

The Relationship Between Burnout and Job Satisfaction among Autism Early Intervention Centre Teachers

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Abstract

This research aims to identify the levels of burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers in Selangor, Johor, WP Kuala Lumpur, Pulau Pinang, and Sarawak. It also aims to determine the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction. The findings of this research can provide an overview of the burnout phenomenon and levels of job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers. This research employs a survey design using a quantitative method involving 103 autism early intervention centre teachers working with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) students. The collected data were analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) version 27.0. The findings of this research indicated a moderate level of burnout among teachers, with emotional exhaustion showing a moderately high level, depersonalization at a low level, and personal accomplishment also at a low level of burnout. Among the various constructs examined, job satisfaction related to salary was relatively low, while others were moderately high. The correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between job satisfaction and two burnout sub-scales: emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The findings of this research can offer insights into the well-being of autism early intervention centre teachers, aiding administrations in creating supportive environments.

Keywords: Burnout, Job Satisfaction, Teachers, Autism, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Early Intervention Centre

Introduction

This research discusses the levels of burnout, job satisfaction, and the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers. In a dynamic and progressive educational landscape, the role of teachers is challenging yet fulfilling. Autism early intervention centre teachers play a crucial role in addressing the diverse needs of SEND students fostering an inclusive learning environment and navigating the intricacies of

individualized educational plans. The work of autism early intervention centre teachers coupled with evolving expectations, may put them at increased risk of experiencing burnout. Burnout is defined as a syndrome that occurs due to prolonged exposure to workplace stress that hasn't been effectively addressed or managed (World Health Organization, 2024). Freudenberger (1974) introduced the concept of burnout, referring to a state of psychological pressure affecting an individual's attitudes, emotions, and work motivation. Burnout occurs when teachers experience prolonged stress that is not positively addressed. Teacher well-being is crucial as it has implications for the quality of education provided to SEND students. At the same time, job satisfaction is seen as an essential component of teacher retention and effectiveness. Job satisfaction refers to an individual's feelings about their job and various aspects of their work such as satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their job (Spector, 1997). According to Spector (1997), job satisfaction encompasses individual aspects such as salary, promotion opportunities, supervision, fringe benefits, extrinsic rewards, operating procedures, colleagues, job nature, communication, and overall work environment. The interaction between burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers requires comprehensive research to identify factors influencing their mental and emotional well-being.

This research can provide input to various stakeholders such as autism early intervention centre teachers, special educational needs and SEND students, and early intervention administrators. Through this research, early intervention administrators could gain a clear understanding of the phenomena experienced by autism early intervention centre teachers and can improve management practices. From the perspective of teachers, this research can open their minds and provide exposure to autism early intervention centre teachers to take appropriate actions to mitigate and reduce burnout symptoms. From the perspective of SEND students, the well-being of autism early intervention centre teachers is linked to their success. Burnout and low job satisfaction can affect teachers' ability to provide effective teaching, support, and individualized learning experiences. Therefore, understanding these factors can contribute to improving educational outcomes for special educational needs students.

Problem Statement

Autism early intervention centre teachers play a crucial role in providing guidance and support for SEND students with diverse learning needs, facing challenges that can significantly impact their professional well-being. This challenging workload can lead to burnout among teachers, and burnout issues can affect job satisfaction among teachers. Teachers may feel physically and emotionally exhausted, leading to burnout. The issues of burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers have generated higher attention due to the potential implications for teacher effectiveness and the quality of education provided to SEND students.

There are several studies on burnout and job satisfaction among mainstream teachers, special education teachers, preschool teachers, and early childhood educators. However, research on burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers in Malaysia has not been explored by researchers in Malaysia. Therefore, this research aims to explore the levels of burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers teaching SEND students in the states of Selangor, WP Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Pulau Pinang, and Sarawak. Two methodological gaps have been identified in this research, specifically related to the respondent population and the research location. Additionally, this

research explores the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers.

Research Objectives

This research has three main objectives which are to identify the levels of burnout, levels of job satisfaction and determining the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers.

Methodology

This research adopts a quantitative survey methodology, employing various techniques to gather data such as defining the study population and sampling methods, selecting research tools, conducting data collection, and performing analysis. Banerjee and Chaudhury (2010) defined population as the complete set of individuals possessing special traits, whereas the sample represents a portion of this population selected according to specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. The survey questionnaire was designed using Google Form and distributed online. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table was utilized to ascertain the sample size of this research. The population consisted of 140 private and non-governmental organization teachers working in early autism intervention centres, whereas the study sample comprised 103 teachers from these centres in Selangor, WP Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Sarawak, and Pulau Pinang who teach SEND students. The sample selection involved a combination of convenience and purposive sampling to meet specific criteria, including private and non-governmental organization teachers who serve at autism intervention centers in the states of Selangor, WP Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Sarawak, and Pulau Pinang, having a minimum of one year of experience in autism intervention centres, teaching SEND students aged 2-6 years, and holding at least a Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) qualification.

Table 1 displays the frequency distribution and corresponding percentages of 103 respondents categorized by gender, age, location of early intervention centres, working experience, field of education, teacher's income, and teacher's satisfaction with training on early intervention.

Table 1
Demographic Information of Respondents

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	14	13.6
	Female	89	86.4
Age	20-29	73	70.9
	30-39	27	26.2
	40-49	3	2.9
Location of Early Intervention Centre	Selangor	56	54.4
	WP Kuala Lumpur	21	20.4

	Johor Bahru	8	7.8
	Sarawak	14	13.6
	Pulau Pinang	4	3.9
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Working Experience	1-2 years	54	52.4
	3-4 years	22	21.4
	5-6 years	7	6.8
	6 years and above	20	19.4
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Field of Education	Allied Health	80	77.7
	Social Science	16	15.5
	Pure Science	2	1.9
	ICT	5	4.9
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Teacher's Income	RM1000-RM2000	11	10.7
	RM2000-RM3000	57	55.3
	RM3000-RM4000	22	21.4
	RM4000-RM5000	4	3.9
	RM5000 and above	9	8.7
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Teacher's Satisfaction	Very Satisfactory	20	
19.4			
With Training on Early Intervention	Satisfactory	59	57.3
	Less Satisfactory	20	19.4
	Unsatisfactory	4	3.9
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Instrument

The research instruments included demographic data of participants, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Maslach and Jackson in 1981 for assessing burnout levels, and the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) developed by Smith et al. (1969) for measuring job satisfaction. This research used a questionnaire translated from English to Malay in the study by Zainudin and Muhamad (2021). The Cronbach's Alpha values for each dimension in job satisfaction were work itself, $\alpha = 0.90$, salary $\alpha = 0.88$, promotion opportunities $\alpha = 0.91$, supervision $\alpha = 0.92$, and coworkers $\alpha = 0.92$. The Cronbach's Alpha values for each dimension for burnout were emotional exhaustion, $\alpha = 0.71$, depersonalization $\alpha = 0.74$, and personal accomplishment $\alpha = 0.72$. The level of burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers is measured using a minimum of five Likert scale score interpretation (adapted from Nunnally & Berstein, 1994). Table 2 shows the mean score interpretation table.

Table 2

Mean value according to Five Likert Scale: Nunnaly & Berstein (1994)

Mean Score Value	Interpretation
1.00-2.00	Low
2.01-3.00	Medium Low
3.01-4.00	Medium High
4.01-5.00	High

Data Collection and Analysis

The findings of this study were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 27.0 to determine frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation scores. The survey questionnaires were distributed online to autism early intervention centre teachers using google form. Mean scores were divided into four categories for determining respondents' interpretation levels. Pearson correlation analysis was also conducted in the SPSS software to examine possible relationship between burnout dan job satisfaction and analyze data inferentially.

Results and Discussion

Below are the findings related to the first research question, which studies the levels of burnout among autism early intervention centre teachers.

Table 3 consists of analysis focusing on the first research question regarding the level of burnout among autism early intervention centre teachers specifically examining three key dimensions of burnout which are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

Table 3

Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Interpretation for Burnout

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Emotional Exhaustion	3.08	0.77	Medium High
Depersonalization	1.95	0.74	Low
Personal Accomplishment	3.72	0.59	Medium High

As shown in Table 3, the findings of this research indicate that the lowest score for personal accomplishment is at a mean of 3.72. A higher minimum score in personal accomplishment suggests a lower level of burnout experienced by teachers. The depersonalization construct shows the lowest mean score at 1.95, indicating a relatively low level of burnout in this aspect.

The second research question in this research focuses on examining the level of job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers. Table 4 presents an analysis addressing this question, which explores job satisfaction across five constructs: work itself, pay, promotion, supervision, and coworkers.

Table 4

Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and Interpretation for Job Satisfaction

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Work Itself	3.31	0.44	Moderate High
Pay	2.72	0.67	Moderate Low
Promotion	3.04	0.79	Medium High
Supervision	3.65	0.94	Medium High
Co-workers	3.72	0.50	Medium High
Overall	3.37	0.50	Medium High

These research findings highlight that the highest level of job satisfaction, as indicated by the minimum score, is observed in the coworkers' construct, with a mean of 3.72. This underscores the significant role of coworker support in fostering job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers. Conversely, the lowest minimum score is associated with the salary construct, with a mean of 2.72, indicating a moderately low level of satisfaction in this area.

The primary focus of the third research question is to determine whether there exists a significant relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers. Table 5 presents an analysis of correlation between dimensions of burnout and job satisfaction.

Table 5

Analysis of Correlation between Dimensions of Burnout and Job Satisfaction

Variables	Job Satisfaction	
	r	Values of p
Emotional Exhaustion	-0.533	<0.001**
Depersonalization	-0.241	0.014*
Personal Accomplishment	0.329	<0.001**

*Correlation significant value $p < 0.05$ *, $p < 0.001$

Using Pearson correlation, this research investigates the association between burnout dimensions and job satisfaction. According to the findings presented in Table 5, a significant positive relationship is found between personal accomplishment ($r=0.329$, $p < 0.001$) and job satisfaction. This indicates that higher levels of personal accomplishment are linked to increased job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers. Moreover,

emotional exhaustion ($r=-0.533$, $p<0.001$) and depersonalization ($r=-0.241$, $p=0.014$) exhibit significant negative relationships with job satisfaction. This implies that higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization lead to reduced job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers. Overall, the null hypothesis of this study is rejected as there is a significant relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers.

The research findings lead to the conclusion that the level of burnout experienced by autism early intervention centre teachers is moderately high, with depersonalization having the lowest mean compared to emotional exhaustion. In this research, teachers experience low levels of burnout for the depersonalization construct possibly due to good social support from colleagues, which can act as a protective factor against depersonalization. A strong social network allows individuals to share experiences, cope with stress, and feel a sense of companionship. This finding is supported by Spittle et al (2015) which found that Physical Education teachers in Australia experience low levels of depersonalization. This indicates that active engagement and good communication can contribute to lower burnout levels.

The level of burnout for the emotional exhaustion aspect is moderately high among autism early intervention centre teachers. These educators often collaborate with SEND students who have a wide range of needs ranging from learning disabilities and behavioural issues to physical and developmental challenges. Meeting these diverse needs demands significant emotional and physical energy from teachers, contributing to burnout. This aligns with findings from a study which stated Physical Education teachers may also experience exhaustion due to the demands of emotional exhaustion (Zainudin & Muhamad, 2021). Additionally, this research finding is also consistent with a study by Al-Adwan and Al-Khayat (2017), which indicates that parental pressure as a primary cause of burnout among teachers. Many parents have high expectations of autism early intervention centre teachers to meet the needs and expectations of their children, leading to psychological pressure experienced by teachers and ultimately resulting in burnout.

Conversely, the findings for the personal accomplishment construct are high, indicating that the level of burnout among autism early intervention centre teachers is low. These teachers have high resilience and coping mechanisms that enable them to face work challenges without succumbing to exhaustion. Zainudin and Muhamad (2021) found similar findings where teachers in Langkawi have good personal achievements and are satisfied with their self-efficacy. Although the level of burnout among teachers is still at an early stage, they still require regular motivation to enhance their productivity and sustain their high level of engagement.

The findings regarding job satisfaction dimensions indicate job satisfaction levels are moderately high for the job itself, promotion, supervision, and co-workers, while satisfaction with pay is at a moderate level. Teachers express dissatisfaction with their salaries, resulting in moderate job satisfaction. This research finding is consistent with research by Kroupis et al (2019), where low salaries contributed to teacher dissatisfaction with their work. Rahman and Mansor (2018) also found that the job satisfaction level among teachers for all dimensions is moderate. These findings align with research by Mahmud, Sarif and Hamzah (2020) showing moderate job satisfaction among lecturers at Community Colleges in Selangor and

Polytechnics in Melaka. Enhancing job satisfaction levels is crucial for achieving organizational goals, as satisfied individuals are likely to perform their work more effectively.

Based on the correlation analysis conducted, this research found a significant negative relationship between the level of burnout and job satisfaction for the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization sub-scales. This indicates that the higher the level of burnout among autism early intervention centre teachers, the lower their job satisfaction. This finding is consistent with Chen et al. (2022), which explains that burnout has a significant negative relationship with job satisfaction and can predict job satisfaction. In that study, Chinese generalist teachers with higher levels of burnout have lower job satisfaction. This implies that to reduce teachers' burnout levels and retain them in the classroom, enhancing their job satisfaction is necessary. Robinson's study (2019) also found a significant negative relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among Special Education teachers. Furthermore, Kolbadinejad, Ashraf Ganjoui, and Haji Anzehaei's study (2018) also found similar findings where lower burnout levels were associated with higher job satisfaction.

Implications

The findings of this research have implications in terms of theory, practice, and training. The theoretical implications provide comprehensive input on factors influencing burnout and job satisfaction. Additionally, this research enables the development of targeted interventions and strategies to create a more positive and supportive work environment. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory emphasizes the importance of dynamic resource interactions in understanding burnout, while the Multidimensional Burnout theory highlights separate studies for burnout components. These theories are integrated into the research to provide a comprehensive understanding of factors contributing to burnout and job satisfaction, facilitating the development of strategies to enhance teacher well-being and organizational success. The practical implications provide detailed information to early intervention administration about the level of burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers and enhance their management aspects. Furthermore, this research also has training implications by providing clear input and a picture to early intervention administrators to further improve training for autism early intervention centre teachers.

Limitations and Future Research

While this research has yielded some significant findings, there are several limitations that have been identified and can be addressed in future research. Primarily, the scope of this research is confined to teachers within early autism intervention centres only, limiting the generalizability of findings solely to this specific population. Hence, future research could encompass a broader range of teachers to broaden the generalization of findings across various teaching contexts. Moreover, this research focused on teachers from early autism intervention centres in five states, namely Selangor, WP Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Pulau Pinang, and Sarawak. Expanding future studies to encompass a more extensive geographical area within Malaysia could better ensure the psychological well-being of teachers, mitigate burnout risks, and enhance job satisfaction on a national scale.

Additionally, this research solely focused on two variables, which are burnout and job satisfaction, and the relationship between these two variables. Further research could explore the relationship between other variables such as commitment factors, self-efficacy,

and motivation, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teacher job satisfaction. It's essential to further investigate the root causes of job dissatisfaction within these aspects in upcoming studies. Through a detailed examination of emerging issues, more targeted strategies can be developed to improve the well-being and job satisfaction of teachers over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this research highlight a significant relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among autism early intervention centre teachers. These findings strengthen the importance of prioritizing retention strategies and providing support for educators in this field. This research can serve as a valuable resource for enhancing teacher retention and recruitment efforts. Early intervention centres can leverage these findings to develop initiatives aimed at sustaining and enhancing job satisfaction among their teaching staff. Furthermore, this research can contribute to training and policies focused on promoting the well-being of teachers working in early intervention settings.

This research increases current knowledge within the field of special education among autism early intervention centre teachers. It is based on theoretical frameworks such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Multidimensional Theory of Burnout, and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory where it provides deeper insights into the challenges faced by teachers. According to Herzberg's Two Factor theory, motivators like pay, promotion, recognition and solid emotional support from co-workers can have a positive impact on teacher's job satisfaction and provides a shield against burnout. Early intervention centres can apply Herberg's Two Factor theory by tailoring strategies to address factors of teacher dissatisfaction and promote factors that enhance teacher involvement, satisfaction, and overall well-being. Steps such as providing emotional support programs, counselling, fitness training and mental health initiatives can help teachers manage burnout. It is crucial to also recognize and appreciate the achievements of teachers in supporting the development of SEND students through rewards or incentives and open recognition within their organization. The dynamics between these theories is important as the quality of teacher support and retention directly affects the quality of care and education provided to SEND students.

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