



The Major Factor about Youth Teachers' Burnout in Private University of Mainland China

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Abstract

This article takes the youth teachers in private university of Mainland China as research object, through a lot of literature review focused on teacher burnout, and the context, the author finds the major factors about youth teachers' burnout, which are the Influences from external environment in private university, influences from internal environment in private university, and the influences from teachers' own professionalism. Based on author's experience and the youth teachers' experience, the more effective strategy for releasing burnout among private university youth teachers is using the motivation system, using Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory. Once the sense of belonging was formed, the youth teachers trust their prosperity are indivisible with the schools, and they inspire their work enthusiasm and creativity consciously. Only in this way, the private university can have a long-term sustainable development.

Keywords

Youth Teachers, Burnout, Private University, Mainland China

1. Introduction

Some research, news and articles report that more and more teachers are suffering from burnout all over the world, China is also no exception. Burnout is not only against teachers' physical and mental health, but also let many teachers cannot effectively perform their duties, further influence the students' academic progress and the whole education career (Wang et al., 2015). The reason why the teacher burnout appeared and how to solve this problem has become the common topic for many scholars. In view of this, this article takes the youth teachers in private university as research object, analyses deeply the causes of burnout, offer suggestions for preventing and releasing burnout among youth teachers in private university of mainland China.

After reviewed a lot of literatures from google scholar, I found that the current research on teachers' burnout was mainly focused on the status of public university teachers' burnout. When I inputted two keywords university teacher and burnout in google scholar, the findings were 11300 articles. When I minimised the keywords as private university teacher and burnout, the findings were 341 articles. Then I added youth teacher with the last two keywords to the searching, the finding just was one article. This result illustrated two real situations. First is the specialized research in private university teachers' burnout is relatively less, which just accounted for 3% of the total research. Next is the research hardly focuses on youth teachers' burnout in private university. In addition, I am also a youth teacher with 10 years in a private university of mainland China. I feel deeply that I and my youth colleagues are encountering burnout. This context more inspired my high internal impetus to proceed my research.

2. Teacher Burnout

2.1 The definition of teacher burnout

The term “burnout” refers to the individual in the work under the weight of the physical and mental fatigue and depletion of the state. The concept is first proposed by Freudenberger (1974), which argues that job burnout is a syndrome peculiar to the helping professions, such as social workers, who, because of their jobs, are constantly under stress. Job burnout is a consequence of the interaction of an individual with a work setting. It usually leads to low productivity and effectiveness at work. It also causes mental dysfunction, such as anxiety, depression, a drop in self-esteem, and so forth. Since then, job burnout has been widely concerned. The scope of his research extends from the earliest service and education professions to other professions, and produces many definitions of job burnout.

Maslach (1976) defines burnout as a condition in which one loses all concerns and feelings toward the people one works with and comes to treat them as impersonal objects. Maslach and Jackson (1981) measure job burnout syndromes along three dimensions: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP) and personal accomplishment (PA). EE is characterized by overwhelming feelings of being emotionally overextended and drained by others. DP is characterized by a tendency to perceive and relate to clients in an overly impersonal, detached fashion. A reduced sense of PA refers to a conscious judgment that one’s efforts were not achieving the desired outcomes.

Through the literature review and comparison of the concept of burnout, this research more inclines to Maslach, who put forward the three-dimensional theory of burnout. Therefore, this study defines teacher burnout as the state of physical, mental and behavioral exhaustion of teachers in a timeless and work overload teaching, scientific research and other related work under the condition that teachers cannot adapt to the teaching work smoothly and for a long time.

Following this conception, Maslach and Jackson (1981) develops the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which is currently the most widely used research instrument in many countries. The MBI has been translated into several languages and has demonstrated good construct validity in many countries. A more recent version of the instrument has been published in 1996, the MBI-Educators Survey (MBI-ES; Maslach, Leiter, 1996), formerly known as MBI-Form Ed.

2.2 Studies of private university teachers’ burnout in Mainland China

The domestic scholars have made a lot of research results focused on university teachers’ burnout in recent ten years (Gan, 2008; Wang, 2009; Ding et al., 2010). The results showed that these had a more emphasis consistently on the prevalence of university teachers’ burnout. In addition, the results also adopt in-depth analysis on the differences of demographic characteristics, such as gender, age and professional titles.

Zhang (2013) selects one private university teachers as the survey object in her research. She uses MBI-MS with referring to the Chinese translation of Taiwan scholars. Her research results show that female teachers’ personal accomplishment is lower than that of male teachers; married teachers’ personal accomplishment is lower than unmarried teachers; teachers in 11-15 years of teaching has a high degree of emotional exhaustion; the emotional exhaustion of undergraduate education teachers were higher than that of master’s degree teachers.

In Chen’s research (2016), she chooses more than 400 private university teachers who are from the 12 private universities of 5 provinces and cities as a sample, using the private university teachers job burnout questionnaire. The results show that there is no significant difference in burnout between male and female; the teachers whose age under 33 has a particularly low work satisfaction because they have a huge life and work pressure in the married life stage. The teachers feel burnout highest are the group who worked 6-10 years.

Yang (2016) chooses the teacher of Jiangxi University of Science and Technology as the research object with using the MBI-MS. Her research results show that 88.23% teachers of this school have a different degree of burnout. The problem of job burnout is quite common.

2.3 News report on teacher burnout in mainland China

The news report on private university teachers’ burnout is less found from the social media. Maybe the reason is that the public always categorized the private university to university directly. They do not make a detailed division among the different universities. However, we also can get some evidences about teacher burnout from the news report.

China Education Newspaper (2015) reports a news titled ‘when university teacher encountered burnout’. In this report, a study on job burnout of university teachers by Tencent and MyCOS, which wants to explain the mystery of teachers’ burnout. The survey got the 10,734 effective respondents, including 7,789 undergraduate colleges and universities, 2,945 teachers of higher vocational colleges. The results show that more than 60% university teachers had a

higher recognition to their own job (the group including the choice of "very high" and "relatively high" teachers). Although most of the recognition of their work, but more than half of university teachers say, they feel exhausted in the actual work every semester, 51% of them work in the undergraduate institutions, 40% of them are the teachers who work less than 15 years.

From the above three parts and combined with my own ten years of work experience in private university, we can firm that there is a certain degree of burnout of the youth teachers in private university. Although it has some results differences in different research, we find the common that job burnout of the youth teachers is more obvious than the elder teacher. Xiao (2005) also states youth teachers under the age of 35 to become an important part of the university teachers' group in mainland China. They have a special psychological feeling and pressure and are suffering a greater pressure than other age teachers in this special period. Therefore, the youth teacher here refers to the teacher who works less than 15 years and age under 35. Then this article analyses the main reason about youth teachers' burnout in private university of mainland China.

3. Context

3.1 The development and evolution of private university in mainland China

It is recognized that a lot of fundamental differences in the private higher education between China and Western countries. In mainland China, private higher education is a quite complex area mostly named *Ming-ban* higher education and there is no consistent definition of private higher education currently (Li & Morgen, 2011). Private university gradually grew and developed with the rise of reform and opening up. However, until 1993 the State Education Commission issued the 'Provisional regulations on the establishment of private higher education', which affirmed the private university was part of higher education in China. From then on, private university had been formally incorporated into the higher education system. Started with the mid-90s of last century, private university has entered a period of rapid development. The statistics of Ministry of Education (2016), the number of private colleges with degree granting powers was 475, and all kinds of private university students were more than 5 million. Private university has some restricts and limits by the government policy which public institutes do not have. For example, private university only can start to enroll new freshmen after the regular public institutions have done so.

3.2 The difference between public university and private university

The establishment of private university and public university are approved by the Ministry of Education. They all have the qualifications to run schools, and are part of the socialist education. The major difference between the two is educational body and financial source. The sponsor of private university is not national government, and the financial source is non-financial funds (mostly from businesses or individuals), in the process of running a school to be self-financing. In the classification of social organization units, private university is defined as enterprise unit or private non-enterprise unit, while public university is defined as public institute.

3.3 The age structure of private university teachers

In private university, there are more teachers who are under the age of 30, over the age 60 currently, and less than middle-aged teachers (Li, 2005). It presents a state with big at both ends but small in the middle. Such phenomenon illustrates that private university generally only can attract new graduates who are not easily accessible to public universities and retired teachers from public university. For middle-aged teachers, they are reluctant to leave public university and taken up employment in private university. Taken my workplace as an example, more than 50% teachers are youth teacher under the age of 35.

4. The major factors of youth teachers' burnout in private university

Based on previous studies, Maslach (1997) pointed out the main cause of burnout is a variety of working environment factors, rather than the employees' personal factors that we previously thought. The variety of specific reasons of burnout in the past was integrated to six areas mismatch between the individual and the work. They were work overload, lack of control, inadequate reward, disintegration of the community, lack of equity and values conflict. China's scholars also discuss the influence factors about teachers' burnout from their own view. An article in the Economic Daily (Cao, 2005) argues that university teachers' burnout is closely related to the factors, such as high teaching intensity, poor working environment, lack of social support, indifferent interpersonal relationships, poor organizational justice and low decision-making participation. Then this article analyses the major factors for youth teachers' burnout based on personal work experiences in private university within the context of mainland China.

4.1 Influences from external environment in private university

The big social institution system difference between private university and public university as we stated in the third part, which lead to the teachers of the two kinds of universities had a great distance in their welfares. According to Maslow's theory of demand (1987), physiological needs are the lowest level of human needs, but the most basic needs. We must obtain economic resources to meet these basic needs. The wage and social security of private university teacher cannot be compared with the public university teacher. Form the region of my workplace, only wage income, private university teachers pay only about 70% of public teachers. In addition, there is a big gap in the 'Insurance and Housing Fund' between the private university and private university because there is no public institution establishment for the private university teachers, and even some private university teachers do not have housing fund. The problem of unequal pay is more prominent, and is the big pressures of private university teachers. For the youth teachers, they are always called 'Tianzhijiaozi' by the public, means "God's favoured one", which makes they have a high self-esteem, and high expectation about themselves. When they just enter society after graduated from university, they want to prove their ability and get the social identity highly through the economic income. However, the reality is very different from their expectations. In addition, people tend to think that private university teachers are not teachers in the true sense. The conventional thought that 'public is senior and private is inferior' (Pan, 2001). This public opinion causes the psychological imbalance of the youth teachers in private university, with a sense of loss, then burnout emerged.

4.2 Influences from Internal Environment in private university

Lack of scientific and democratic management system. Most private universities have not built a mature and perfect management mechanism to the youth teachers, and the management methods are still relatively simple. On the one hand, most of the private universities lack of collective leadership, and bureaucracy is more common in these. On the other hand, the management of private universities is more inclined to enterprise management, and care-style phenomenon is more prominent, often overlook the school's rules and characteristics. This situation makes most youth teachers lack of the opportunity to participate in school management and decision-making, the masters of the status and sense of responsibility is not due respect, lack of sense of belonging, and then produces burnout (Zhang, 2003).

Furthermore, the employment mechanism of private university often employs a full-time appointment system, which lead the relationship between private universities and youth teachers is basically a loose temporary employment relationship. It is difficult for youth teachers to feel the sense of belonging to the school, so that youth teachers in the teaching and research process are lack of initiative awareness to create and innovate. The polarization trend in the teacher team is more and more obvious. These are caused to a certain increased in the sense of burnout. Therefore, it is difficult for private universities to attract and retain excellent youth teachers.

Lack of adequate attention to the development of youth teachers' career. Private universities have a low level of scientific research. Teachers do not have much chance to participate in external communication and learning. They do not have regular collective lesson preparation and exchange of teaching experiences. However, the youth teachers highly tend to pay more attention to their growth and development. As Bredeson (2003) states, professional development refers to learning opportunities that engage educators' creative and reflective capacities in ways that strengthen their practice. The youth teachers expect they can not only always use their learning from university to teach the students, but also they want get the updated knowledge and recourses to progress their career. As we stated the teacher age structure in private university in the above section, this phenomenon does not conducive to the long-term development of research and teaching about youth teachers. If over time, youth teachers are muddle all day, then resulting burnout. Moreover, it also makes the high mobility of teachers, and bad for the scientific and sustainable development of schools.

4.3 Influences from teachers' own professionalism

As the admission scores of *Gaokao* is low, private university has a relative poor student quality. The students generally have a weak foundation, poor learning ability and other issues. In order to achieve the teaching quality, youth teachers often need to start from the most basic concepts, which causes them do a lot of lesson preparation. The number of teachers in private universities is generally too few, often less than the national standard. The youth teacher's weekly hours are generally around 16 hours, even some youth teachers up to 20 or more. Hence, the youth teachers' work is always overload. At the same time, most of the students learn with less initiative, which is difficult to form an effective interaction in the classroom, teaching and learning is no way to talk about. It is difficult to stimulate the enthusiasm of youth teachers teaching. In addition, most of the private university students are only children born in the 1990s, coupled with good family environment. Most of them are lack of tolerance and collective ideas, often more selfish performance

in life, and have a poor communication and relationships between the peers. This satiation also gives more difficulties to the student management work. Many youth teachers always need to undertake the part time job like class teacher or counsellor, recruiting affairs and other school affairs apart from their own work affairs. Youth teachers always assume many roles in the school: knowledge transfer, behavior demonstration, class managers, ideological educators, educational researchers, students' friends and so on. These roles constantly change and positioning in the daily work and life process. This always makes them fatigued physically and mentally. This phenomenon is consistent with Maslach's research (2001), she found that there is a high degree of correlation between the role of conflict and job burnout. In my school's situation, I and my youth colleagues always need to do many affairs not our own work in the weekend or the night, in the peak time, we cannot even rest for weeks. This makes us feel tired every day, and we begin to doubt the meaning and value of work.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this study confirms that the youth teachers' burnout existed obviously in private university through reviewing previous study and media report. Then, this study reveals that the three major factors (social system, internal management and professionalism) which influence the youth teachers' burnout of private university in the context of mainland China. Due to word limitation, the strategies how to reduce the youth teachers' burnout cannot analyze in-depth in this article. Based on my experience and the youth teachers' experience what I knew, the more effective strategy for releasing burnout among private university youth teachers is using the motivation system, using Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1987) and Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg, 1964). The youth teachers of private universities have a higher cultural level and rich emotions in nowadays. They are a group of educators who grow up in a pluralistic society, with strong self-esteem. They demand to ensure the basic physiological and security needs, pursuit of self-realization and self-respect constantly, and have a high expectation for their own future development and personal ability. They can be a certain degree of contempt for the temptation of interest, but great emphasis on their own personality respected degree. They are eager to their results from hard work can be recognized by the school and the public. Once the sense of belonging was formed, the youth teachers trust their prosperity are indivisible with the schools, and they inspire their work enthusiasm and creativity consciously. Only in this way, the private university can have a long-term sustainable development.

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