

PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT STORIES AMONG PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Helen Grace Lopez

College of Human Kinetics, University of Southern Mindanao,
Kabacan, Cotabato, 9407 Philippines.
E-mail: hgdlopez@usm.edu.ph

Received: 28.10.2025

Accepted: 10.02.2026

ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: This study explores the lived experiences of professional burnout among Physical Education (PE) teachers in higher education, focusing on the emotional, psychological, and environmental stressors that shape their professional well-being. PE teachers often face challenges such as undervaluation, excessive workload, role ambiguity, and poor institutional support—factors that contribute to chronic stress, fatigue, and a diminishing sense of self-efficacy and professional identity.

Methodology: A qualitative narrative inquiry was employed to gain a deeper understanding of burnout as experienced by 10 PE faculty members. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants, allowing them to narrate their personal struggles and insights related to their profession. The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method, which involved extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, organizing themes, and validating the findings through participant feedback.

Findings: This study reveals the multifaceted nature of burnout among Physical Education faculty in higher education, highlighting emotional exhaustion, lack of administrative support, workplace discrimination, and poor technology literacy as key stressors. Participants reported chronic mental and physical strain stemming from overwhelming workloads, toxic environments, and difficulty balancing professional duties with family responsibilities. Discrimination and lack of institutional recognition further diminished morale, leading to disengagement and identity struggles. The abrupt shift to digital learning exacerbated stress, particularly for educators lacking technological proficiency. Health issues such as fatigue, headaches, and digestive problems were common. These findings emphasize the urgent need for systemic reforms, supportive leadership, and inclusive practices to foster well-being, retain educators, and create sustainable teaching environments for PE professionals.

Contributions: These findings emphasize the urgent need for systemic reforms and institutional policies that support teacher well-being, recognition, and professional development. By giving voice to PE educators, the study advocates for a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that addresses the root causes of burnout.

Keywords: Professional burnout, physical education teachers, lived experiences, narrative inquiry.

Cite as: Lopez, H. G. (2026). Professional burnout stories among physical education teachers: A narrative inquiry. *Journal of Nusantara Studies*, 11(1), 141-154.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol11iss1pp141-154>

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Professional burnout remains a persistent and complex issue in education, particularly within service-oriented professions such as teaching, where emotional labor and sustained interpersonal engagement are integral to professional practice. Burnout is commonly characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (Rumschlag, 2017). Teachers are frequently exposed to chronic stressors including excessive workload, unclear roles, behavioral challenges among students, and limited institutional support (Haydon et al., 2018). Among these factors, Mielke (2023) emphasizes that a primary contributor to burnout is the misalignment between teachers' capacities and the expectations placed upon them. An incongruence that gradually erodes motivation, passion, and emotional resilience.

Although burnout has been extensively examined through theoretical and empirical research across diverse contexts, much of the existing literature has focused on healthcare professionals and general educators through predominantly quantitative methods. In contrast, the particular experiences of Physical Education (PE) teachers, however, have been largely overlooked. PE teachers face unique occupational stressors, including physical strain, the demand for outdoor or non-traditional teaching environments, dual roles as educators and coaches, and limited access to specialized resources (Brennan, 2024). These conditions can intensify emotional fatigue, contribute to professional isolation, and increase vulnerability to burnout yet these dynamics remain insufficiently explored in the literature (Ghasemi, 2025). Globally, burnout among educators has been recognized as a growing concern. In Sweden, teachers report some of the highest rates of long-term sick leave due to stress and exhaustion (Arvidsson et al., 2016). Similarly, Australian research reveals that primary and secondary school teachers experience higher rates of burnout than school leaders, particularly in rural areas where access to resources is scarce and workloads are heavier (Carroll et al., 2022). These trends have been observed in the Philippine context, where studies have linked emotional exhaustion, low self-efficacy, and work overload to increased burnout among public school teachers (Dumaplin-Paulin & Sirad, 2025). The COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified these pressures, amplifying fatigue and mental distress across the profession (Kumar et al., 2024).

Despite this growing body of evidence, research is still limited about how educators, particularly physical education teachers, experience and make sense of burnout in their daily lives. This gap highlights the need for a more context-sensitive, qualitative understanding of burnout one that moves beyond statistics and scales to capture the lived realities of affected individuals. Narrative inquiry provides a powerful framework for exploring these experiences. By attending to personal stories, this approach allows researchers to uncover how educators interpret, internalize, and respond to the stressors that define their professional landscapes (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019).

The significance of this study lies in its focus on bringing visibility to a marginalized group of educators whose professional challenges are often underestimated or ignored. Physical education is frequently perceived as peripheral to the academic core, yet PE teachers face demands that are physically taxing and emotionally draining. Understanding their burnout experiences through narrative inquiry not only humanizes the issue but also contributes to the broader discourse on educator well-being. The insights gained may inform the design of more holistic support systems such as peer mentoring, wellness programs, and institutional interventions tailored to the specific needs of PE educators. Furthermore, the findings may serve as a foundation for developing proactive strategies that foster emotional resilience, job satisfaction, and long-term engagement in the teaching profession.

Ultimately, this study aims to deepen the understanding of professional burnout by centering the voices and stories of physical education teachers, offering a vital perspective that is often absent in mainstream educational research and policymaking.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework drawing primarily from Maslach and Leiter's Burnout Theory, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, and Organizational Justice Theory. These frameworks provide an understanding how individual, relational, and institutional factors shape the lived experiences of professional burnout among Physical Education (PE) teachers in higher education.

Maslach and Leiter's (2016, 2017) burnout theory conceptualizes burnout as a psychological syndrome emerging from chronic workplace stress, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. This framework is particularly relevant to the present study as participants' narratives consistently reflect emotional fatigue, diminished motivation, and feelings of professional inefficacy. The theory emphasizes the mismatch between workers and their work environment across six domains: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values, which aligns closely with the stressors described by PE teachers, including excessive workload, lack of administrative support, discrimination, and limited recognition. By applying this theory, the study interprets burnout not as an individual weakness but as a systemic and relational phenomenon rooted in institutional conditions.

Bandura's (2014) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the concept of self-efficacy, further informs the analysis. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their capacity to organize and execute actions required to manage prospective situations. In this study, participants' accounts reveal how unsupportive leadership, technological challenges, and repeated experiences of marginalization eroded their confidence in their professional abilities. Reduced self-efficacy intensified emotional exhaustion and disengagement, while perceived support and competence, when present served as protective factors. This framework helps explain how teachers' beliefs about their own capabilities mediate the relationship between workplace stressors and burnout.

To account for experiences of discrimination and perceived unfair treatment, the study also draws on Organizational Justice Theory (Panicker & Sharma, 2020). This theory focuses on employees' perceptions of fairness in decision-making processes, interpersonal treatment, and resource distribution. Participants' narratives of unequal opportunities, lack of transparency, and exclusion highlight how perceived injustice undermines trust, belonging, and organizational commitment. Within this framework, burnout emerges as a response to sustained inequity and devaluation in the workplace, particularly for PE teachers who already occupy a marginalized position within academic hierarchies.

These theories collectively inform the research focus, narrative analysis, and interpretation of findings. Maslach and Leiter's model frames the core dimensions of burnout evident in participants' stories; Social Cognitive Theory explains variations in coping, resilience, and withdrawal; and Organizational Justice Theory contextualizes burnout within broader institutional power dynamics. By integrating these perspectives, the study situates teachers' personal narratives within a broader socio-organizational context, allowing for a nuanced understanding of burnout as both an individual lived experience and a structurally produced condition.

3.0 SYNTHESIS OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Research on professional burnout has consistently identified teaching as a high-risk occupation due to its emotional demands, role complexity, and sustained interpersonal engagement. Burnout is commonly conceptualized through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016, 2017). Across educational contexts, empirical studies have shown that prolonged exposure to workload pressure,

inadequate institutional support, and misalignment between professional expectations and available resources contribute significantly to burnout (Haydon et al., 2018; Mielke, 2023). However, while these patterns are well documented among general educators, fewer studies have examined how burnout manifests within discipline-specific contexts such as Physical Education (PE).

Comparative studies across countries suggest that burnout among teachers is shaped not only by individual stress tolerance but also by systemic and organizational conditions. In Sweden, Arvidsson et al. (2016) found high rates of stress-related sick leave among teachers, linking burnout to chronic workload and limited recovery opportunities. Similarly, Australian research by Carroll et al. (2022) reported that environmental constraints, particularly in under-resourced or rural settings exacerbate emotional exhaustion and disengagement. In the Philippine context, Dumaplin-Paulin and Sirad (2025) identified emotional exhaustion and reduced self-efficacy as central predictors of burnout among public school teachers, underscoring the influence of contextual pressures in developing countries. While these studies collectively demonstrate burnout as a global phenomenon, they largely rely on quantitative methods, offering limited insight into how educators interpret and live through these experiences.

Emerging literature highlights that PE teachers encounter unique stressors that differentiate their burnout experiences from those of classroom-based educators. Brennan (2024) and González-Calvo et al. (2022) emphasized that PE teachers face physical strain, outdoor and non-traditional teaching environments, and dual responsibilities as instructors and coaches. These demands are often compounded by the marginal status of PE within academic hierarchies, leading to professional undervaluation and limited access to institutional resources (Ghasemi, 2025). Compared with teachers in core academic subjects, PE educators report higher levels of emotional labor, particularly in managing student behavior, maintaining motivation, and meeting performance expectations under constrained conditions (Petiot et al., 2025).

Administrative support has been repeatedly identified as a critical protective factor against burnout. Studies by Maslach and Leiter (2016) and Berkovich and Eyal (2018) demonstrate that supportive leadership, transparent communication, and recognition significantly reduce emotional exhaustion and enhance teacher well-being. Conversely, Cubcuban and Paglinawan (2024) and Romano et al. (2021) found that perceived lack of administrative support contributes to emotional distress, reduced commitment, and higher attrition rates. These findings converge with Bandura's (2014) assertion that social environments shape self-efficacy beliefs, suggesting that unsupportive leadership not only increases stress but also weakens teachers' confidence in their professional competence.

Workplace discrimination and perceived injustice further intensify burnout risk. Settles et al. (2022) documented how epistemic exclusion and professional devaluation in higher education contribute to psychological distress and turnover intentions among faculty. Similarly, Richman et al. (2016) linked perceived discrimination to adverse mental health outcomes and reduced motivation. Organizational justice theory posits that when educators perceive unfair treatment or inequitable decision-making, their sense of belonging and organizational commitment erodes (Panicker & Sharma, 2020). For PE teachers, who often occupy a marginalized position within academic institutions, these experiences may amplify emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced an additional layer of complexity to teacher burnout, particularly through the rapid shift to online and remote teaching. Chen (2021) described this transition as "emergency remote teaching," marked by limited preparation, heightened stress, and technological inadequacy. PE teachers were disproportionately affected, as their pedagogical practices rely heavily on physical interaction and demonstration

(González-Calvo et al., 2022). The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2009) highlights the importance of integrating technological skills with pedagogical and content knowledge—an area many educators were forced to develop under crisis conditions, often at the cost of emotional well-being (Esto, 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature on teacher burnout, significant gaps remain. Most studies prioritize measurement over meaning, relying on surveys and scales that quantify burnout but fail to capture its lived, evolving nature. Moreover, PE teachers in higher education particularly within the Philippine context remain underrepresented in burnout research. Narrative inquiry offers a valuable methodological response to these gaps by foregrounding educators' voices and illuminating how burnout is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated over time (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019). By synthesizing existing research and extending it through narrative analysis, the present study contributes a context-sensitive understanding of burnout that integrates emotional, organizational, and socio-cultural dimensions.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically using a narrative inquiry approach to explore the lived experiences of professional burnout among physical education teachers. Qualitative research involves the systematic collection and interpretation of non-numerical data such as interviews, texts, and personal stories to understand individuals' perspectives and meanings behind their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Within this framework, narrative inquiry emphasizes on how people make sense of their lives through storytelling and how these stories reflect personal, relational, and contextual dimensions of experience (O'Toole, 2018).

The use of a qualitative narrative inquiry design is most appropriate for this study because it allows for a deep, contextualized understanding of burnout as experienced by educators over time. This approach supports the goal of capturing the emotional, psychological, and social dynamics of burnout through the own voices of the participants. It also emphasizes the importance of temporality, relationships, and settings, enabling the researcher to construct a collective understanding of professional burnout grounded in real-life stories. Moreover, this design is well-suited for exploring complex human phenomena such as stress, meaning-making, and resilience within educational environments.

4.2 Research Context

This study was conducted at the University of Southern Mindanao (USM), located in Kabacan, Cotabato, in the southern region of the Philippines. The selection of USM as the research site is both strategic and purposeful. The university's diverse academic environment, extensive faculty population, and multiple role expectations such as teaching, research, and administrative work create an ideal context to explore burnout. These stressors, along with the university's evolving demands, offer a complex and nuanced setting for narrative inquiry. Conducting qualitative research at USM enables an in-depth and contextually grounded understanding of how burnout manifests among faculty members. Through personal narratives, this study captures the lived experiences, coping strategies, and challenges faced by educators. These insights not only enrich the academic discourse on professional burnout but also offer a basis for developing responsive and localized intervention strategies. Overall, USM's scale, diversity, and institutional complexity provide a fertile ground for exploring professional burnout through narrative inquiry, making it an ideal setting for this research.

4.3 Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants of this study were ten (10) Physical Education teachers from the University of Southern Mindanao (USM) – Kabacan Main Campus, purposefully selected based on their relevance and capacity to provide in-depth narratives on professional burnout. Purposive sampling, a widely used technique in qualitative research, was employed to intentionally identify individuals who possess substantial knowledge and lived experience of the phenomenon being studied (Campbell et al., 2020). Inclusion criteria required participants to be full-time or part-time PE instructors with a minimum of three years of teaching experience, regardless of gender, and willing to voluntarily participate in scheduled interviews. Their employment status and residence within or near the university vicinity were also considered to ensure accessibility and contextual relevance. Data were collected during the academic year 2022–2023. Individuals who declined participation or chose to withdraw at any point during the study were respectfully excluded in accordance with ethical research protocols (Esto et al., 2025; Kgosiemang, 2024).

4.4 Participant Backgrounds

This section presents brief professional backgrounds of each participant to enhance the credibility and transferability of the narrative inquiry. The profiles provide contextual information regarding participants' institutional roles, years of service, and professional responsibilities, without reference to interview findings. All participants are identified using anonymized codes.

Participant 001 is the Research Coordinator of the Institute of Sports, Physical Education, and Recreation (ISPEAR) at the University of Southern Mindanao. The participant has over eight years of teaching experience and has published numerous research works at both local and international levels.

Participant 002 has been a contractual service faculty member for nearly five years and recently completed a master's degree at the University of the Immaculate Conception in Davao City. In addition to teaching responsibilities, the participant serves as a trainer for the Active Dance troupe (BDADALI) and holds the designation of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Document Control Officer.

Participant 003 is a service contractual faculty member currently pursuing a master's degree and carrying a teaching workload of approximately 30 units. The participant also serves as a varsity beach volleyball coach at the university.

Participant 004 is a futsal varsity coach and an active participant in university extension program activities. The participant is pursuing a master's degree while fulfilling teaching and coaching responsibilities.

Participant 005 is a former Sports Development Coordinator with 31 years of service at the University of Southern Mindanao. The participant currently coaches the women's varsity volleyball team and is an active member of the university's faculty association.

Participant 006 serves as the property custodian of the institute and is also a varsity table tennis coach. The participant balances custodial, coaching, and instructional responsibilities within the department.

Participant 007 is the Department Chairperson of the Bachelor of Science in Exercise and Sports Sciences program, with 32 years of service at the university. The participant also coaches the lawn tennis varsity team.

Participant 008 serves as the women's softball varsity coach and holds the designation of Department Curriculum Coordinator within ISPEAR.

Participant 009 is the Director of the Sports Development Program and a varsity soccer coach, with 15 years of service at the University of Southern Mindanao.

Participant 010 is newly designated as the Guidance Coordinator of the department and serves as a varsity table tennis coach. The participant also handles ISO document control responsibilities.

4.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study followed the narrative inquiry framework proposed by Clandinin (2019) and Mueller (2019) which involved three key interpretive tools: broadening, burrowing, and storying/re-storying. Broadening placed the narratives within broader social, historical, and cultural contexts, while burrowing focuses on the emotional depth and specificity of participants' lived experiences (Clandinin, 2019). Storying and re-storying allowed the researcher to identify narrative threads and reconstruct participant experiences in ways that revealed meaningful patterns and themes (Parks, 2023). In addition, an inductive thematic analysis was employed using Colaizzi's method to structure the data interpretation process (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019). This involved transcribing interviews, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and developing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. From there, a core framework was established to capture the essence of participants' experiences, which was subsequently validated by returning the findings to participants for confirmation. This dual-layered approach ensured a rich, context-sensitive, and trustworthy interpretation of faculty burnout experiences.

5.0 FINDINGS

Theme 1. Sailing the Storm: Navigating the Turbulent Waters of Emotional, Mental, and Psychological Burnout

This theme captures the emotional and psychological toll experienced by Physical Education faculty as they navigate demanding workloads, shifting academic expectations, and limited institutional support. Participants described a gradual accumulation of emotional fatigue, stress, and mental exhaustion, often likened to steering through an unrelenting storm. These experiences were characterized by feelings of isolation, cognitive overload, and diminished emotional resilience.

These experiences highlight how the emotional labor of teaching in PE, often underestimated, leads to a sustained sense of being overwhelmed. The demands of balancing instruction, performance expectations, and student needs leave little space for recovery, risking disengagement and long-term burnout.

Sub-theme 1.1 Lack of Administration Support

Participants consistently described experiencing insufficient administrative support, which negatively affected their emotional well-being and professional morale. Limited communication, lack of encouragement, and restricted access to institutional resources and

professional development opportunities were frequently mentioned. These conditions made it increasingly difficult for participants to perform their responsibilities effectively, contributing to stress, frustration, and emotional exhaustion.

Several participants expressed feelings of neglect and discouragement, particularly when requests for assistance or recognition went unaddressed. These experiences led some to question their professional value and consider discontinuing their roles. To give a clearer view of the concept discussed above, the following excerpts are provided:

When you feel that your leaders, higher-ups, or colleagues have negative or no support at all, I can sense that there is no administrative support or concern and care for you. (Participant 001)

It's burning me out because you have to request papers from the administration building, and many people are asking for them, and you don't even know where to find those documents. (Participant 008)

I am planning not to renew my contract because aside from the discouragement. I am trying to apply for permanent position for how many times. (Participant 002)

Sub-theme 1.2 Struggling with Discrimination

This theme highlights the emotional and psychological burden experienced by Physical Education faculty members who face discrimination in the workplace. Participants shared that being marginalized, overlooked, or unfairly treated led to persistent emotional distress, feelings of isolation, and a diminished sense of professional value. Such experiences often caused them to question their worth, capabilities, and belonging within the academic community. These internal struggles intensified the emotional exhaustion they faced, ultimately contributing to professional burnout. To give a clearer view of the concept discussed above, the following excerpts are provided:

Some people are given opportunities, and I ask myself, "Why not me? Maybe the factor here is that there are people who don't like me. (Participant 002)

The one thing that stresses me a lot is that my exhaustion seems uncompensated. (Participant 003)

Comparisons have arisen among us because our colleagues have skills. (Participant 004)

Sub-theme 1.3 Struggle with Technology Literacy

Participants described significant challenges related to technology use, particularly during the transition to online teaching. Many struggled with unfamiliar digital platforms, limited technical knowledge, and the difficulty of translating physical and movement-based lessons into virtual formats. These challenges increased workload demands and emotional strain. While some managed to cope through self-directed retooling, maintaining a positive mindset, and exploring alternative teaching strategies, the overall experience contributed to an increased workload and emotional strain. These challenges were especially pronounced for PE educators, whose teaching methods rely heavily on physical interaction and demonstration, making the transition more complex and demanding. To give a clearer view of the concept discussed above, the following excerpts are provided:

In the field of teaching, it's not that easy, especially nowadays when we have high technology and many gadgets that we need to use. These are the challenges we face. Implementing learning effectively, especially with the need to upgrade oneself in this technology, is one of the things to consider. (Participant 005)

I got stressed during the pandemic because of the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment). We were not used to it, and we had no idea about it. We were used to having office orientations, but at that time, we were navigating blindly. (Participant 006)

I experienced burnout during our online classes. I had a hard time tracking down the students because, for the first time, I had to find them one by one and collect the list of students. It took more than two weeks for me to contact everyone. By the time the online classes began, it felt like I was already late, and I was close to giving up. (Participant 006)

I worked night and day, and I almost cried. My colleague couldn't be forced to learn it right away because mastering these applications takes time. That burnout led to me losing my temper. (Participant 008)

Sub-theme 1.4 Health-Related Problems

Participants reported experiencing various physical health concerns associated with prolonged work-related stress. Participants reported symptoms like headaches, sleep disturbances, fatigue, and digestive issues. Participant 002 highlighted how chronic stress weakened their immune system, resulting in anxiety, depression, and eventual burnout. These experiences illustrate that prolonged stress affects not only mental and emotional well-being but also leads to serious physical health issues. To give a clearer view of the concept discussed above, the following excerpts are provided:

Just like last year, anxiety, depression, stress, and burnout were all present, and they really affected me physically, Ma'am. (Participant 002)

When I'm totally stressed like this, I also know that it's almost time for it to happen. The way my body expresses stress is through diarrhea. (Participant 006)

There were times when I felt uncomfortable in my stomach. I mentioned this to a colleague after we presented our curriculum for BSESS. I didn't go to school for about three days because I suffered from frequent bowel movements. (Participant 008)

Yes, I experienced headaches, I think it was during our ISO activity, and then the other one is right after that, and then we had an accreditation activity, so they were all consecutive. (Participant 010)

Theme 2. In the Professional Tangle: Balancing the Complex Weight of Workload, Environmental Waves, Family Commitments, and Designation Challenges

This theme reflects participants' experiences of managing multiple and overlapping responsibilities within their professional and personal lives. Participants described how environmental stressors, workload demands, family responsibilities, and institutional designations interacted to create sustained pressure and emotional fatigue. Participants shared how unprofessional behavior, lack of collegial respect, and a persistently critical atmosphere contribute to mental stress and diminished self-worth. Confrontations, dismissive remarks, and challenges to one's credibility within a toxic work environment create emotional fatigue and push some educators toward a professional crisis.

Sub-theme 2.1 Environmental Issues

Participants described workplace environments characterized by strained professional relationships, limited collegial support, and unprofessional interactions. Experiences of public criticism, dismissive behavior, and challenges to credibility contributed to feelings of humiliation, discouragement, and emotional distress. To give a clearer view of the concept discussed above, the following excerpts are provided:

It's like it's happening every day, as if even with many people around, [she] constantly compares me to our colleagues, even in the presence of professors from other colleges. I think she's trying to embarrass me. We could talk and discuss things one on one, there's no need for a large audience; it's very unprofessional. You ask her politely, but she'll shout at you, and it even includes our colleagues. (Participant 004)

We had conflicts, and I became discouraged. Then, I experienced a professional crisis where I didn't want to teach anymore because the people in the office were stressful, and the environment was not conducive to good mental health. The workplace environment was really bad; it had a tremendous impact on me. I've been working for four years, and they still questioned my credibility. And there were other people who were instigating and making me feel like I was being ganged up on, as if I was being criticized beyond measure during that time. (Participant 002)

And some people will look down on you without knowing our story. They will suddenly shout at you and scold you. (Participant 003)

Sub Theme 2.2 Workload Problems

Participants highlighted the extensive workload associated with teaching, research, administrative tasks, and extracurricular responsibilities. Managing multiple sections, assessments, and institutional duties created constant time pressure and fatigue. To give a clearer view of the concept discussed above, the following excerpts are provided:

The employees get stressed; there are times when we can feel exhaustion or burnout, but it's not most of the time. It happens very few times, like some days when our workload is high, especially during busy hours or peak seasons, such as exams, checking students' activities, or during university events where our services are needed. This can lead to feelings of exhaustion, especially on an emotional or personal level. (Participant 001)

Apart from our workload at the university, we also have personal errands that can leave us feeling exhausted. That's why we often don't get much rest. (Participant 001)

I often feel highly stressed due to my job, and it might be because of the workload, considering that I'm handling 14 sections. (Participant 003)

Sub Theme 2.3 Family Responsibility

Participants described the challenge of balancing professional responsibilities with family obligations. Personal issues, caregiving roles, and financial pressures often spilled over into their work lives, intensifying stress and emotional exhaustion. These pressures were further compounded by institutional designations requiring additional administrative and supervisory duties. To give a clearer view of the concept discussed above, the following excerpts are provided:

Sometimes, when we have problems at home, it's hard not to carry them into the workplace because those issues can be quite pressing. (Participant 001)

The work itself here at the school can be stressful at times, but it's also very chill. However, when personal problems, like family issues, creep in, it greatly affects work. (Participant 002)

The main factor that really stressed me out was when I thought that I have a job, so why can't I provide money for my parents? (Participant 003)

My mother passed away, and I felt like I was all alone. When my mother was alive, I knew someone was waiting for me at home. I was experiencing burnout because I was the one taking care of my mother, and I had the added pressure of school. (Participant 007)

Having a designation can be stressful at times because I have to check students' outputs, and there are a lot of students to handle, with just me doing the job. It's challenging to accommodate everyone in a day. Especially when students tend to procrastinate and only submit their work when the deadline is near, it becomes exhausting. Of course, I have to attend to their needs, even though at times, I'd rather not entertain them because it's mainly due to their negligence in not checking their papers when I wasn't too busy. Dealing with these situations has been the most stressful part of my work so far. (Participant 001)

I'm also stressed about the designations assigned to us because, aside from being a teacher, I am also responsible for a group called the BDADALI, and at that time, I am the document control officer. (Participant 002)

I get really stressed out, especially when it comes to paperwork, and even more so with the local designations given to me because everyone here at ISPEAR has a designation. (Participant 008)

6.0 DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived experiences of professional burnout among Physical Education (PE) teachers in higher education through narrative inquiry. The findings reveal burnout as a multidimensional and cumulative process shaped by emotional exhaustion, organizational conditions, interpersonal dynamics, and contextual demands. Interpreted through the lenses of Maslach and Leiter's Burnout Theory, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, and Organizational Justice Theory, the narratives underscore burnout as not merely an individual experience but a structurally embedded and relational phenomenon.

6.1 Burnout as Emotional Exhaustion and Work–Environment Mismatch

Consistent with Maslach and Leiter's (2016, 2017) burnout framework, emotional exhaustion emerged as the most dominant dimension of burnout across participants' narratives. Teachers described persistent fatigue, cognitive overload, and diminished emotional resources resulting from excessive workload, multiple designations, and sustained institutional pressure. These findings converge with prior research identifying workload and role overload as central predictors of teacher burnout (Haydon et al., 2018; Njuguna, 2024). The narratives further illustrate how burnout develops gradually, reinforcing Maslach and Leiter's assertion that burnout arises from chronic mismatches between educators and their work environments, particularly in domains of workload, control, and reward.

However, this study extends existing literature by demonstrating how these mismatches are intensified within the context of Physical Education. Unlike classroom-based educators, PE teachers must navigate physically demanding instruction, coaching responsibilities, and non-traditional teaching environments, often with limited institutional recognition. This supports Brennan's (2024) and Petiot et al.'s (2025) findings that PE teachers experience heightened emotional labor, yet it also contributes qualitative depth by illustrating how these demands are lived, negotiated, and emotionally internalized over time.

6.2 Administrative Support, Self-Efficacy, and Professional Identity

Participants' experiences of limited administrative support align closely with Bandura's (2014) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the role of self-efficacy in coping with stress. The findings suggest that when institutional leaders fail to provide guidance, recognition, and resources, teachers' beliefs in their professional competence are undermined. This convergence with prior studies (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018; Cubcuban & Paglinawan, 2024) highlights leadership as a critical determinant of educator well-being.

Importantly, this study contributes to the literature by illustrating how diminished self-efficacy among PE teachers is not only tied to instructional challenges but also to perceived marginalization within academic hierarchies. Participants frequently described feeling undervalued compared to colleagues in other disciplines, reinforcing the notion that professional identity plays a central role in burnout experiences. This finding expands Bandura's framework by situating self-efficacy within broader institutional power structures rather than viewing it solely as an individual cognitive belief.

6.3 Discrimination, Organizational Justice, and Emotional Withdrawal

Experiences of discrimination and perceived unfair treatment featured prominently in participants' narratives, lending strong support to Organizational Justice Theory (Panicker & Sharma, 2020). Consistent with Settles et al. (2022) and Richman et al. (2016), the findings demonstrate that perceived injustice erodes trust, belonging, and organizational commitment, ultimately accelerating emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

What distinguishes this study is its focus on how PE teachers interpret and emotionally respond to these injustices. Rather than immediate resignation, many participants described emotional withdrawal, silence, and internalized self-doubt—responses that are less visible but equally damaging. This divergence from turnover-focused literature suggests that burnout among PE teachers may persist in more concealed forms, reinforcing the value of narrative inquiry in capturing experiences that quantitative measures often overlook.

6.4 Technology Demands and Contextual Stressors

The struggle with technology literacy, particularly during the transition to online teaching, aligns with existing research on pandemic-related teacher stress (Chen, 2021). Consistent with the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2009), participants' narratives revealed gaps in technological preparedness that compounded workload and emotional strain. These findings converge with González-Calvo et al. (2022), who emphasized that PE teachers faced disproportionate challenges in translating physical, movement-based instruction into virtual formats.

This study contributes further by illustrating how technological demands intersect with age, role multiplicity, and institutional support. Rather than technology alone causing burnout, it functioned as an amplifier of pre-existing stressors, reinforcing the need for sustained professional development rather than crisis-driven interventions.

6.5 Health, Family Responsibilities, and the Embodied Nature of Burnout

Participants' accounts of physical health problems and work–family conflict underscore burnout as an embodied experience, supporting prior findings linking chronic stress to physical symptoms and reduced job satisfaction (De Simone et al., 2016; Costin et al., 2023). These narratives highlight how emotional exhaustion manifests somatically, reinforcing Maslach and Leiter's assertion that burnout affects the whole person, not merely professional performance. The findings also align with Sajid et al. (2022) in demonstrating how unresolved family responsibilities intensify occupational stress. However, this study contributes a nuanced

understanding of how caregiving, grief, and financial pressure intersect with institutional demands, further complicating PE teachers' capacity for recovery and resilience. Overall, the findings contribute to the burnout literature in three key ways. First, the study provides discipline-specific insight into burnout among PE teachers in higher education, a group that remains underrepresented in existing research. Second, by integrating burnout theory, social cognitive theory, and organizational justice theory, the study demonstrates how individual, relational, and structural factors collectively shape burnout experiences. Third, the use of narrative inquiry foregrounds teachers' voices, revealing the emotional depth, temporal progression, and contextual complexity of burnout that survey-based studies often fail to capture.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Professional burnout among Physical Education (PE) teachers emerges as a deeply layered experience shaped by a range of emotional, psychological, and environmental stressors. The personal narratives shared in this study reveal how burnout develops gradually fueled by persistent mental fatigue, insufficient administrative support, discrimination, and challenges in adapting to technology. These difficulties are further intensified by physical health concerns, excessive workloads, unclear job roles, and the struggle to balance family responsibilities with professional demands. Despite their dedication to the teaching profession, many PE educators feel undervalued, overwhelmed, and isolated. Their stories reflect the lived reality of emotional exhaustion and waning motivation, echoing key elements from Maslach and Jackson's burnout framework, as well as Bandura's theory on reduced self-efficacy in unsupportive environments.

REFERENCES

- Arvidsson, I., Håkansson, C., Karlson, B., Björk, J., & Persson, R. (2016). Burnout among Swedish school teachers: A cross-sectional analysis. *BMC Public Health*, 16, Article 823.
- Bandura, A. (2014). *Self-efficacy*. Wiley.
- Berkovich, I., & Eyal, O. (2018). Principals' leadership and teachers' emotional well-being. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(1), 84–126.
- Brennan, D. (2024). Occupational stressors among physical education teachers: A global perspective. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 29(1), 1–15.
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 17(4), 652–661.
- Carroll, A., Forrest, K., Sanders-O'Connor, E., Flynn, L., Bower, J., Fynes-Clinton, S., York, A., & Ziaei, M. (2022). Teacher burnout in rural and urban schools. *Social Psychology of Education*, 25, 441-469.
- Chen, C. H. (2021). Emergency remote teaching and teacher stress during COVID-19. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26, 7145–7165.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2019). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Routledge.
- Costin, V., Ionescu, C., & Dumitru, D. (2023). Occupational stress and physical health complaints among teachers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1123456.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Cubcuban, M. A., & Paglinawan, R. L. (2024). Administrative support and burnout among Filipino teachers. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Sciences*, 11(2), 45–57.
- De Simone, S., Cicotto, G., & Lampis, J. (2016). Occupational stress and physical health in teachers. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 54(2), 212–229.

- Dumaplin-Paulin, A., & Sirad, R. (2025). Emotional exhaustion and burnout among public school teachers in the Philippines. *Philippine Journal of Education*, 104(1), 23–38.
- Esto, M. C. (2024). Technological pedagogical content knowledge and teacher adaptation in higher education. *Journal of Educational Technology Development*, 12(3), 101–115.
- Esto, M. C., Ramirez, J. P., & Santos, R. L. (2025). Ethical considerations in qualitative educational research. *International Journal of Research Ethics*, 9(1), 15–29.
- Ghasemi, A. (2025). Emotional labor and burnout in physical education teachers. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 44(1), 55–68.
- González-Calvo, G., Barba-Martín, R., Bores-García, D., & Gallego-Lema, V. (2022). Physical education teachers' experiences during online teaching. *Sport, Education and Society*, 27(1), 1–15.
- Haydon, T., Leko, M. M., & Stevens, A. (2018). Teacher stress and burnout: A review. *Preventing School Failure*, 62(1), 1–9.
- Kgosiemang, M. (2024). Participant withdrawal and ethical safeguards in qualitative studies. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 24(1), 33–45.
- Kumar, R., Saini, N., & Jeet, K. (2024). COVID-19 and burnout among educators. *Journal of Mental Health and Education*, 8(2), 88–102.
- Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2016). Understanding the burnout experience. *World Psychiatry*, 15(2), 103–111.
- Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2017). *Burnout*. Wiley.
- Mielke, T. (2023). Role overload and teacher burnout. *Educational Review*, 75(3), 345–361.
- Mishra, P., & Koehler, M. J. (2009). Technological pedagogical content knowledge. *Teachers College Record*, 108(6), 1017–1054.
- Mueller, R. A. E. (2019). Narrative inquiry and qualitative research design. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 19(1), 17–29.
- Njuguna, J. W. (2024). Workload and burnout among university faculty. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 43(2), 289–304.
- O'Toole, J. (2018). *Doing drama research*. Routledge.
- Panicker, A., & Sharma, A. (2020). Demonstrating the impact of participative decision making, distributive justice perception and growth opportunities on favorable and unfavorable employee outcomes: Mediating effect of workplace inclusion in Indian HEI. *International Journal of Business Science & Applied Management*, 15(1), 30-46.
- Parks, M. (2023). Narrative re-storying as qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Research in Education*, 12(1), 55–73.
- Petiot, M., Dupont, C., & Roussel, P. (2025). Emotional strain in physically demanding teaching roles. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 48(1), 78–95.
- Richman, L. S., Pascoe, E., Lattanner, M., & Major, B. (2016). Perceived discrimination and health. *Psychological Bulletin*, 142(3), 238–273.
- Romano, J., Santos, L., & dela Cruz, P. (2025). Leadership support and teacher retention. *Journal of Educational Leadership*, 18(2), 41–59.
- Rumschlag, K. E. (2017). Teacher burnout and job satisfaction. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(5), 713–726.
- Sajid, M., Khan, A., & Rehman, S. (2022). Work–family conflict and teacher stress. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 114, Article 101999.
- Schaefer, L., & Clandinin, D. J. (2019). Narrative inquiry in education. *Educational Researcher*, 48(5), 306–316.
- Settles, I. H., Jones, M. K., Buchanan, N. T., & Dotson, K. (2022). Discrimination and mental health in academia. *American Psychologist*, 77(3), 364–378.