

# The Influence of Value Orientation on the Level of Teacher Burnout

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## Abstract

The article highlights the influence of teachers' values and personal beliefs on their resilience to burnout syndrome. It points out that loss of idealism and enthusiasm for work, accompanied by exhaustion, cynicism, and decreased motivation, is common among teachers who enter the profession with idealistic and altruistic values, a deep sense of mission, a desire to help children, and a desire to change society for the better. If the school environment supports these values and creates a supportive climate, this can act as a protective factor.

## Keywords

character; value orientation; resilience; risk values; teacher burnout; school support; education; teaching; personality; profession; goals of education; philosophy of education

## Introduction

Research in Norway, for example, has shown that when teachers' values align with those of the school, teachers feel more part of the collective, are happier at work and experience less emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Jackson 2013, 227–51). On the other hand, a lack of alignment between teachers' personal values and the practices or goals of the institution is one of the most significant predictors of burnout, particularly with the development of depersonalisation and cynical attitudes, and subsequently with considering leaving the education sector. Recent studies of university teachers have even suggested that teachers who strongly identify with their school's values, may experience moral distress (a kind of "moral injury") in crisis situations, which can lead to burnout. For example, during the pandemic, teachers had to balance earlier demands for academic results with empathy for students. This led to a painful conflict of values for some (Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2011, 68–77).

Overall, the ability to realise one's professional ideals and values in practice acts as a significant resilience factor – a personal value system can function as an effective regulator of a teacher's psychological state in stressful situations. Conversely, persistent disagreement between a teacher's values and the reality of the school environment creates conditions for gradual exhaustion and loss of meaning in work.

**Risk values: idealism, need for recognition**

Some values and personality traits can make teachers more vulnerable to burnout. Strong idealism – namely, high expectations and a desire to fulfil one’s mission perfectly – can lead to frustration if the reality of school life differs from these ideals. Studies show that highly idealistic teachers are much more likely to leave the profession. It is precisely those who are deeply committed to serving students who are most at odds with conditions that prevent them from doing what they themselves consider best for their students (Harland, Journell, Campbell & Kaplan 2020, 301–22).

A classic example is the American National Teacher Corps programme of the 1960s – enthusiastic university graduates filled with idealism wanted to “save” disadvantaged children, but over 95% of them left teaching within five years due to the clash with the harsh reality of school bureaucracy. Idealism and altruism can therefore be a double-edged sword: they provide teachers with internal motivation and meaning, but if their ideals are not met, they are at risk of burnout from chronic disappointment (Peterson 2011, 18–27).

Similarly, the need for recognition and appreciation can increase susceptibility to burnout. Teachers who strongly desire social respect and feedback often suffer in environments where their efforts are taken for granted and there is a lack of significant recognition. One of the most frequently mentioned stressors is the feeling of insufficient recognition and low social status of teachers. For example, a qualitative study of teachers identified that, alongside objective stressors (workload, disciplinary issues, etc.), teachers repeatedly cited a lack of recognition from management and society, or limited involvement in decision-making, as factors contributing to their burnout. In other words, if a teacher values respect for their work and professional autonomy, but encounters the opposite, it creates fertile ground for chronic stress (Wilson, & Thompson 2019, 384–96).

Further research suggests that certain personality traits – for example, teachers with a ‘hero complex’, who are self-sacrificing and set unrealistically high standards for themselves – may be more prone to burnout. It is therefore important for teachers to find a balance between their ideals and taking care of their own mental health (Maslach & Jackson 2013, 227–51).

**Value conflicts in practice: case studies of teachers**

In the stories of teachers, conflicts of values often emerge as a trigger for burnout or leaving the education sector. Education philosopher Doris Santoro (2015, 14–6) distinguishes classic burnout from a phenomenon she calls the demoralisation of teachers – this occurs when a teacher wants to do a “good job” in line with their moral convictions, but systemic conditions prevent them from doing so. Teachers then experience not only exhaustion, but also deep disappointment at being unable to teach as they believe to be right and meaningful. Many experienced teachers describe that it is not the children or teaching that exhausts them, but rather the dilemmas and pressures they face, such as when school policy, bureaucratic regulations or overload prevent them from fulfilling their values, such as fair treatment of every student, creative teaching, or helping underperforming children (Peterson 2023, 18–27).

When a teacher's work is in conflict with their conscience and values, the "moral reward" of the profession disappears and a state of moral exhaustion sets in, which authors describe as demoralisation (Smith 2021, 125–37). This can manifest itself in a similar way to burnout (apathy, cynicism, resignation), but the cause lies in a value conflict, not just personal resilience failure (Santoro 2018, 14–6).

Case studies of teachers in different types of schools illustrate these conflicts. For example, a primary school teacher for whom the key value is helping each child according to their needs may find it difficult to cope when, due to overcrowded classrooms and pressure to fulfil the curriculum, he lacks the capacity to dedicate himself to weaker students, he experiences a conflict between the value of altruism and reality, which leads to frustration and gradual burnout (Wilson & Thompson 2019, 384–96).

Among secondary school teachers, there is often a conflict between the value of expertise and the education of students vs. pressure to achieve good test results and strong admission statistics. Teachers may feel that they are merely "preparing students for tests" rather than providing a real education, which undermines the purpose of their work. In qualitative interviews, teachers repeatedly mention a lack of autonomy (the ability to implement their own pedagogical approach) and weak support for collegiality as factors that contribute to their dissatisfaction.

### **Burnout among teachers: statistics**

Statistical data confirms that burnout is a widespread problem across different levels of education and countries. For example, in the Czech context, studies show that around a fifth of teachers exhibit signs of burnout and up to 65% are at risk of developing it in the future. This means that almost two-thirds of teachers experience high levels of stress and exhaustion, which can lead to burnout if the situation does not improve. Similar figures emerge in data on the departure of novice teachers – in some studies, turnover exceeds 50–60%. This suggests that many of them are leaving the profession due to burnout or dissatisfaction with their values. Study examined resilience to burnout in relation to experience and school type, and found that teachers in secondary schools had slightly higher burnout scores than teachers in primary schools (Kollerová, Květon & Zábrowská, et al 2023, 885–902).

### **Conclusion**

The overview of studies shows a close connection between teachers' value hierarchy and burnout. Teachers are strongly motivated by values such as the meaning of work, helping others, social contribution and self-realisation. These values can act as a protective shield – they give work meaning, increase engagement and help overcome difficulties. However, they can also be a potential source of vulnerability if they are not in line with the reality of the school system. Ideals that run into obstacles can turn into frustration and long-term stress.

The above empirical studies in different countries confirm that a discrepancy between a teacher's personal values and the conditions for their fulfilment is one of the key factors in

burnout. On the other hand, the ability to realise one's values – to feel meaningful, see results in students, gain recognition and autonomy – acts as a prevention of burnout. Individual value priorities also come into play: teachers with extremely idealistic or perfectionist tendencies need support to avoid burnout, while those with a balanced value framework and self-care are more resilient.

Several recommendations for practice can be derived from this. Schools should openly discuss the values and goals of education at their workplace – as research suggests, clear definition and sharing of values at school level can strengthen value consonance and reduce the risk of teacher burnout. It is also important to give teachers feedback and recognition for their work, so they feel that their efforts are worthwhile (this will prevent a sense of futility in those who strongly desire professional recognition). The management should recognise warning signs of value conflicts – for example, if a teacher complains that they have to do things against their convictions, this could lead to burnout or resignation if nothing changes. Programmes supporting teachers' mental health (mindfulness, supervision) can help teachers to better manage stress, but it is equally important to create an environment where teachers do not have to compromise their values.

Teachers who can remain true to their “mission” while setting healthy boundaries have the best chance of working in education long-term without burning out. The aim is therefore to align teachers' values with those of the school and to promote a culture that takes human limitations into account – only in this way can we combat burnout in this demanding and valuable profession.

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