationship. He believed that building positive interaction and relationship among teachers in general, be it from a different or the same disciplines, is highly important. He pointed out four of his male colleagues to be his best friends in the workplace. Furthermore, he mentioned that socializing and getting along well

with them can make him to "get better in work" and his overall mood (narrative frame extract, P2). In other words, the reciprocal, mutual relationship among P2 and his best (colleague) friends allows him to generate positive emotions. Although he highlighted on four of his best friends, he restated the importance of building positive relationship among teachers to be an important practice. However, P2, unlike P1, did not mention any teachers or colleagues that has any negative traits which affect him in any way.

While P1 and P2 are willing to make friends with everyone in the workplace, P3 viewed everyone as a family already. Socializing with the "family", according to P3, makes her mood improved (narrative frame extract, P3). Although she mentioned so, she feels a rather far relationship with some of the teachers. She detailed that teachers who are rarely seen in the workplace falls under this category she believed. In addition, teachers whose age gap is too large compared to P3 made P3 feels awkward, which then P3 consider them as "far". P3 tried to communicate with those teachers and found the interaction to be positive yet a bit rigid. Another barrier that she encountered when it comes to collegial relationship is a difference in teaching schedule of EFL teachers. She mentioned that when EFL teachers do not meet in the same day, they would not be able to communicate and share experiences as EFL teachers.

Teacher-learner rapport

Based on the narrative frame fetched from all of the participants, the data revealed that each of the participants have a positive relationship and interaction with their students. Zooming on P1, she mentioned that she has been an EFL teacher for two decades and experienced handling many students with varying personalities as well as characteristics. Scrutinizing on how she responded to students' behavior, she seemed to be showing a positive attitude. Further commenting on her teacher-student relationship, she seemed to show a kind of happiness upon entering the classroom. The reason for this was because she could teach and introduce foreign language to er students, that is, English language. Looking at how she teach the students, it is evident that she utilized a differentiated learning. She further detailed that incorporating this kind of personalized (differentiated) instruction made her temperament to be joyful and happy. As P1 put it, "[m]y mood is very happy … by utilizing this differentiated teaching" (narrative frame extract, P1). A possible reason for this is that she could provide proportional and fair knowledge to each of the students based on their unique individual needs.

Moving on to P2's side, it seemed that his relationship and interaction with his students are in a highly positive state. A possible reason for this might be that the existence of his students made P2 to be receiveing positive energy. ~~This argument is then supported by P2's statement which entails how he sees student as his source of motivation to work as an EFL teacher.~~ This argument is then supported by P2's statement, "…the reason is that because I get to see my students" (narrative frame extract, P2), which entails how he sees student as his source of motivation to work as an EFL teacher. Scrutinizing on this, not only that P2 build a strong and positive relationship with his students for the sake of his students but also for himself. Considering how long P2 has been teaching (19 years), it seemed that P2 is a very social EFL teacher who found interacting with students as a source of his energy.

Alternating to P3, her relationship with her students was built upon the perception of "teachers duty". The reason for this might be entangled with how she perceive the profession of EFL teacher. Given that her teaching experience is 8 years, an early stage of mid-career EFL teacher, there might be a chance of developing stable motivation. This stable motivation then could lead to a change in her view about her students as well as her relationship with her students. However, despite so, she currently seemed to view her relationship with her students to be in a positive term. When she entered the classroom, she felt a sense of happiness. When in the classroom, however, she seemed to be acknowledging the myriad spectrum of emotions and moods of her students, making her to feel a sense of anxiety. Upon leaving the classroom, her

emotional state was found to be reliefed and happy. She then confessed that she often feel relieved when she successfully managed to regulate and control the students' behavior as well as successfully delivered the materials. On an additional note, she seemed to be receiving a kind of appreciation from her students for the way she teach and treat her students, "As long as I have been an EFL teacher, I got appreciation from my students for the way I teach".

Discussion

Collegial interaction and relationship within this study's context seem to be in a positive way on the surface level. Based on the narrative all the participants wrote, they experienced a sense of positive emotions. This is evident on how each of the participants narrated their social relationship status with other teachers using positive attributions. However, a sense of depersonalization was unearthed when it comes to interacting with colleagues possessing poor work ethics. P1 highlighted that while having an interaction with colleagues who are cooperative and embraces innovation can motivate such trait towards her herself; having an interaction with sloth, unmotivated, and conservative attitude towards positive change in professional development can affect her negatively. This finding is well documented in Meredith et al.'s (2020) study who also found that one's burnout state may contagion other EFL teacher. While P2 and P3 did not comment further on negative collegial relationship or school leader, P1 stressed that managerial and school leadership characteristics influenced her in a significant way. She further explained that school principal who possesses a poor managerial and leadership characteristics made her detached from the teaching profession. This negative work environment could potentially threaten her well-being and even develop attrition or quitting the teaching profession (McInerney et al., 2018; Sulis et al., 2022).

Zooming on the teaching strategies, all of the participants implemented a differentiation in the classroom. This teaching strategy involves personalizing student's learning based on their needs and assessments (Bondie & Zusho, 2018; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). This strategy is also demanding in terms of what strategies best implemented for each individual students. Therefore, innovations and breakthroughs are essential to provide proper personalized learning for each students in the classroom. However, the fact that EFL teachers rarely meet with each other in the teachers' office, in the current study's context, hinders the opportunities for them to exchange ideas and current issues in implementing differentiated instruction. The participants commented that this was occurred due to the scheduling regulation made by the school principal. Due to this limitation, they developed a sense of disconnection with others EFL teachers. The consequences resulted from this limited knowledge exchange between EFL teachers, in the long run, may cause depersonalization and reduced personal achievement (Maslach, 1998; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Seligman, 2011).

Considering the teaching experiences of each participants, they fall under the category of mid-career teachers. This means that the characteristics, motivation, and resiliency level is different with that of early-career and late-career teachers. In essence, mid-career EFL teaachers crave for continuing professional development (Shin et al., 2022). Failing to do so due to limited interaction among EFL teachers to implement differentiated learning optimally may threaten their well-established confidence to professional development, which in turn may cause to a decrease in motivation to teach—or, in other words, their well-being.

In terms of teacher-learner rapport, depersonalization level of all participants was low to none. This is evident on how each participants described how interaction with students are their motivation fuel to progressing and loving the teaching profession. All participants associated their relationship and interaction with their students as joyful, elevated moods, and happiness. This indicate a strong motivation to teach among the three participants, thus preventing any

depersonalization that may emerged in the teacher-learner relationship and creating a sense of positive well-being (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Virtanen et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

As a verdict on exploring the depersonalization level of EFL teachers and its impact on their well-being through the view point of social dimension, mid-career EFL teachers experienced a certain degree of depersonalization sourced in the contextual situation, specifically collegial relationship and leadership characteristics. It is advised for school leaders, administrators, and/or authorities to take a systemic level improvement regarding continuing professional development of mid-career EFL teachers to supplement their needs. For instance, allocating a day in the week to facilitate teachers of the same discipline to meet and discuss current issues in their teaching may benefit EFL teachers and increase their quality of well-being.

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