

# Work overload and organisational climate as predictors of job burnout among primary school teachers in Lesotho

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## ABSTRACT

This investigation adopted a correlational research design. This study aimed to establish whether work overload and organisational climate are predictors of burnout among primary school teachers in Lesotho. The sample comprised 350 primary school teachers. Data were collected through the use of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey, Overload Scale and School Environmental Questionnaire. Multiple regression analysis reveals that work overload and organisational climate are predictors of burnout among teachers. Pertaining to work overload, the study finds that primary school teachers in Lesotho are burdened with teaching many grades. In relation to organisational climate, the findings of the study are that teachers work under unfavourable working conditions.

**Keywords:** Burnout, teacher, stressors, work overload, organisational climate.

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## INTRODUCTION

Teaching is one of the noblest professions. For example, in demonstrating this fact, Jillson (2019) argues that teachers are entrusted with important responsibilities which contribute to the academic, social and emotional development of the youth. This is consistent with the findings of a study which was conducted by Frink-Levenhagen (2021). In this study, Frink-Levenhagen (2021) reports that within the world of academia, high-quality teachers are the backbone of well-functioning institutes. While teaching is supposed to be the most rewarding and fulfilling job, it is characterised by demands and challenges which sometimes force teachers to quit. Teacher attrition can be attributed to a variety of factors. However, the factor which requires the most attention, in my opinion, is teacher burnout.

Frink-Levenhagen (2021) notes that teacher burnout has historically proven to be a great concern in the teaching profession. The seriousness of this phenomenon is illustrated by Küçüksüleymanoğlu (2011), Amimo (2012) and Hurlley (2021). Küçüksüleymanoğlu (2011) postulates that at the start of their profession, many teachers are

enthusiastic and dedicated but because of burnout, after a few years they lose interest, become cynical and distant themselves from colleagues and learners. In support of this issue, Amimo (2012) states that burnout does not only expose teachers to a problem of exhaustion but as its process spirals down, learners become victims of poor teaching. Furthermore, Amimo (2012) shows that while burnout may force some teachers to leave the profession, others may continue with poor teaching. Hurlley (2021) also notes that teacher burnout is a serious problem that can cause psychological lassitude, emotional exhaustion and physical fatigue which eventually create a vicious cycle of health problems.

It may be important to define the concept 'burnout'. There is a substantial number of definitions of burnout. However, only a few of them are considered in this study. Burnout is defined as a work-related syndrome that stems from an individual's perception of a significant discrepancy between effort (input) and reward (output) (Buyukbayraktar and Temiz, 2015; Pucella, 2011). This perception of the individual is influenced by individual,

organisational and social factors (Buyukbayraktar and Temiz, 2015; Pucella, 2011). According to Aksu and Temeloglu (2015) as well as Kūçüksüleymanoğlu (2011), burnout occurs most often in those who work with troubled or needy clients and is marked by withdrawal from and cynicism toward clients, with symptoms such as irritability, anxiety and lowered self-esteem. Teachers are at risk of being attacked by burnout because they are labelled as the workers who work with disadvantaged, troubled, naughty and troublesome learners (Davidson, 2021).

### Statement of the problem

As it has already been indicated in the introduction that teaching is one of the greatest professions which contribute to the development of young people but this profession is characterised by many challenges which make it unenjoyable to teachers. One of the major problems which make teaching to be a challenging career is burnout which has a number of problematic outcomes (Tsigilis et al., 2011). These problems entail unsympathetic behaviour toward the learners and intolerance for classroom disruption, leading to teacher absenteeism (Mutkins et al., 2011). Other problems which are related to this phenomenon involve a limited commitment to teaching, job turnover intentions and the tendency to depersonalise the learners (Aksu and Temeloglu, 2015; Utami and Nahartyo, 2012). Many reasons justify the need to conduct a study on teacher burnout in Lesotho. The following are some of them:

- While burnout may be a detrimental syndrome that attacks teachers' motivation and thus jeopardises the future of a learner, there are no studies conducted on teacher burnout in Lesotho.
- Attrition of high-quality teachers is high in Lesotho and there is a possibility of attributing this problem to the phenomenon of burnout.
- Because teaching is a stressful profession, the findings of this study on teacher burnout may inform teachers and other stakeholders about the specific practices which they can adapt or adopt in order to reduce the incidence of burnout and its negative effects on them, the learners and the school environment.

### Aim and objectives

The aim of this study was to establish whether work overload and organisational climate are predictors of burnout among primary school teachers in Lesotho. In this regard, the study was guided by the following objectives:

- To determine whether work overload and organisational climate are predictors of teacher burnout.
- To suggest the measures that can be employed to alleviate burnout in the Lesotho primary schools.

### Research hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested:

- Work overload is a predictor of teacher burnout.
- Organisational climate is a predictor of teacher burnout.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this literature review is on the causes of burnout among teachers. There is a variety of causes of teacher burnout; however, the researcher focused on only two of them, work overload and organisational climate, as predictors of burnout among teachers. According to Amino (2012) and Koenig (2014) work overload is a predictor of teacher burnout. There are various ways in which work overload causes burnout among teachers. For example, Amino (2012) notes that teachers are overloaded with work and have long working hours which results in the problem of burnout. Amino (2012) further postulates that it is inevitable for teachers to escape the problem of burnout because, compared to other professionals, teachers work beyond the statutory teaching hours. Their work extends to the preparation of lessons as well as the marking of assignments and tests. Another aspect of work overload which causes burnout among teachers relates to the problem of teachers' assumption of several roles (Koenig, 2014). In this regard, Koenig (2014) argues that teachers are challenged with the task of playing and performing several different roles and responsibilities in their everyday work. These include being a motivator, a manager, an observer, a counsellor, a school leader, a resources provider, a mentor, a discipline enforcer and an agent of change at school. According to my unresearched observation, the Lesotho primary school teachers are burdened with teaching many grades. Some teachers teach four grades. Another problem is that the teacher-learner ratio is very high in Lesotho. These problems possibly cause teacher burnout.

The literature explains the relationship between organisational climate and teacher burnout. According to Bai (2014), organisational climate is a major factor in the lives of teachers. It can either expose teachers to burnout or protect them from the hazards of burnout. Bai (2014), Pan and Wu (2015) define organisational climate as the underground set of norms, values, beliefs, rituals and traditions. Bai (2014) reports that irrational school traditions and ineffective rituals cause burnout among teachers. This is consistent with the results of the studies which were conducted by Gardazi et al. (2016) as well as Hurtley (2021). An issue that organisational climate causes teacher burnout is further supported by Sahni and Deswal (2015). Thus, Sahni and Deswal (2015) illustrate this point by postulating that unfavourable school organisational climate triggers burnout among teachers. The present study is based on this postulation by Sahni and Deswal (2015). It assumes that organisational climate

is a factor that causes burnout among teachers in Lesotho as well. The school environment in this country is not conducive to teaching. For example, the management of the primary schools is poor because most of the members of the school boards are less educated. Secondly, there is an acute shortage of teaching resources. Lastly, teachers' salaries are very low; that is why there has been a series of teachers' strikes since 2020. These factors are likely to contribute to the problem of teacher burnout.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research design**

This is a correlational study. Measures taken on the predictor variables (teachers' work overload and school organisational climate) were correlated with the predicted variable (teacher burnout).

### **Population and sample**

The population for this study comprised 600 primary school teachers who were pursuing a Bachelor of Education in Primary Education at the National University of Lesotho. A Bachelor of Education in Primary Education is a part-time programme offered by the University for practicing teachers who hold a Diploma in Primary Education. From this population, a sample of 350 teachers was drawn using stratified random sampling. The sample comprised 255 females and 95 males. The proportionate stratified random sampling was employed to select the sample from the population. The researcher stratified the population into females and males because the population reflected an imbalance insofar as there were more females than males in the population. Stratification of the population was relevant because the number of female respondents in the population was substantially higher than that of their male counterparts. The number of females was 440 while the number of males was 160 which represented 27 percent of the total population. If stratified sampling had not been applied, the sampling would have resulted in the selection of more females than males. This would have led to the collection of non-representative data, thus leaving out the views of the male respondents while they were already a minority group in the population. By employing stratified random sampling, the strata, for example, male and female were represented in the sample in the proportion in which they existed in the population thus avoiding yielding fewer respondents in the gender category (Creswell, 2012).

### **Data collection**

Data were collected through the use of the second version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, called the Maslach

Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES). This instrument was administered to the respondents by the researcher who located it in a study that was investigated by Steyn in 2015. The main aim of using a survey to collect data was to establish whether teachers in Lesotho encounter burnout and also to measure the degree of burnout among them. The MBI-ES is a structured questionnaire that addresses three subscales of burnout, namely, emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and lack of feelings of personal accomplishment (Won-Sun et al., 2014).

The Overload Scale is another instrument that was used to collect data. This scale collected data on a measure of overload. That is, the researcher used this tool to assess teachers' work overload. This instrument was administered to the respondents by the researcher. The Overload Scale was developed by the researcher.

School Environmental Questionnaire is the other instrument that was used to collect the data on the organisational climate of the schools. This instrument was developed and administered to the respondents by the researcher.

### **Validity and reliability of the research instruments**

The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBIES) was tested by conducting a pilot study to ascertain its content reliability and validity. The reliability of MBIES was ascertained by administering this instrument to fifty primary school teachers in the district of Maseru. The reliability estimate (coefficient) of 0.70 was obtained. In ascertaining the construct validity of MBIES, the burnout scores were correlated with the scores of work overload and organisational climate and the results revealed a validity index of 0.28. The reliability and validity of the other two instruments, namely, the Overload Scale (OS) and School Environmental Questionnaire (SEQ) were ascertained by discussing the instruments with colleagues and by conducting a pilot study. Pertaining to OS, the reliability coefficient of 0.67 was reported and the validity index of 0.14 was revealed. In relation to SEQ, the results of the pilot study revealed a coefficient of 0.74 and a validity index of 0.15.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The aim of analysing these data was to find out whether work overload and organisational climate are predictors of teacher burnout. The following statistical hypotheses were tested:

- $H_0$ : Work overload is not a predictor of teacher burnout
- $H_0$ : Organisational climate is not a predictor of teacher burnout

Data were analysed using multiple regression analysis

(MRA). Pietersen and Maree (2013) describe multiple regression as a statistical data analysis technique that is applied in situations where multiple independent variables are used to predict a single dependent variable. Specifically, in this study, multiple regression was employed to predict the respondents' burnout from two variables, namely, work overload and organisational climate. The two variables were entered in the multiple regression model of the following form:

$$Y = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2$$

Where:

Y was burnout score.

$b_0$  was the constant.

$b_1$ ,  $b_2$  were coefficients of work overload and organisational climate.

$X_1$  and  $X_2$  were the scores of work overload and organisational climate.

Multiple regression was used to analyse data which were

collected using three questionnaires, namely, Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey, Overload Scale and School Environmental Questionnaire. Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey was used to collect data pertaining to the measures of teachers' burnout, Overload Scale was used to collect data relating to the measures of teachers' work overload while a School Environmental Questionnaire was used to collect data relating to the scores from a variable called organisational climate.

### Research findings on work overload and organisational climate on teacher burnout

Table 1 depicts that the regression analysis yielded the R squares ( $R^2$ ) of 0.026 and 0.012 for the two predictor variables (work overload and organisational climate) in relation to burnout. Thus, 0.026 + 0.012 (0.038) is the proportion of variance in burnout accounted for by work overload and organisational climate. This means that 3.8 (0.026 + 0.012 = 3.8%) percent of the variance of burnout is explained by work overload and organisational climate.

**Table 1.** Summary of multiple regression analysis of burnout on work overload and organisational climate.

Variable	N	R	$R^2$	Df	F	Sig
YX <sub>1</sub>	350	0.162	0.026	1.348	9.453417	P < .01
YX <sub>2</sub>	350	0.108	0.012	1.348	4.124	P < .05

### First null hypothesis tested

$H_0$ : work overload is not a predictor of teacher burnout.

A summary of the results of regression analysis pertaining to work overload as a predictor of teacher burnout is presented in Table 2. In Table 2, R (0.162) refers to the correlation coefficient. The correlation coefficient is the value that shows a relationship between two or more variables (Pietersen and Maree, 2013).

A further explanation of a summary of the results of regression analysis pertaining to work overload as a predictor of teacher burnout, as presented in Table 2, is made in this paragraph. In this case, R square (0.026 = 2.6%) refers to a percentage of a variation in teacher burnout that is explained by work overload. That is, R square ( $R^2$ ) is a percentage of variation in the predicted variable (Y) that is explained by the predictor variable (X) (Pietersen and Maree, 2013).

Referring to Table 2, the regression analysis resulted in a correlation of 0.162 ( $R = 0.162$ ) between burnout scores and teachers' work overload scores. This value shows that work overload influences teacher burnout. That is, work overload results in burnout. The analysis further yielded the R square of 0.026 for work overload in relation to

burnout. This means that work overload accounted for 2.6 percent of the variance in burnout. This also implies that 97.4 percent of the variance in teacher burnout is due to factors other than work overload. Multiple regression analysis (F test) yielded the calculated F-value of 9.453417. The calculated F-value (9.453417) was then used with the degree of freedom (df) in the research problem ( $df = 1, n - 2$ ), where n is the number of observations (respondents = sample) in the frequency distribution. In this case,  $df = (1, 350 - 2 = 1, 348)$ ; 1 being a degree of freedom for the numerator and 348 is a degree of freedom for the denominator. Note: since the computed df (348) is greater than the table; df (200) which is the highest df in the critical values of the F Distribution, the researcher then employed infinity ( $\infty$ ) as the degree of freedom (df). When the calculated F-value ( $F = 9.453417$ ) was compared with the critical value in the F Distribution with  $df = 1$  and 348 ( $\infty$ ) and the p-value = 0.01 ( $F_{0.01}$ ), an F-value of 6.63 was found. Since the calculated F-value of 9.453417 is greater than the critical F-value of 6.63, it was concluded that work overload is a predictor of teacher burnout. Thus, the research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) which states that work overload is a predictor of teacher burnout was retained while the null or statistical hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), which states that work overload is not a predictor of teacher

**Table 2.** Multiple regression analysis of burnout on work overload.

Regression	Statistics
R	0.162
R Square	0.026
Adjusted R Square	0.024
Standard Error	13.262

Analysis of Variance						
Model	N	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	Df	F	Sig
Regression	350	1662.587	1662.587	1	9.453417	P < .01
Residual		61203.3	175.8716	348	0.002	
Total		62865.89	1838.4586	349		

burnout, was rejected. Based on this, a conclusion is made that work overload results in burnout among primary school teachers in Lesotho. That is, work overload causes burnout among teachers. An assertion that work overload causes teacher burnout is further substantiated below.

#### **How work overload causes teacher burnout**

As depicted in Figure 1, work overload is a stressor that causes teacher burnout. The respondents indicated three ways in which work overload causes burnout among teachers in Lesotho. For example, 350 respondents suggested that teachers are assigned some tasks, without adequate resources, to execute them. The inadequacy of resources exposes teachers to burnout hazards due to failure to achieve the set goals. On the other hand, 150 respondents reiterated that one of the factors which burden teachers and causes burnout among them is the fact that teachers are requested to perform unnecessary tasks. The respondents complained that the principals take advantage of teachers and request them to perform tasks that are not related to their job descriptions. Two hundred respondents also reported that teachers are exposed to burnout because they are burdened with teaching many grades. For example, respondent number 16 (R16) stated that in his school, there are seven grades, which are taught by three teachers. Complaining about teaching many grades, R2 explained as follows:

*I teach five grades. This situation puts me under pressure to achieve my goals. It is stressful. Some learners fail because I am unable to reach every one of them.*

Still, in the same issue of teaching many grades as a stressor that results in teacher burnout, R3 (respondent number 3) explained her position as follows:

*I teach five grades every day of the week. I do not have enough time to rest. Preparing for five*

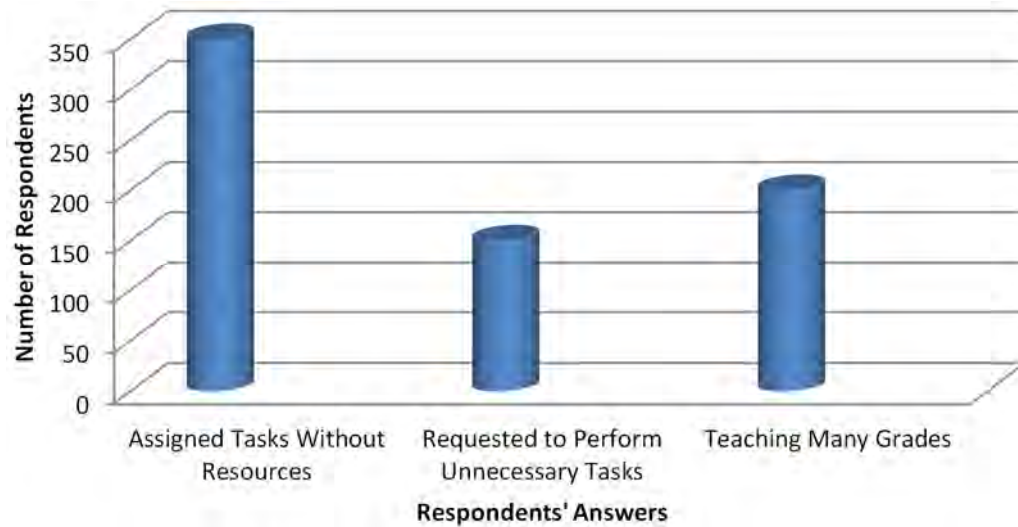
*groups of learners is a huge challenge. Teaching many grades is problematic and stressful, and burnout is inevitable under this circumstance.*

#### **Second null hypothesis tested**

H<sub>0</sub>: organisational climate is not a predictor of teacher burnout.

In analysing data in relation to organisational climate and teacher burnout, multiple regression analysis was carried out by regressing burnout scores on organisational climate scores. A summary of the results is presented in Table 3.

In Table 3, the regression analysis resulted in a correlation of 0.108 (R = 0.108) between the burnout score and organisational climate score. This value shows that organisational climate influences teacher burnout. The analysis further yielded the R square of 0.012 for organisational climate in relation to burnout. This implies that organisational climate accounted for 1.2 percent of the variance in burnout. Simply, this means that 1.2 percent of the variance (variation) in burnout is explained by organisational climate or is predictable from the variance in organisational climate. The regression analysis yielded the calculated F-value of 4.124. The calculated F-value (4.124) was then used with the degree of freedom (df) in the research problem (df = 1, n – 2), where n is the number of respondents. In this case, df = (1, 350 – 2 = 1, 348; 1 is the degree of freedom for the numerator and 348 is the degree of freedom for the denominator. **Note:** since the computed df (348) is greater than the table df (200) which is the highest df in the critical values of the F Distribution, the researcher then employed infinity (∞) as the degree of freedom (df). When the calculated F-value (F = 4.124) was compared with the critical value in the F Distribution with df = 1 and 348 (∞) and the p-value = 0.05 (F<sub>0.05</sub>), an F-value of 3.84 was found. Since the calculated F-value of 4.124 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.84, it was concluded that organisational climate is a predictor of teacher burnout.



**Figure 1.** Ways in which work overload influences teacher burnout.

**Table 3.** Regression analysis of burnout on organisational climate.

Regression	Statistics
R	0.108
R Square	0.012
Adjusted R Square	0.009
Standard Error	13.361

Analysis of Variance						
Model	N	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	Df	F	Sig
Regression	350	736.3584	736.3584	1	4.124	P < .05
Residual		62129.53	178.5331	348	0.043	
Total		62865.89	914.8915	349		

Thus, the research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ), which states that organisational climate is a predictor of teacher burnout, was retained while the null or statistical hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), which states that organisational climate is not a predictor of teacher burnout, was rejected. On the basis of these calculations, the conclusion is made that organisational climate results in burnout among primary school teachers in Lesotho. That is, organisational climate causes burnout among teachers. An assertion that organisational climate causes burnout among teachers, is further presented below.

### **Organisational climate and teacher burnout**

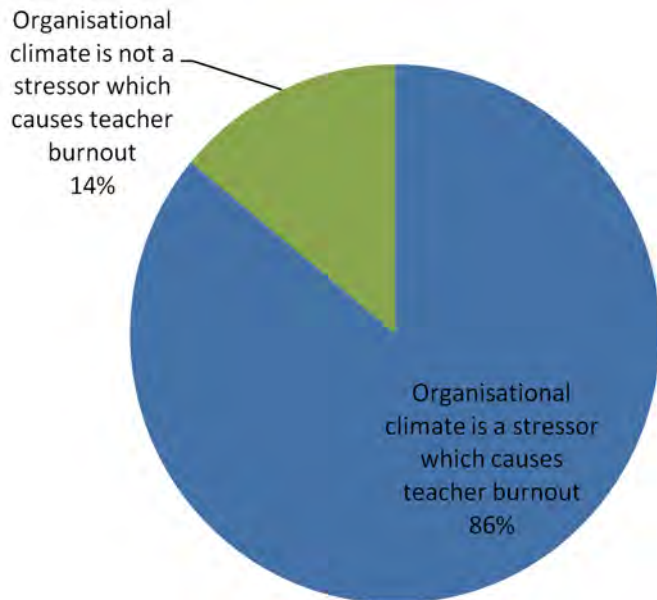
As illustrated in Figure 2, 86% of the respondents suggested that organisational climate is a stressor that causes burnout among teachers. The respondents reiterated that a bad work environment such as a lack of collaboration among colleagues results in a problem of

burnout; it contributes to a feeling of isolation among the teachers. The respondents mentioned a number of ways in which organisational climate causes burnout among teachers. For example, respondent number 300 (R300) illustrated this issue by saying:

*The climate of my school is unfavourable to teachers. Policies are imposed on teachers. Teachers are not involved when policies are developed. Policies merely serve as a means of controlling teachers. This situation is stressful and teachers cannot enjoy teaching.*

Another respondent, R310 also reported that organisational climate is one of the causes of burnout among teachers. She argued as follows:

*Teachers are professionals but in my school, teachers are denied the opportunity of exercising their professional autonomy. The*



**Figure 2.** The impact of organisational climate on teacher burnout.

*principal has the tendency to suggest the teaching methods that teachers should use. There is no way that teachers can avoid burnout under such circumstances. The management style of my principal frustrates teachers.*

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study are that work overload is a stressor that causes burnout among teachers. The respondents indicate various ways in which work overload causes burnout among teachers in Lesotho. For example, the respondents complain that the principals take advantage of teachers and request them to perform tasks that are not related to their job descriptions. From the responses, it is evident that teachers are burdened with several responsibilities. According to the unresearched observations of the researcher, the Lesotho primary school teachers are burdened with executing many tasks, most of which are not related to their job specifications. For instance, teachers supervise children when sweeping the classrooms, cleaning the toilets and cleaning the schoolyard. These tasks are compulsory. Being a teacher in a primary school in Lesotho calls for being a 'jack of all trades;' a teacher is expected to assume the responsibilities of a football/netball coach, choir conductor, supervisor, cleaner and counsellor. This situation shows that it is highly unlikely that teachers in the Lesotho primary schools can avoid the syndrome of burnout. Another finding of this study indicates that work overload is a factor that causes teacher burnout and relates to the teaching of many grades. As depicted in Figure 1, two hundred

respondents reported that teachers are exposed to burnout because they are burdened with teaching many grades. In illustrating this fact, R3 explained:

*I teach five grades every day of the week. I do not have enough time to rest. Preparing for five groups of learners is a huge challenge. Teaching many grades is problematic and stressful; burnout is inevitable under these circumstances.*

I support the argument that work overload in the form of teaching many grades, is a stressor; it causes burnout among teachers. According to my observation, there are cases in Lesotho in which a teacher teaches four grades. This problem is more common in rural schools. Teaching many grades is a problem that frustrates teachers. It does not only trigger burnout among teachers but it also forces them to quit their profession.

The second finding of this study is that organisational climate causes burnout among teachers. The respondents mentioned two ways in which this takes place. The first one is the imposition of policies on teachers. The second one is the lack of professional autonomy. In relation to the imposition of policies as a prevailing school climate that triggers teacher burnout, R300 reiterated that the climate of her school is characterised by a state in which policies are imposed on teachers, teachers are not involved when policies are developed and the school policies merely serve as a means of controlling teachers. Therefore, R300 concludes that this state of affairs exposes teachers to the problem of burnout. This finding is in line with the results of the studies which were conducted by Gardazi et al. (2016) and Hurlley (2021). This study concludes that organisational climate is a stressor that causes burnout among primary school teachers in Lesotho. The school climate in Lesotho is characterised by the imposing of educational policies on teachers. These problems create tension in the minds of teachers and it is unlikely that teachers can avoid the syndrome of burnout.

With regard to lack of professional autonomy as an aspect of organisational climate which exposes teachers to the condition of burnout, R310 argued that teachers are denied the opportunity to exercise their professional autonomy in the Lesotho primary schools. For example, he noted that the principal in his school has the tendency to suggest the teaching methods that teachers should use. R310, further argued as follows:

*There is no way that teachers can avoid burnout under such circumstances. The management style of the principal frustrates teachers.*

Another conclusion of this study is that a negative organisational climate causes burnout among primary school teachers in Lesotho. It is not conducive to teaching and learning. It frustrates teachers and is typified by poor management as R310 explains.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that work overload and organisational climate are predictors of burnout among primary school teachers in Lesotho. Work overload refers to a state in which an employee is assigned tasks that exceed his/her ability to execute them. Organisational climate refers to a worker's perception of the working environment of an institution, organisation, or firm he/she is working for. The worker may either perceive the working environment of his/her organisation as favourable or unfavourable to him/her. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- The number of grades taught by each teacher should be reduced and the teacher-learner ratio should be reduced from 1:40 to 1:35.
- The infrastructure in the primary schools should be improved, especially, the staff rooms and the classrooms.

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