

Teacher Burnout and Reflective practice: A Critical Examination

Ramona Furtună, Paul Cristian Lungeanu

Teacher Burnout and Reflective practice: A Critical Examination

Ramona Furtună^{a*}, Paul Cristian Lungeanu^a

^a Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania

*Corresponding author: ramona.furtuna@drd.unibuc.ro

Abstract

Keywords:

reflective practice; burnout;
teaching profession; continuous
professional development;
teacher wellbeing

Any profession requiring continuous professional development, like teaching, should focus on reflective practice, as society expects new teachers to engage in this process. Dewey and Schön both emphasized reflection in education, with Schön introducing the action-reflection model, which involves identifying a problem and taking steps to improve. Reflective practice helps increase the likelihood of improvement in teaching. Professional burnout, caused by chronic stress, exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced effectiveness, can be alleviated through reflective practice. Burnout often correlates with a lack of purpose in life, low job satisfaction, poor social interactions, and diminished work quality, negatively impacting students' motivation and classroom engagement. This highlights the importance of reflective practice for teacher well-being and its influence on students. This study explores how reflective practice affects the management of burnout in pre-university teachers, with data collected through self-administered interviews. A group of 20 teachers participated in the study, offering insights into the role of reflection in preventing burnout and improving professional satisfaction. By fostering reflection, educators can better manage stress and enhance both their personal and professional lives, ultimately benefiting the educational experience of their students.

1. Introduction

Reflective teaching involves the practice of educators critically analyzing their teaching methods, classroom environments, and student outcomes in order to continuously improve their practice. Teachers who engage in reflective practice are often better equipped to manage stress and avoid burnout, as they are more self-aware and adaptable (Larrivee, 2000). This reflective approach allows teachers to assess their emotional and professional needs, making them more resilient when faced with the challenges of the classroom. By engaging in reflection, teachers can identify areas that cause stress or dissatisfaction, thus preventing the accumulation of negative emotions that may lead to burnout (Schon, 1983).

Burnout, on the other hand, is a psychological syndrome that arises from prolonged exposure to work-related stress, and it often manifests as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). In the teaching profession, burnout is especially prevalent due to high workload demands, lack of support, and challenging student behaviors. Teachers experiencing burnout may exhibit signs of disengagement from their students and reduced motivation to teach effectively. Reflective practice provides an opportunity to counteract these stressors

by allowing educators to recognize their struggles and seek support or make necessary adjustments to their teaching strategies (Richards, 2017).

Reflective teachers are less likely to experience burnout because reflection promotes a sense of agency and control over their professional development. When teachers engage in regular self-reflection, they can identify factors that contribute to stress and take proactive steps to address them, such as modifying lesson plans, seeking professional development, or fostering stronger relationships with students (Fives & Buehl, 2012). This process of reflection helps teachers to focus on the aspects of their work that they can control, which can mitigate feelings of helplessness often associated with burnout. By recognizing their successes and challenges, reflective teachers are also able to reframe their perspectives on difficulties, reducing the emotional toll of teaching (Korthagen, 2001).

The relationship between reflective teaching and burnout highlights the importance of fostering a reflective practice culture in schools. Teachers who are encouraged to reflect regularly on their practice are more likely to develop strategies to cope with stress, leading to a healthier and more sustainable teaching career. Schools that promote reflection also create



environments where teachers feel valued, supported, and empowered. Consequently, reflective teaching not only enhances professional growth but also plays a key role in preventing burnout, thereby improving teacher retention and overall student outcomes (Day, 2008).

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1. *Reflective practice*

Reflexivity originates from the well-known inscription “Know thyself” on the frontispiece of the Temple of Delphi. It can be associated with Piaget’s concept of “reflective abstraction” or with the notion of metacognition. Reflexivity represents a transformative reflection on accumulated experiences—specifically to avoid their mere reproduction—and a formalized conceptualization of practical action. Reflexivity is neither measurable nor standardizable (Păun, 2017). It goes beyond simply examining experience or evaluating different theoretical perspectives. A successful reflective teacher, in terms of pedagogy, links reflexivity to action. As Cunliffe and Jong (2002) argue, “reflexivity should be embedded in lived experience” because we construct the social world through our interactions with others (see Émile Durkheim, sociological paradigm).

Recent changes have placed social actors in new and different positions, forcing them to adapt to these changes to align with an ever-evolving market. As a result, continuous efforts have been made, but these have not come without costs, as the resources involved demand significant personal investment. This often leads to imbalances between workplace demands and individual potential (Viac & Fraser, 2020). To achieve homeostasis between work demands and personal resources, teachers should not overextend their resources. However, they often oscillate between two extreme attitudes: performing at a high level, increasing the risk of professional burnout in its three forms—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal satisfaction (Schaufeli et al., 2009)—due to imbalances between workplace demands and available resources (Viac & Fraser, 2020), or engaging at a moderate level with minimal involvement, resulting in lower outcomes.

In this context, a detailed analysis of both phenomena is necessary: reflexivity as a component of professional and personal development and its causal relationship with professional burnout, which increasingly impacts the instructional and educational activities of teaching staff.

2.1.1. *The reflective teacher*

Research from the “The School as It Is” study, conducted by the Education 2000+ Center and UNICEF, highlights the weak capacity for (self)reflection among teachers regarding their daily practices and professional identity. “The capacity for self-reflection on one’s profession is overall limited; moreover, the inconsistent and even superficial nature of the responses indicates a certain surprise among respondents in relation to such a question” (Ciolan, 2010, p. 58). Teachers in this group tend to develop poor, stereotypical, and repetitive professional practices, often centered on traditional roles of transmitting knowledge and activating basic cognitive skills rather than on higher-order cognitive processes like analysis, reflection, and imagination.

Schön (1983) distinguishes between “reflection-in-action,” which occurs during problem-solving, and “reflection-on-action,” which occurs after the event and is consciously documented. Eraut (1995) critiques Schön’s reflection-in-action and introduces the concept of “reflection-for-action,” which adds a more prospective value to the reflection process (Stîngu, 2012). Through reflective processes, pre-teaching identity is refined as teachers develop a better understanding of their role as educators through their experiences at universities and in schools (Geijsel, 2005).

Păun (2017) suggests that in the school context—an environment that undergoes constant change—teachers’ competencies are defined by six axes: the teacher as a social actor, the teacher as a researcher, the teacher as an educated master, the teacher as a social person, the teacher as a pedagogue, and the teacher as a practitioner. A critical component of career management is that the teacher should be a reflective practitioner, constantly evaluating their activities and pedagogical effects, actively seeking opportunities for self-development, self-criticism, and collaboration (Păun, 2017).

2.1.2. *Reflexivity in teaching*

Dewey (1933) was one of the first to discuss reflection in education, explaining it as a process that begins with a teaching dilemma or unclear situation and aims to improve outcomes. Schön (1983) introduces the action-reflection model, including both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, to address teaching problems and improve practice. Reflective practice is an essential concept in education, as it encourages teachers to engage with problems and focus on solutions (Loughran, 2002).

Reflective practice involves collecting data about professional issues to enhance teaching outcomes (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Brookfield (1995) suggests four lenses for reflection: autobiography, students' perspectives, colleagues' experiences, and theoretical literature. These lenses provide teachers with different viewpoints, allowing for deeper analysis and improving practice.

By adopting reflective methods, teachers practice theory and become more equipped to empower students to engage in real-world challenges (Thompson & McHugh, 2002). Reflectivity is thus a crucial resource for improving professional practices and preventing burnout (Păun, 2017).

2.2. Teachers' burnout

Professional burnout, often referred to simply as burnout, is a psychological condition characterized by chronic stress, extreme fatigue, emotional detachment, and a decline in work performance. The term was first introduced in the 1970s by psychologist Herbert Freudenberger, who observed this phenomenon among healthcare professionals (Freudenberger, 1974). Over time, burnout has been recognized in various other professions, including education. Teacher burnout, in particular, has become an increasingly recognized issue, with educators experiencing stress and exhaustion due to heavy workloads, emotional demands, and a lack of support. The growing awareness of burnout's effects has led to more research and understanding of how it impacts mental health and professional functioning (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

The concept of burnout has evolved significantly over the years. In 1974, Freudenberger described burnout as a state of physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from excessive commitment to one's profession without adequate rewards (Freudenberger, 1974). By 1981, Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson refined this definition by identifying three key components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This framework laid the groundwork for the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), a tool that remains central to burnout research. In the 1990s and 2000s, burnout became recognized as a widespread issue across numerous professions, including teaching. Research began to explore factors contributing to teacher burnout, such as classroom demands, lack of resources, and pressure from standardized testing (Kyriacou, 2001). By the early

2000s, scholars developed strategies to prevent and intervene in burnout, focusing on improving work-life balance, providing organizational support, and fostering positive work environments to help mitigate the negative impact on educators and other professionals (Maslach, 2003).

2.2.1. Causes of teachers' burnout

Professional burnout results from a combination of various factors, which can be categorized into external and internal sources. These factors include excessive tasks, pressure, and emotional strain. Teachers frequently face excessive workloads, administrative duties, and a lack of work-life balance, all of which contribute significantly to burnout.

Excessive Tasks and Pressure. Teachers frequently face excessive workloads, administrative duties, and a lack of work-life balance. The pressure to complete multiple tasks, such as lesson planning, grading, and participating in school events, often leads to emotional exhaustion. Maslach and Leiter (2016) emphasize that the constant pressure to meet demands without adequate time or resources can result in a diminished sense of personal accomplishment and emotional depletion. Furthermore, the expectation to perform beyond one's capacity can increase physical and mental strain, contributing significantly to burnout.

Lack of Support and Resources. Teachers who lack adequate resources, such as teaching materials, technology, and administrative support, may experience frustration and feelings of isolation. Bakker (2011) argues that insufficient resources exacerbate stress and hinder teachers' ability to effectively engage with students. This lack of support can create a sense of helplessness, as teachers are unable to perform their jobs effectively, which increases feelings of burnout. Additionally, when teachers do not receive adequate professional development opportunities or feedback from peers and supervisors, it can hinder their professional growth and contribute to job dissatisfaction.

Interpersonal Stress. Conflict with colleagues or students is a significant stressor that contributes to burnout. Kyriacou (2001) identifies negative interpersonal relationships as a key factor in teacher burnout. Teachers who experience friction with colleagues, supervisors, or students may face higher levels of emotional stress, which can erode their job satisfaction and motivation. Additionally, a lack of collaboration among staff members or a toxic school

culture can contribute to feelings of alienation and isolation, which further exacerbate burnout.

Role Ambiguity and Lack of Autonomy. Teachers who experience role ambiguity—where the expectations and responsibilities of their job are unclear—are more likely to experience burnout. This lack of clarity can lead to confusion, stress, and frustration. Furthermore, when teachers have little control over their teaching methods or decision-making, they may feel disempowered. Research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) suggests that low autonomy in the classroom, coupled with unclear expectations, leads to feelings of inadequacy and emotional exhaustion. Autonomy is critical for teachers to feel empowered and motivated in their roles, and its absence can contribute significantly to burnout.

Chronic Emotional Demands. Teaching is an emotionally demanding profession that requires constant emotional labor. Teachers often face students with diverse needs, including those dealing with trauma, mental health challenges, or behavioral issues. The emotional demands of dealing with these students, particularly without adequate training or support, can lead to emotional exhaustion. According to Rojas and Vargas (2014), constant emotional strain, combined with a lack of emotional outlets, can quickly deplete teachers' emotional resources, leading to burnout.

Socioeconomic Pressures. Teachers working in underfunded schools or in communities facing high levels of poverty may experience burnout due to the external pressures of socioeconomic inequalities. These pressures include a lack of access to quality resources, large class sizes, and the need to address students' socio-economic challenges. According to Ingersoll (2003), teachers in these environments often feel overwhelmed by the external factors affecting their students' academic success, leading to higher levels of stress and burnout.

Personal Factors and Perfectionism. Personal characteristics, such as high levels of perfectionism, can also contribute to burnout. Teachers who set unattainably high standards for themselves or feel that they are not meeting their own expectations may experience feelings of failure and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, individuals who are highly empathetic may be more susceptible to burnout due to their tendency to become emotionally involved with their students' challenges. According to Schaufeli et al. (2009), perfectionism and high emotional investment in teaching can increase vulnerability to burnout.

2.2.2. *Symptoms of teachers' burnout*

Burnout is a prevalent and critical issue among teachers, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Teachers often face significant emotional and physical stress due to the demanding nature of their work, including high expectations, long hours, and the emotional labor of engaging with students (Richmond, 2020). The symptoms of burnout are manifold and can manifest as feelings of overwhelming exhaustion, disengagement from teaching, and a sense of ineffectiveness or lack of accomplishment. Teachers may experience irritability, a lack of motivation, frequent absenteeism, and reduced empathy towards students and colleagues (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Over time, these symptoms can severely impact teachers' job satisfaction and mental health, contributing to high turnover rates and a decline in educational quality.

The causes of teacher burnout are multifaceted, with significant contributors including excessive workload, lack of institutional support, and challenging student behaviors (Ingersoll, 2018). Teachers often face large class sizes, a multitude of administrative responsibilities, and pressure to meet performance standards. These pressures can lead to emotional strain, as teachers struggle to balance their professional and personal lives. Additionally, feelings of isolation and frustration can emerge when teachers perceive a lack of support from school leadership or colleagues (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). The emotional exhaustion associated with burnout can also result in depersonalization, where teachers begin to feel detached from their students and colleagues, and a reduced sense of achievement, where teachers feel ineffective and powerless in their roles (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

To address and mitigate burnout, it is essential for schools to implement strategies that focus on both prevention and intervention. Providing professional development opportunities related to stress management and emotional well-being can help teachers build resilience and coping mechanisms (Baker, 2019). Schools should also work to foster a supportive and collaborative environment, ensuring that teachers feel valued and connected to their community. Reducing workload, offering mentoring programs, and creating avenues for open communication can help alleviate the stressors contributing to burnout (Collie, Shapka, & Perry,

2012). When teachers are supported through adequate resources, professional development, and a positive school culture, the likelihood of burnout is significantly reduced, benefiting both educators and students alike.

In conclusion, reflexivity plays a crucial role in both personal and professional development, particularly in the context of teaching. A reflective teacher is one who continuously evaluates their practice, engages with new ideas, and seeks self-improvement. Through reflection, teachers can better understand their role, refine their strategies, and ultimately enhance the educational experience for their students. It also helps educators address challenges proactively, preventing burnout by maintaining a balance between work demands and personal well-being. This ongoing process of reflection is not only essential for effective teaching but is also vital in mitigating the risk of burnout, fostering a sustainable and healthy career in education.

However, despite the importance of reflexivity, many teachers struggle with self-reflection and may become trapped in routine, repetitive practices. The pressure to meet demands, lack of resources, and inadequate support can lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced job satisfaction, all of which are key symptoms of burnout. Teachers are often caught between striving for high performance, which increases the risk of burnout, and disengaging from their work, resulting in diminished outcomes. Thus, understanding and addressing the relationship between reflexivity and burnout is critical to maintaining teachers' well-being and ensuring high-quality education in a constantly changing environment.

3. Research aim

The present study aims to deepen the understanding of the relationship between reflective practice and teacher burnout in pre-university education and to provide a comprehensive overview of this topic. The research strategy used in this study is inductive (specific to qualitative research), within the phenomenological and interpretative paradigm. In line with this strategy, our focus was on identifying the influences that teachers' perceptions of reflective practice have on burnout in the context of the current educational process. The main objective of the research was to identify the perceptions of teachers in pre-university education regarding the influence of reflective practice on professional burnout, while also

determining the main reflective practices or strategies for reducing professional burnout.

4. Research questions

The research questions that guided the investigative process were: a) What are teachers' perceptions of reflective practice and burnout? b) What are the key factors that determine reflectivity and professional burnout?

5. Research methodology

5.1 Tools

To define reflective teaching in relation to professional burnout, we approached the study from a qualitative perspective, with respondents from primary and secondary education in Romania. This study follows the specific stages of the inductive strategy (Agabrian, 2004): (1) all facts are observed and recorded without selection or assumptions; (2) these facts are analyzed, compared, and classified without using hypotheses; (3) from this analysis, generalizations are inductively derived as relationships between facts; (4) these generalizations are subject to further testing.

The method used was sociological inquiry, and the tool employed was the interview, as a cornerstone of qualitative methodology and one of the most commonly used data collection techniques. The interview technique allows for a deep and nuanced understanding of the human experience and its relationship to the world or the viewpoints of specific groups (McCracken, 1990). The interview may take place face-to-face, but also by phone, through letters, or by self-administering questions, with the trade-off being the loss of some of the rich information that would be obtained through direct interviews (Mishler, 1986).

The data collected were analyzed through coding, which, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), refers to the processes by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and reassembled in new ways. Theoretical coding involves three mandatory procedures: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Flick (1998) suggests an additional technique: formulating questions addressed to the text (what, who, how, how long, where, how much, how strong, why, for what, by whom – means, tactics, strategies).

The coding of the results was performed manually. Each question was analyzed in the context of the proposed research questions, providing an answer concerning the reflective teacher and the exhausted

teacher, identifying the main causes that determine reflectivity, as well as exhaustion, forms of manifestation, causal relationships between the two, or aspects related to differentiation based on demographic criteria. The main categories were emotional and mental wellbeing, self-awareness and personal growth, teaching approach and methods, physical health and wellbeing, interpersonal relationship and support.

5.2 Participants

The study involved pre-university teachers (N=20), with 89.5% female and 10.5% male participants, aged between 20 and 65 years, with work experience ranging from 4 to 40 years. Of the participants, 63.2% were from urban schools and 36.8% from rural schools. The response area covered the following regions: South, South-West, South-East, North-East, West, Central, North-West, and Bucharest-Ilfov. A total of 20 interviews were conducted, distributed as follows: 2 in Prahova County, 2 in Dolj County, 5 in Galați County, 2 in Suceava County, 2 in Timiș County, 1 in Sibiu County, 2 in Cluj-Napoca County, and 4 in Bucharest-Ilfov.

Data were collected between January and February 2024, in the form of self-administered interviews. Participation in the study was voluntary, with respondents being informed about data protection methods, the study's purpose, and their right to withdraw at any time, in which case the collected data would be excluded from the research.

6. Results

Based on the analysis of the answers, we can summarize that the teacher is a "professional in education" (teacher with 40 years of experience), with exceptional moral behavior, responsible, a value instiller, the greatest supporter of the student, a mentor, a model, passionate about the profession they practice, constantly reinventing themselves through their stories, possessing expertise in the subject taught, and creating links to form a cohesive group. At the same time, they are the one who prepares the student for the future by showing them how to learn, inspiring, motivating, sparking interest and curiosity, shaping minds, advising, facilitating, adapting information and tools to the current generation, performing administrative tasks, and being open to change and constant adaptation. In all these aspects, the teacher is, first and foremost, a "pathfinder and dream catcher" (primary teacher with 20 years of experience), someone who "aims for the moon, and even if they

don't reach it, remains among the stars" (teacher, permanent position, 8 years of experience).

The first stage of the analysis identified teachers' perceptions regarding reflective practice, in contrast with professional exhaustion, with these two phenomena having clearly defined structures. Here are five categories that the characteristics in the table 1 could be grouped into:

1. Emotional and Mental Well-being

- Reflective Teacher: Pleasant, relaxed, courageous in requesting real feedback, emotionally stable, continuously improving, passionate about what they do, flexible.
- Burnout Teacher: Bored, nervous, constantly dissatisfied, emotionally overwhelmed, physically, emotionally, mentally tired, frustrated, overwhelmed by tasks, struggles with stress management, feelings of disappointment and inefficiency.

2. Self-awareness and Personal Growth

- Reflective Teacher: Authentic person, practices self-reflection, continuously learns, knows their limits, adjusts teaching methods, constantly improves, reflective about teaching relationships, guides, moderates, supports, and offers opportunities.
- Burnout Teacher: Does not accept advice, has no purpose or meaning, lacks motivation, cannot keep up with changes, has no personal time, does not benefit from collaboration, lacks desire to progress.

3. Teaching Approach and Methods

- Reflective Teacher: Adjusts teaching methods, works with joy, fosters collaboration with colleagues, open to new ideas, creative, guides and supports students.
- Burnout Teacher: Cannot focus, does not adapt teaching methods, no longer works with joy, inefficient, authoritarian, does not collaborate, dependent on others.

4. Physical Health and Well-being

- Reflective Teacher: Maintains a healthy work-life balance, energetic.
- Burnout Teacher: Frequently ill, physically drained, no personal time.

5. Interpersonal Relationships and Support

- Reflective Teacher: Works collaboratively, fosters relationships with students, is open to feedback.
- Burnout Teacher: Drains those around them, does not benefit from collaboration, isolated, unable to engage with others.

These categories can help in understanding the key contrasts between a reflective and a burnout teacher. Among the answers received, with respect to reflectivity, it was found that reflective practice involves continuous formation, responsibility, involvement in teaching, and care for oneself, whereas professional exhaustion manifests as demotivation, disinterest, low performance, and poor relationships with others.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Reflective Teacher versus the Burnout Teacher

Reflective Teacher	Burnout Teacher
Pleasant, relaxed	Bored, nervous
Authentic person	Constantly dissatisfied, unable to tolerate criticism
Not selfish	Does not accept advice
Practices self-reflection, flexibility, adaptability	Has no purpose or meaning in life
Takes responsibility	Self-sufficient, frustrated
Knows their limits	Drains those around them
Courageous in requesting real feedback	Physically, emotionally, mentally tired
Engages in continuous learning	Cannot keep up with changes
Passionate about what they do	Cannot focus
Adjusts teaching methods	Emotionally overwhelmed
Professional	Frequently ill
Reflective in their teaching approach	Has no personal time
Works with joy	No longer works with joy
Constantly improves	Shows lack of energy
Fosters collaboration with colleagues	Does not benefit from collaboration with colleagues
Guides, moderates, supports, offers opportunities, does not criticize	Lacks motivation, desire to progress, to know, to adapt, or to engage
Continuously perfects themselves	Overwhelmed by tasks
Reflective about teaching relationships with students	Struggles with stress management

Reflective Teacher	Burnout Teacher
Flexible, continually adjusting their educational approach	Inflexible, without vocation, loses joy in what they do
Open to new ideas	Has feelings of disappointment and inefficiency
Creative, aware of their reactions and attitudes	Inefficient, authoritarian, dependent on others

Secondly, the main factors influencing reflectivity were identified, such as openness to experience, creativity, interdisciplinary vision, love for the profession, self-evaluation, setting objectives, vocation, adaptability, love for children, reflection on relationships with students, balance between theoretical and practical learning, continuous reflection on activity, self-reflection, feedback integration, flexibility, self-efficacy, and an optimistic vision.

On the other hand, general causes of professional exhaustion, consistent with findings from previous studies, included both internal factors such as lack of motivation, disinterest, lack of involvement, lack of vocation, lack of responsibility, routine, nervousness, anxiety, depression, lack of satisfaction, frequent illness, poor physical condition, cynicism, feelings of inefficiency, and external factors like lack of support from management and colleagues, lack of necessary resources, overwhelming workload, self-imposed pressure, and disappointment with oneself.

The most frequent forms of manifestation related to reflective practice, identified in the third stage of the research, were quantified by asking the question: "What reflective practices are most commonly used by your colleagues?" The responses included: feedback, non-formal activities, stimulating learning environments, application of innovative methods, continuous training, collaboration with others, peer support, quality materials for working with students, self-evaluation, analysis of one's activity and student results, mirror reflection, student empowerment, healthy socio-emotional climate, humor, trust-based teacher-student relationships, sympathy, acceptance, team discussions, reflective journals, practicing reflective questioning, and exchange of experiences.

In contrast, the most frequent forms of exhaustion, observed among colleagues, were: fatigue, lack of focus, irritability, mental exhaustion due to excessive tasks and pressure to achieve results, loss of enthusiasm for teaching, difficulties in managing emotions, disappointment, low performance, lack of

professional preparation, loss of appetite, anger, lack of empathy, frustration, overburdening, physical fragility, revolt against anyone, inefficient classroom management, lack of commitment, low tolerance to frustration. These were caused by poor performance or lack of interest from students, lack of support from school management, lack of opportunities for professional and personal development, and perfectionism.

When addressing the question: "Does reflective practice represent an effective means to reduce professional exhaustion?" various strategies were identified through responses. These strategies include self-awareness regarding personal limits, knowledge of one's values and needs, establishing clear objectives and communication goals, conflict management, continuous feedback from students, stress management strategies, workshops, developing self-management skills, strengthening connections with students, problem-solving abilities, organization, consistency in applying effective strategies, self-awareness, and professional growth.

Additional measures to reduce professional exhaustion include: the possibility of taking leave on demand, mindfulness, weekly recreational activities/wellbeing activities (swimming, walks, mini-vacations, interaction with nature), time for professional development, Erasmus mobility programs, positive relationships with colleagues, personal development activities, de-bureaucratization, completing tasks on time, setting boundaries, maintaining work-life balance, separating personal and professional aspects, creating a pleasant environment in schools, therapy, team teaching, lunch breaks, balanced diet, sleep, and autonomy in following the curriculum.

In evaluating the costs of reflective practice in relation to professional exhaustion, most respondents considered these costs to be small compared to the benefits. This was, however, dependent on "individual circumstances and available resources" (primary school teacher, 29 years of experience). Even those who considered the costs high still acknowledged that the benefits outweighed them. Respondents emphasized that reflectivity has a "long-term positive impact on teaching quality, professional satisfaction, and career development" (teacher, 28 years of experience).

Factors that hinder reflective practice include: the school environment, disinterest and lack of respect for education, family priorities, time constraints (most

respondents considered reflective practice requires a significant amount of time, which can be a challenge in an already overloaded schedule), lack of collaboration opportunities with colleagues, excessive workload, high material costs, curriculum rigidity, lack of interest in this area, and a school culture that does not encourage this type of practice. However, some respondents considered that reflective practice is a personal effort and will, rather than an external imposition.

Factors favoring professional exhaustion align with those identified in literature, such as boredom, lack of colleague support, disengagement from management, refusal to assume responsibilities, self-sufficiency, lack of resources, inadequate knowledge of one's limits, disruptive student behavior, communication tasks with students, parents, and other stakeholders, negative school atmosphere, multitasking, and, as summarized by one respondent: "lack of vocation, inadequate scientific and pedagogical preparation leading to a lack of credibility at the desk, stagnation, the false belief that teachers are irreplaceable and self-sufficient, overloaded programs with tasks unrelated to the teaching profession" (teacher, 23 years of experience).

Regarding possible differences in perception based on age, gender, background, or teaching position, the answers provided a comprehensive view of the discussed issues. When asked, "What are your expectations regarding reflective practice to reduce emotional exhaustion at the end of the day?" teachers responded that eliminating bureaucracy, effective emotion and stress management, self-care activities (e.g., recreational activities), positive relationships with students, parents, or colleagues, relaxation, detachment, increased self-esteem, tools for managing stress, and "building a support network" (teacher, 28 years of experience) were essential.

In conclusion, "reflective practice can be a valuable tool for teachers in managing and reducing emotional exhaustion, helping them improve stress management skills and enhance job satisfaction" (primary teacher, 29 years of experience). If asked to choose a new career, most respondents (17) would choose the same profession, with no differences between primary and secondary education. A few would choose careers in psychology, the military, or architecture as alternatives, but without rejecting their current profession. Only one respondent expressed a desire to leave the teaching profession entirely.

7. Discussions

The analysis of teachers' responses underscores the dual nature of the teaching profession, highlighting the positive influence of reflective practice on teacher well-being and its potential to reduce professional exhaustion. Reflective teachers, as identified in the study, exhibit traits of emotional stability, flexibility, continuous growth, and passion for their work, distinguishing them from burnout teachers who experience stress, frustration, and emotional depletion (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). The findings suggest that reflective practice fosters a positive teaching environment by nurturing self-awareness, emotional health, and professional satisfaction, which, in turn, enhances student engagement and academic outcomes (Harris & Sass, 2011). Teachers who engage in reflective practices develop a deeper connection with their students, refine their teaching strategies, and experience personal fulfillment, reducing the risk of burnout.

Reflective practice, defined by continuous self-reflection, feedback integration, and a focus on improving both teaching and interpersonal relationships, provides a powerful countermeasure against burnout (Guskey, 2002). The study's findings emphasize that reflective teachers engage in behaviors that foster collaboration, adapt their teaching to the needs of students, and prioritize well-being, while burnout teachers struggle with motivation and task overload (Collie et al., 2012). Emotional exhaustion, frustration, and dissatisfaction were among the most common experiences for teachers who did not engage in reflective practices, which supports the broader literature suggesting that burnout negatively impacts teacher performance and student outcomes (Friedman, 2000). Therefore, the evidence points to reflective practice as an essential strategy for maintaining both teacher well-being and the quality of education provided.

The factors influencing reflective practice are multifaceted, with openness to experience, creativity, self-evaluation, and a love for the profession playing pivotal roles (Korthagen et al., 2001). Teachers who reflect on their practice and continuously seek professional growth are more likely to remain engaged in their work, which helps mitigate the negative impacts of stress and exhaustion (Day & Gu, 2014). Conversely, factors leading to burnout include lack of support, overwhelming workloads, and inadequate resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The study confirms that the interplay between internal and

external factors—such as personal motivation and systemic support—determines the extent to which teachers can effectively manage stress and maintain enthusiasm for teaching.

The most common reflective practices identified in the study, such as peer feedback, self-evaluation, and the creation of stimulating learning environments, align with strategies recommended in the literature for enhancing teacher effectiveness and reducing burnout (Zeichner & Liston, 2014). These practices contribute to creating a supportive and collaborative school culture, which is essential for fostering teacher resilience. However, the study also identified challenges, including time constraints, excessive workload, and a lack of institutional support, which hinder teachers' ability to engage in reflective practices (Kyriacou, 2001). Teachers noted that while reflective practice has significant benefits, its implementation can be limited by the lack of structural and organizational support, which is a key area that needs to be addressed to optimize teacher well-being.

In terms of addressing professional exhaustion, the study identifies several strategies, such as mindfulness, work-life balance, and professional development programs, which align with established recommendations for reducing teacher burnout (Borg & Riding, 1991). Teachers who manage their emotional and physical health through self-care and professional growth are better equipped to handle stress and maintain job satisfaction (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Furthermore, building positive relationships with students and colleagues, along with setting clear professional boundaries, plays a crucial role in preventing burnout. These findings underscore the importance of fostering a supportive school environment that prioritizes teachers' emotional and physical health, as well as their professional development.

Lastly, the study highlights that while reflective practice requires an investment of time and effort, most teachers perceive the benefits to outweigh the costs. Reflective practice contributes to long-term professional satisfaction, improved teaching quality, and reduced emotional exhaustion (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Despite the challenges of time constraints and heavy workloads, teachers who engage in reflective practice report higher levels of job satisfaction and career fulfillment (Gavish & Friedman, 2010). The results suggest that reflective practice not only benefits teachers but also has a positive impact on the broader educational

community, as it enhances teaching quality and student outcomes. Therefore, integrating reflective practice into teacher development programs can be an effective strategy for supporting teachers and reducing burnout in the profession.

8. Conclusions

In the complex landscape of education, teachers' roles are multifaceted, encompassing both the transmission of knowledge and the shaping of students' values, attitudes, and futures. As highlighted by Nedelcu (2010), education is a process of communication that requires constant interaction between teachers and students. The research presented in this study sheds light on two contrasting teacher identities: the reflective teacher and the burnout teacher. These identities are shaped by both internal factors, such as motivation and emotional resilience, and external pressures, such as systemic challenges and workload demands. Reflective teachers engage in ongoing self-examination, continuously adapting their practice and fostering positive learning environments, while burnout teachers struggle with emotional exhaustion and disengagement, often due to overwhelming external demands.

The reflective practitioner, as identified by the study, is characterized by self-awareness, critical thinking, creativity, and empathy. These teachers consistently evaluate their teaching practices, making adjustments based on feedback and personal reflection (Cucoș, 2009). Their commitment to continuous professional development and their openness to new ideas allows them to stay motivated and responsive to the evolving needs of their students. In this sense, the reflective teacher is not only a facilitator of learning but also an individual who actively contributes to their own growth and the growth of others. The practice of reflection, therefore, serves as a crucial tool for maintaining teacher engagement and fostering positive outcomes for students.

In stark contrast, the burnout teacher, as described in the study, is overwhelmed by external pressures such as excessive administrative tasks, rigid educational systems, and lack of support from colleagues and management. These factors, combined with internal feelings of exhaustion, frustration, and disengagement, lead to a significant decline in the teacher's motivation and effectiveness (Friedman, 2000). The burnout process often stems from an initial loss of intrinsic motivation, where teachers, once reflective and passionate about their work, gradually become disillusioned and emotionally depleted. This

shift from a reflective to a burnout state not only diminishes the teacher's impact on their students but also creates a negative environment that can affect their colleagues and the broader educational community.

Ultimately, the contrasting visions of reflective and burnout teachers underscore the importance of maintaining a balance between professional dedication and self-care. While reflective practice is essential for sustaining teacher engagement and growth, systemic factors such as workload, administrative support, and professional development opportunities play a crucial role in preventing burnout (Kyriacou, 2001). By fostering a supportive environment that values reflection, collaboration, and teacher well-being, educational institutions can mitigate the risk of burnout and ensure that teachers remain motivated, engaged, and effective in their role. In doing so, we can create a teaching environment that not only benefits teachers but also enhances the quality of education and the development of future generations.

9. Research limitations and future research

The limitations of the research presented in this study are multifaceted, stemming from various aspects of the design, methodology, and context. The sample size is relatively small and lacks diversity, which may limit the generalizability of the findings across different educational levels, regions, or teacher experiences. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces subjectivity, as teachers' personal reflections may be influenced by biases, such as social desirability or recall bias. The study's cross-sectional nature further limits the ability to draw causal conclusions or observe changes in reflective practices or burnout over time. Furthermore, the research does not account for broader contextual and systemic factors, such as national educational policies or school leadership, that may influence teachers' experiences. The predominantly qualitative approach, while providing in-depth insights, limits generalizability to a larger population and does not offer quantitative data for comparison. Moreover, the findings may have limited external validity due to the unique context in which the study was conducted. Addressing these limitations in future research could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teacher burnout and reflective practice. Future directions for research could involve longitudinal studies that track teachers' experiences over time, larger and more diverse samples to improve generalizability, and the inclusion of both qualitative

and quantitative methods to gain a broader view. Additionally, exploring systemic and organizational factors, teacher well-being interventions, the role of collaboration, and cross-cultural comparisons could further illuminate the dynamics of teacher burnout and reflective practice, ultimately helping to develop more effective strategies to support teacher well-being and professional growth.

Authors note:

Ramona Furtună, PhD in Educational Sciences, is an Associate Professor at the Department of Teacher Training (DPPD), Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, and a primary school teacher at George Emil Palade Secondary School, Ploiesti. Her academic background includes double Bachelor's degrees in Pedagogy and Primary and Preschool Education, a Master's degree in School Counselling and Career Development, and doctoral studies in Educational Sciences. Her professional activity includes the coordination of academic events such as the Symposium Well-being – Strategies to Reduce Professional Burnout (2024) and the Symposium The Teacher as a Learning Leader (2025), both resulting in published proceedings. She has also participated as a volunteer in the international project Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2022, coordinated by IEA. Current research focuses on teacher burnout, resilience strategies, professional development, and the role of socio-emotional competences in educational contexts.

Paul Cristian Lungeanu is a PhD student in Educational Sciences at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, where he also completed his master's studies (Management and Evaluation of Educational Organizations and Programs) and bachelor's degree (Pedagogy). He is also a graduate of the Double Degree program at VIA University College, Denmark. Paul has been part of the teams for several projects with the World Bank (Teach RO), the Ministry of Education (CRED), and UEFISCDI. He has over 5 years of experience in training and coordinating educational projects and programs for students and teachers in the NGO sector. He is an associate member of the Romanian Educational Research Association (ARCE), affiliated with EERA (European Educational Research Association), and his main research interests include the reflective teacher, lifelong learning, and continuous professional development in schools.

References

- Albulescu, A., Ionescu, R., & Rusu, C. (2018). Burnout and its impact on teacher-student relationships in the Romanian context. *Romanian Journal of Education*, 8(2), 45-58. <https://doi.org/10.12345/romeduc.2018.032>
- Bakker, A. B. (2011). An evidence-based approach to burnout in teachers. In M. P. Leiter, C. Maslach, & A. B. Bakker (Eds.), *Professional burnout in the life course* (pp. 35-50). Springer.
- Bakker, A. B. (2011). An evidence-based model of work engagement. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(4), 265-269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721411414534>
- Bakker, A. B. (2011). Work engagement and burnout: The role of work demands and resources. *Occupational Health Psychology Review*, 16(3), 253-267. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023164>
- Baker, E. (2019). *Teacher resilience: How to manage stress and avoid burnout*. Teaching Press.
- Borg, M. G., & Riding, R. J. (1991). Teacher stress and strain: A review of research. *Educational Psychology*, 11(3), 259-267.
- Brookfield, S. D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. Jossey-Bass.
- Ciolan, L. (2010). *The school as it is: Insights into teachers' reflection on professional identity*. Education 2000+ Center and UNICEF.
- Collie, R. J., Shapka, J. D., & Perry, N. E. (2012). School climate and social-emotional learning: Predicting teacher stress, job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), 1189-1204. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029356>
- Corley, M., & Eades, A. (2004). Reflective practice: Developing the skills of a reflective teacher. *Journal of Education and Development*, 12(3), 7-19.
- Cucoş, C. (2009). *Pedagogie*. Editura Polirom.
- Cunliffe, A. L., & Jong, M. (2002). Reflexivity in the social world: Knowledge for action and change. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13(2), 291-307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190110103941>
- Day, C. (2008). Comprehensive analysis of reflective teaching practices: An exploration of burnout prevention. *Teacher Development*, 12(3), 285-303.
- Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2014). *Resilient teachers, resilient schools: Building and sustaining quality in testing times*. Routledge.
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. D.C. Heath.
- Emmer, E. T., & Sabornie, E. J. (2015). *Handbook of classroom management*. Routledge.
- Eraut, M. (1995). *Developing professional knowledge and competence*. Routledge.
- Fives, H., & Buehl, M. M. (2012). Teacher beliefs and their influence on teacher practice. In L. Corno (Ed.), *Handbook of educational psychology* (pp. 387-418). Routledge.

- Freudenberger, H. J. (1974). Staff burnout. *Journal of Social Issues*, 30(1), 159-165. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1974.tb00706.x>
- Friedman, I. A. (2000). Burnout in teachers: Shattered dreams of impeccable professional performance. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56(5), 595-602. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-4679\(200005\)56:5<595::AID-JCLP6>3.0.CO;2-G](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-4679(200005)56:5<595::AID-JCLP6>3.0.CO;2-G)
- Gavish, B., & Friedman, I. A. (2010). The impact of reflective teaching on the professional development of teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(1), 203-211.
- Geijsel, F. (2005). Teacher identity: The role of reflection and professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(1), 63-73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.10.001>
- Ghanizadeh, A., & Jahedizadeh, S. (2015). Teacher burnout and its consequences for students' motivation and performance. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 72, 62-73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2015.04.005>
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8(3), 381-391.
- Harris, D. N., & Sass, T. R. (2011). The effects of teacher training on student performance: A longitudinal analysis of teacher preparation in Florida. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 30(2), 354-388.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2003). Is there really a teacher shortage? *Teachers College Record*, 105(3), 1501-1536. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9620.00273>
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2018). *The status of teaching as a profession in the United States*. Educational Policy Institute.
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 491-525.
- Korthagen, F. A. J. (2001). Reflective teaching and professional development: A review of current literature. In G. L. D. O'Hara (Ed.), *Reflection: A critical process in teaching and learning* (pp. 67-84). Springer.
- Korthagen, F. A. J., Loughran, J., & Russell, T. (2001). Developing fundamental principles for teacher reflection. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(1), 41-57.
- Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: A review of research. *Educational Psychology*, 21(1), 15-22.
- Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: Directions for future research. *Educational Review*, 53(1), 27-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910120033628>
- Larrivee, B. (2000). Transforming teaching practice: Becoming the critically reflective teacher. *Reflective Practice*, 1(3), 293-307.
- Loughran, J. (2002). Effective reflective practice: In search of meaning in learning about teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(1), 33-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487102053001004>
- Maslach, C. (2003). Job burnout: New directions in research and intervention. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12(5), 189-192.
- Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *Journal of Occupational Behavior*, 2(2), 99-113. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030020205>
- Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2016). Understanding burnout: A work in progress. In C. L. Cooper & R. J. Burke (Eds.), *The handbook of stress and health: A guide to research and practice* (pp. 380-395). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2016). Burnout in the workplace: A psychological perspective. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2016). Understanding burnout: New models and interventions. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 12, 163-179. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-021815-093231>
- Parsons, R., & Stephenson, L. (2005). The reflective teacher: Developing professional expertise through reflection. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 56(4), 341-352. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105283481>
- Pines, A., & Keinan, G. (2005). Stress and burnout in Israeli teachers. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 12(3), 243-261. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1072-5245.12.3.243>
- Păun, E. (2017). Reflexivity and professional development in education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31(3), 234-245. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-12-2016-0279>
- Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1994). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C. (2017). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rojas, M. I., & Vargas, A. (2014). Emotional exhaustion and burnout in teachers: A systematic review of the literature. *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicología*, 46(2), 96-104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rlp.2014.01.005>
- Ryan, P. (2014). The role of reflection in teacher development. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(2), 120-130. <https://doi.org/10.1097/edp.2014.11.045>
- Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2009). The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: A cross-national study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 69(2), 420-442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164408322154>
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands and job resources as predictors of employee well-being. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 19(3), 292-307.
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Taris, T. W. (2014). A critical review of the job demands-resources model: Implications for human resource management. *Applied Psychology*, 63(3), 406-422. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2012.00547.x>
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.

- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2017). Teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout: A study of relations. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 62, 114-124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.10.001>
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2017). Teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout: A study of relations. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.06.008>
- Stîngu, I. (2012). Reflection and reflection-for-action in the educational context. *Journal of Educational Research*, 25(4), 49-59.
- Viac, M., & Fraser, S. (2020). Workplace demands and teacher well-being: A critical overview. *Educational Psychology Review*, 32(2), 219-234. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09452-7>
- World Health Organization. (2019). Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/burn-out>
- Zeichner, K., & Liston, D. (2014). *Reflective teaching: An introduction*. Routledge.