Exploring Vietnamese Tertiary EFL Teachers' Perception of Burnout and Reflective Teaching across Career Stages

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This qualitative study explored the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching among Vietnamese tertiary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. Set within the specific cultural and educational context of Vietnam, the research engaged nine EFL teachers across varying career stages—novice, mid-career, and near-end career—from two different institutions. Utilizing semi-structured interviews, the study sought to delve into the teachers' personal experiences and perceptions, with the data analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings reveal several key themes: the varying impact of reflective teaching on burnout across career stages, the critical role of institutional support in mediating burnout, the influence of the Vietnamese cultural context on burnout and reflective teaching, differences in burnout experiences and coping strategies across career stages, and the personal coping strategies and resilience-building techniques employed by teachers. For novice teachers, reflective teaching initially exacerbates stress and burnout, while for mid-career and near-end career teachers, it evolves into a valuable tool for managing and preventing burnout. The study also highlights the pivotal role of institutional support, which needs to be tailored according to the career stages, and the significant influence of the Vietnamese cultural context on both burnout and reflective teaching practices. Furthermore, the importance of personal coping strategies and resilience-building across different career stages is emphasized. This research contributes to the understanding of teacher burnout and reflective teaching, particularly in non-Western contexts, offering implications for educational policy and practice.

Keywords: burnout, career stages, reflective teaching, Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers

INTRODUCTION

Teacher burnout in the field of tertiary education, particularly among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors, has emerged as a critical area of concern in educational research (Nayernia & Babayan, 2019). This is especially pertinent in the context of Vietnam, where EFL teachers encounter unique challenges inherent to their professional environment (Beisser & Thoma, 2021; Nguyen & Newton, 2021). EFL teachers in Vietnam often face large class sizes, limited resources, and high expectations for student performance, all of which can contribute to increased stress and burnout. Moreover, the cultural context, which places a high value on educational success, adds to the pressure experienced by these educators.

Reflective teaching, which involves a continual process of self-evaluation and adaptation in teaching methodologies, is widely acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of high-quality education (Schön, 1983, 2017). It empowers teachers to responsively address the diverse and evolving needs of their students, thereby enhancing the learning experience. Research in various educational contexts has shown that reflective teaching can lead to improved teaching practices and student outcomes (Farrell,

2015). However, the demanding nature of reflective practice, combined with the high-stress atmosphere typical of tertiary education, could potentially intensify experiences of burnout among teachers (Gobena, 2020; Shirazizadeh & Moradkhani, 2018). Burnout, defined as a state of emotional, mental, and sometimes physical exhaustion caused by prolonged or repetitive stress, presents significant obstacles to educators' well-being and effectiveness (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). In Vietnam, studies have reported high levels of burnout among EFL teachers, highlighting the need for effective interventions and support systems (Thanh Thao et al., 2019). However, there is a lack of comprehensive research examining the interplay between reflective teaching practices and burnout within this context.

In this study, we specifically explore how Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers perceive and experience the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching. We delve into the nuanced ways in which these two elements interact, and how this interaction varies across different stages of their teaching careers. Our motivation for researching this issue stems from the increasing reports of teacher burnout in Vietnam and the recognition that reflective teaching could either mitigate or exacerbate this problem. If this issue is not researched, there is a risk that interventions aimed at reducing burnout may overlook the potential benefits or drawbacks of reflective teaching practices. Furthermore, understanding this relationship could inform professional development programs and policy decisions aimed at supporting EFL teachers in Vietnam.

Other related studies conducted in Vietnam and abroad have yielded significant findings regarding teacher burnout and reflective teaching. For instance, a study by Lap and colleagues (2022) found that Vietnamese EFL teachers who engaged in regular reflective practice reported lower levels of burnout. Conversely, international studies, such as those by Hobbs and Quinn (2021) and van der Wal and colleagues (2019), have shown mixed results, with some indicating that reflective teaching can increase burnout under certain conditions.

The present study delved into the intricate dynamics between burnout and reflective teaching within this specific educational landscape, focusing on Vietnamese tertiary EFL educators. The insights gained aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of both burnout and reflective teaching, potentially informing strategies to support educators in managing these challenges. This exploration is especially crucial in the context of Vietnamese tertiary education, where understanding these dynamics can significantly impact educational practices and teacher well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Burnout in Educational Settings

Burnout in educators is extensively documented in the literature. Maslach and Florian (1988) defined burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, primarily attributed to prolonged exposure to interpersonal stressors at work. In the context of EFL teaching, factors such as workload (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014), class size (Kasalak & Dağyar, 2021), institutional support (Szabo & Jagodics, 2019), and student engagement levels (Wong et al., 2017) have been identified as key contributors to burnout. Studies focusing on Vietnamese tertiary educators have underscored the impact of socio-cultural factors and systemic pressures in exacerbating burnout (Vu et al., 2022).

The Concept and Practice of Reflective Teaching

Reflective teaching, as conceptualized by Schön (1983, 2017), involves teachers' critical analysis of their teaching practices for continuous improvement. This concept has evolved to encompass a range of practices, from informal self-reflection to structured peer observations and professional development activities (Farrell, 2015). Research indicates that reflective teaching can enhance pedagogical effectiveness and student learning outcomes (Jay & Johnson, 2002). In Vietnam, the

adoption of reflective teaching practices has been increasingly emphasized as a means to address the evolving demands of EFL education (Thanh Thao et al., 2020).

The Relationship between Burnout and Reflective Teaching

While the literature on burnout and reflective teaching as separate entities is substantial, research exploring their direct relationship is still emerging. One reason for examining the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching is that reflective teaching encourages teachers to engage in continuous self-assessment and professional growth, which may reduce feelings of helplessness and exhaustion, common symptoms of burnout. Some studies suggest that the introspective nature of reflective teaching might help mitigate burnout by fostering a greater sense of professional efficacy and job satisfaction (Meijer et al., 2009). However, others argue that the demands of reflective teaching, particularly in resource-constrained environments, could potentially exacerbate burnout (Hobbs et al., 2013). Additionally, understanding this relationship can provide valuable insights into how reflective practices might serve as a coping mechanism, distinguishing it from other factors like teaching loads or different teaching methods, which have their own unique impacts on burnout. In the Vietnamese context, the relationship between these variables remains under-explored, with limited empirical studies providing insights into how reflective practices impact teacher burnout in this specific educational setting.

Contextualizing the Study in Vietnamese Tertiary Education

Vietnamese tertiary education, particularly in EFL teaching, presents unique challenges. Teachers often face large class sizes (Lap & Thy, 2017), varied student proficiency levels (Vu, 2023), and high administrative demands (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). These factors, combined with cultural expectations and institutional pressures, create a distinctive environment for examining the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching.

In summary, the literature review highlights a significant gap in understanding how burnout and reflective teaching interact in the specific context of Vietnamese tertiary EFL education. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the experiences of Vietnamese EFL teachers, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on teacher well-being and pedagogical innovation in high-stress educational environments.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing semi-structured interviews to explore the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching among Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Creswell (2013) for in-depth qualitative exploration, particularly in understanding complex social phenomena such as teacher burnout. This methodological approach was chosen for its ability to capture the nuanced understanding of the subjective experiences and perceptions of teachers, which are often not fully accessible through quantitative methods. Semi-structured interviews provided the necessary flexibility to delve deeply into individual experiences while maintaining a consistent structure across interviews to enable comparative analysis. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), semi-structured interviews are effective in qualitative research for uncovering rich, detailed data that can reveal underlying patterns and themes.

The study was grounded in two principal theoretical frameworks: burnout theory and the concept of reflective practice in education. Burnout theory, as developed by Maslach and Florian (1988), provides an essential framework for understanding burnout, a condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. Maslach and

Leiter (2016) further elaborated that burnout results from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed, highlighting its relevance to high-stress professions such as teaching. This theory was crucial for the study as it helped in comprehending the specific symptoms and underlying causes of burnout, particularly within the demanding context of Vietnamese tertiary education. By applying this framework, the study could effectively identify and interpret how burnout manifests among Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers, considering the unique pressures and challenges they face.

Alongside burnout theory, the study also incorporated Schön's (1983, 2017) reflective practice model. This model emphasizes the importance of critical self-reflection in the teaching profession. It advocates for a continuous process where teachers critically assess and adapt their teaching methods based on their experiences and feedback. Schön (1987) argued that reflective practice is crucial for professional growth and effective teaching, as it encourages teachers to become more aware of their practices and their impacts. This aspect of the study was vital for understanding how reflective teaching practices impact teachers' experiences of burnout. By drawing upon Schön's model, the research aimed to explore the dual nature of reflective teaching: as a potential contributor to burnout due to its demanding nature, and as a possible mitigator of burnout through enhanced teaching efficacy and job satisfaction. Previous studies, such as those by Farrell (2013), have shown that reflective practice can lead to significant improvements in teaching quality and teacher well-being, which supports the exploration of its effects in this study. This combination of theoretical perspectives provided a comprehensive lens to examine the complex interplay between burnout and reflective teaching among Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers.

Participants

The study focused on a purposively selected group of nine Vietnamese EFL teachers, representing a cross-section of professional experiences within the context of Vietnamese tertiary education. These participants were drawn from two different educational institutions in Vietnam, chosen for their distinct teaching environments and reputations for comprehensive EFL programs. The selection of these institutions was based on their diverse student populations and varying levels of institutional support for teachers, allowing for a richer comparative analysis. The selection was strategically divided into three distinct career stages to capture a broad spectrum of experiences: three novice teachers, with less than five years of teaching experience; three mid-career teachers, who had been teaching for five to fifteen years; and three near-end career teachers, with over fifteen years of experience in the field. Choosing three teachers for each career stage was intended to provide a representative sample that could offer a balanced view of experiences at different points in a teaching career. Although the sample size is small, it was deemed sufficient to obtain a rich array of perspectives through in-depth qualitative analysis, as qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This diverse cohort provided a rich array of perspectives on the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching.

Ethical considerations were at the forefront of the participant selection process and throughout the study. The participants were informed in detail about the study's objectives, the nature of their involvement, and their rights as participants, including the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any adverse consequences. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and any identifying information was carefully removed from the study's documentation and publications. Prior to participating in the study, all teachers provided informed consent, which was obtained in accordance with ethical guidelines stipulated by the respective institutions and broader ethical standards in educational research.

The inclusion of teachers from different career stages and institutions was crucial in providing a comprehensive understanding of the nuances in how burnout and reflective teaching practices are experienced and perceived across the spectrum of a teaching career in Vietnamese tertiary education.

This purposeful sampling strategy ensured that the study captured a wide range of experiences, from the fresh perspectives of novice teachers to the seasoned insights of near-end career educators, thereby enriching the study's findings and its contribution to the field. Despite the small sample size, the detailed and varied experiences shared by the participants provided valuable insights that might not be achievable through a larger, less focused sample.

Data Collection

The data collection for this study was primarily conducted through semi-structured interviews, a method chosen for its effectiveness in eliciting detailed, personal responses. A total of 15 semi-structured questions were used in the interviews. These questions were adapted from previous research on teacher burnout and reflective teaching to suit the specific context of Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers (Hobbs et al., 2013; van der Wal et al., 2019). Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted with two Vietnamese EFL teachers who were not part of the main participant group. The participants for the pilot study were chosen based on their availability and willingness to provide constructive feedback. They were experienced teachers who could offer insights into the clarity and relevance of the interview questions. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the interview protocol, ensuring the clarity and relevance of the questions. During the piloting, the teachers provided valuable feedback. For example, one participant noted that a question about the frequency of reflective teaching practices was too vague, suggesting it be rephrased to specify different types of reflective activities. Another participant indicated that the question about the impact of burnout on personal life was too intrusive and recommended framing it in a more general context, such as, "Can you describe how your experiences of burnout have influenced your teaching practices?" Based on the feedback and observations from the pilot study, necessary revisions were made to the interview questions to enhance their appropriateness and comprehensiveness.

The revised interview protocol included questions such as: "Can you describe a recent instance where you felt burned out and its impact on your teaching?" and "How do you integrate reflective teaching practices in your daily routine, and how does this affect your experience of burnout?" These questions were designed to explore the depth of the teachers' experiences with burnout and their engagement with reflective teaching practices. It is important to note that no closed-ended questions were used; the focus was entirely on open-ended questions to facilitate rich, detailed narratives.

Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in locations chosen by the participants for their convenience and comfort, such as their offices or quiet cafes. This setting was intended to provide a relaxed atmosphere conducive to open and honest discussions. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the native language of the participants, to ensure clarity and ease of expression. This choice was crucial for capturing the subtleties and nuances of their experiences and perceptions. For participants who required it, additional linguistic or cultural explanations were provided to ensure full understanding of the questions and to facilitate more accurate and expressive responses.

The use of semi-structured interviews in the native language of the participants, combined with the careful preparation and revision of the interview protocol, ensured that the data collection process was both rigorous and sensitive to the contextual and cultural specifics of the Vietnamese tertiary EFL teaching environment. This approach was instrumental in gathering rich, detailed data, forming the foundation for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching in this context.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews was conducted using thematic analysis, a method renowned for its flexibility and robustness in qualitative research. This approach

allowed for an in-depth exploration of the patterns, themes, and nuances present in the data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions (Braun et al., 2023).

In the initial phase of the analysis, the interview transcripts were meticulously read and re-read to gain a thorough familiarity with the depth and breadth of the content. This immersive process facilitated the identification of preliminary ideas and patterns that emerged from the data. Subsequently, a more focused coding process was undertaken. During this stage, segments of the data were systematically coded, categorizing them into meaningful groups. This coding process was both iterative and reflective, with constant comparison between different data segments and across different transcripts to ensure consistency and accuracy in the interpretation.

Following the coding, the study moved into the phase of theme development. The coding system included preset categories of burnout and reflective teaching, adapted from the literature review (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Schön, 1987). These preset categories were used to guide the initial coding process, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in established theoretical frameworks while remaining open to new insights emerging from the data. The coded data segments were collated and examined to identify overarching themes and sub-themes. These themes were carefully refined and defined, ensuring that they accurately represented the underlying ideas and concepts conveyed by the participants. Throughout this process, attention was paid to both the frequency of certain ideas and their significance to the research questions, allowing for a balanced consideration of both common and unique perspectives among the participants. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how burnout and reflective teaching are perceived and experienced by Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers, aligning the findings with existing literature while also highlighting context-specific nuances.

The final phase involved reviewing and refining the themes to ensure they formed a coherent, internally consistent, and externally valid narrative. This phase also included integrating the themes with the existing literature and theoretical frameworks to situate the findings within the broader academic context. The resulting thematic framework provided a detailed and nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between burnout and reflective teaching as experienced by Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers.

Throughout the data analysis process, rigor was maintained by actively seeking out and considering divergent or contradictory data, thus ensuring a comprehensive and unbiased analysis. This thematic analysis not only illuminated the specific research questions of this study but also contributed to the broader discourse on teacher burnout and reflective teaching practices.

FINDINGS

Impact of Reflective Teaching on Burnout Experience

This theme was prominently mentioned by seven out of the nine participants, including two novice teachers, three mid-career teachers, and two near-end career teachers, indicating its prevalence across different career stages.

The findings revealed a nuanced relationship between reflective teaching and burnout. Novice teachers, in particular, expressed that reflective teaching initially added to their stress and feelings of inadequacy, potentially exacerbating burnout. Nhan, a novice teacher, remarked, "When I started reflecting on my teaching methods, I often felt overwhelmed by the areas I needed to improve. It sometimes led to self-doubt and increased stress." This sentiment aligns with burnout theory, which suggests that early career stages might be more vulnerable to stress due to perceived gaps between idealistic expectations and real-world challenges.

In contrast, mid-career teachers reported a more positive impact of reflective teaching on their experience of burnout. Tu, a mid-career teacher, noted, "Reflective teaching helped me identify what was causing stress in my classes and find ways to address it. It has become a valuable tool for managing my workload and reducing burnout." This reflects the potential of reflective teaching as a mechanism for coping with burnout, as proposed by the concept of reflective practice in education. The ability to critically analyze and adapt teaching practices appears to equip mid-career teachers with strategies to mitigate stressors effectively.

Near-end career teachers, however, provided a different perspective, with one, who is Kien, stating, "Over the years, reflective teaching has become integral to my practice. It helps me stay engaged and find new ways to teach, which keeps burnout at bay." For these experienced educators, reflective teaching seems to act as a buffer against burnout, fostering a sense of professional renewal and ongoing engagement with their work. This observation can be interpreted through the lens of burnout theory, which posits that a sense of personal accomplishment and efficacy in one's work is a critical factor in mitigating burnout.

These findings demonstrate that the relationship between reflective teaching and burnout is not linear and varies significantly across different stages of a teaching career. While reflective teaching may initially contribute to stress and burnout among novice teachers, it evolves into an effective tool for managing and preventing burnout for mid-career and near-end career teachers. This variation underscores the importance of contextualizing reflective teaching practices within the career trajectory of educators, as suggested by both burnout theory and the concept of reflective practice in education.

Institutional Support and Its Role in Mediating Burnout

This theme was referenced by all nine participants, encompassing three novice teachers, three mid-career teachers, and three near-end career teachers, highlighting its universal relevance across different career stages.

The participants consistently highlighted the critical role of institutional support in shaping their experiences of burnout and their engagement in reflective teaching practices. Novice teachers, in particular, emphasized the need for more structured support systems. Tin, a novice teacher, shared, "I often feel lost in handling classroom challenges. More guidance and support from the institution would definitely help ease the pressure." This perspective aligns with burnout theory, which underscores the importance of organizational context in influencing an individual's stress and burnout levels.

Mid-career teachers expressed a somewhat different view, focusing on the need for recognition and resources to facilitate reflective teaching. Huong, a mid-career teacher, explained, "While I've found my footing in teaching, the lack of resources and recognition for reflective practices often leaves me frustrated and contributes to burnout." This response illustrates how institutional support, or the lack thereof, can impact the sustainability of reflective teaching practices and, consequently, affect teacher burnout.

For near-end career teachers, institutional support was seen as crucial for fostering a culture of continuous learning and reflection, which they viewed as antidotes to burnout. Bao, an experienced teacher, remarked, "The support I receive for professional development and reflective practices makes me feel valued and rejuvenates my teaching." This suggests that for more experienced teachers, institutional support not only mitigates burnout but also enhances job satisfaction and engagement, consistent with the principles of reflective practice in education.

These findings underscore the vital role of institutional support in mediating the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching. Across all career stages, teachers indicated that support from their institutions, in the form of resources, guidance, and recognition, is pivotal in managing burnout and

fostering effective reflective practices. This highlights the need for educational institutions to be proactive in creating supportive environments that recognize and facilitate the professional growth and well-being of their teaching staff.

Cultural Context and Its Influence on Burnout and Reflective Teaching

This theme was mentioned by six of the nine participants, including two novice teachers, two mid-career teachers, and two near-end career teachers. This distribution suggests that the impact of cultural context is a noteworthy factor across different stages of teaching careers.

The participants highlighted how the specific cultural context of Vietnam influences both their experiences of burnout and their approach to reflective teaching. Novice teachers particularly noted the challenges posed by traditional expectations and hierarchical structures within the education system. Quynh, a novice teacher, reflected, "Adhering to traditional teaching norms while trying to implement reflective practices is challenging. It sometimes adds to the stress and leads to feelings of burnout." This comment aligns with burnout theory, which acknowledges that cultural and organizational norms can significantly impact stress levels and job satisfaction.

Mid-career teachers discussed the cultural aspects of respect and authority in the classroom, and how these dynamics interact with reflective teaching practices. Ninh, a mid-career teacher, shared, "Balancing the cultural expectations of being an authoritative figure in the classroom with reflective teaching can be tricky. It can lead to internal conflicts and contribute to burnout." This perspective highlights the complex interplay between cultural norms and innovative teaching practices, and its potential impact on teacher well-being.

For near-end career teachers, the cultural context was seen as both a challenge and an opportunity. Chau, an experienced teacher, observed, "Over the years, I've learned to navigate the cultural expectations and integrate them with reflective teaching. It's a balancing act, but it can also be enriching." This viewpoint suggests that with experience, teachers may develop strategies to harmonize cultural norms with reflective practices, potentially mitigating burnout.

These findings indicate that the cultural context of Vietnam plays a significant role in shaping teachers' experiences of burnout and their engagement in reflective teaching. The study reveals that teachers at different career stages perceive and respond to these cultural influences differently, suggesting that interventions to address burnout and promote reflective teaching need to be sensitive to these cultural dimensions. This theme underscores the importance of considering cultural factors in the discourse on teacher burnout and reflective practice, particularly in non-Western educational settings.

Career Stage Differences in Experiencing Burnout and Engaging in Reflective Teaching

This theme emerged from the narratives of all nine participants, reflecting the experiences of three novice teachers, three mid-career teachers, and three near-end career teachers. The theme underscores the varying impacts of career stage on the experiences of burnout and the practice of reflective teaching.

Novice teachers reported feeling particularly vulnerable to burnout due to their inexperience and the high expectations they placed on themselves. Nhan expressed, "As a new teacher, I constantly question my methods and effectiveness. This self-doubt and the pressure to excel contribute significantly to my burnout." This aligns with burnout theory, which posits that novices might face greater stress due to their lack of experience and the challenge of meeting their own and others' expectations.

Mid-career teachers, on the other hand, described a different kind of challenge. They often felt caught between the demands of their evolving roles and the need to maintain enthusiasm in their teaching.

Huong stated, "I've become more confident in my teaching, but the routine can be draining, and finding new ways to engage students is a constant challenge." This reflects the nuanced ways in which reflective teaching practices and burnout interact at different career stages, as suggested by the concept of reflective practice in education.

For near-end career teachers, the challenge was in maintaining their passion and avoiding the complacency that can come with experience. Kien shared, "After years of teaching, it's easy to feel like you've seen it all. Staying innovative and reflective is key to keeping burnout at bay." This perspective highlights how reflective teaching can serve as a tool for career-long engagement and satisfaction, mitigating the risk of burnout even in the later stages of a teaching career.

These findings illustrate that the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching is significantly influenced by the career stage of the teachers. The study reveals a dynamic interplay where the causes, manifestations, and coping mechanisms related to burnout and reflective teaching evolve as teachers progress through their careers. Understanding these differences is crucial for developing targeted support strategies for teachers at various stages of their professional journey.

Personal Coping Strategies and Resilience Building

This theme was discussed by eight of the nine participants, including two novice teachers, three mid-career teachers, and three near-end career teachers. It highlights the individual approaches and resilience-building techniques teachers adopt to manage burnout and engage effectively in reflective teaching.

Novice teachers tended to focus on developing personal coping mechanisms to deal with the immediate challenges of burnout. Quynh described, "I rely on peer support and sometimes seek mentorship to navigate the stressful aspects of teaching. It helps me reflect more constructively on my practice." This approach is reflective of burnout theory, which emphasizes the importance of support networks and coping strategies in mitigating the effects of burnout, especially for those in the early stages of their career.

Mid-career teachers, having gained more experience, often spoke about a combination of professional and personal strategies to balance the demands of teaching and reflective practice. Tu shared, "I've learned to balance my workload and set aside time for hobbies and family, which helps me recharge and come back to teaching with fresh perspectives." This statement illustrates the role of work-life balance and personal well-being in enhancing the capacity for reflective teaching and resilience against burnout.

Near-end career teachers highlighted the importance of long-term resilience building and the continuous evolution of coping strategies. Ninh noted, "Over the years, I've developed a toolkit of strategies, from mindfulness to professional development, which keeps me engaged and helps mitigate feelings of burnout." This perspective underscores the role of accumulated experience and ongoing professional growth in building resilience, as suggested by the concept of reflective practice in education.

The findings on this theme reveal that teachers across different career stages employ a range of personal coping strategies and resilience-building techniques to manage burnout and maintain their commitment to reflective teaching. These strategies evolve and adapt over time, reflecting the changing needs and experiences of teachers as they progress through their careers. This theme emphasizes the importance of individual agency and the development of personalized coping mechanisms in addressing the challenges of burnout and enhancing the effectiveness of reflective teaching practices.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the existing literature on burnout and reflective teaching, particularly in the context of Vietnamese tertiary EFL education. The exploration of these themes within this specific cultural and educational setting offers both parallels and divergences from previous studies, thereby enriching the understanding of this complex relationship.

The theme of the impact of reflective teaching on burnout experience, as highlighted by a majority of participants across different career stages, presents both similarities and differences when compared to existing literature. Previous studies have often emphasized the potential of reflective teaching to mitigate burnout by enhancing teacher efficacy and job satisfaction (Meijer et al., 2009). However, this study adds a nuanced perspective by illustrating that the impact of reflective teaching on burnout varies across career stages. For novice teachers, the initial experience of reflective teaching can exacerbate burnout due to increased stress and feelings of inadequacy, a finding that diverges from the commonly positive portrayal of reflective practices in literature (Jacobson, 2016). For mid-career and near-end career teachers, reflective teaching evolves into an effective strategy for managing and preventing burnout, aligning with existing research but highlighting a developmental trajectory in the relationship between reflective teaching and burnout (Lim & Eo, 2014).

The unanimous emphasis on institutional support across all career stages resonates with existing literature that underscores the critical role of organizational context in influencing burnout (Maslach & Florian, 1988). However, this study extends the understanding by differentiating the types of support needed at various career stages. While novice teachers seek more structured guidance, mid-career teachers look for recognition and resources for reflective practices, and near-end career teachers value support for ongoing professional development. This finding contributes a layered perspective to the discourse, suggesting that institutional support needs to be tailored according to career stages to effectively mitigate burnout and foster reflective teaching.

The influence of cultural context, as reported by participants, offers a unique contribution to the field. While existing studies acknowledge the role of cultural and organizational norms in shaping burnout experiences (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2020)), this study provides specific insights into how the Vietnamese cultural context influences both burnout and the practice of reflective teaching. It highlights the specific challenges and opportunities that Vietnamese cultural norms present at different stages of a teaching career, thereby adding depth to the understanding of how cultural factors intersect with burnout and reflective practices in non-Western educational settings.

The theme of career stage differences echoes some findings from previous research (e.g., Rahimi, 2017) but extends them by offering a more granular analysis of how burnout and engagement in reflective teaching vary across the career trajectory. This study underscores the evolving nature of the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching, a dynamic that has been less explored in existing literature. By highlighting how the causes, manifestations, and coping mechanisms related to burnout and reflective teaching evolve, this study provides valuable insights for developing targeted support strategies for teachers at different career stages.

The emphasis on personal coping strategies and resilience building aligns with burnout theory's focus on individual coping mechanisms (Maslach & Florian, 1988). However, this study extends the narrative by illustrating how these strategies are adapted and evolve over the course of a teacher's career. The findings offer a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers at different career stages leverage personal and professional strategies to manage burnout and maintain their commitment to reflective teaching.

CONCLUSION

The study, set in the context of Vietnamese tertiary education, aimed to explore the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching among EFL teachers. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the study engaged nine Vietnamese EFL teachers across different career stages (novice, mid-career, and near-end career) from two institutions. Through semi-structured interviews, which were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, the research sought to delve deeply into the teachers' experiences and perceptions.

The findings revealed several key themes: the varying impact of reflective teaching on burnout across career stages, the critical role of institutional support in mediating burnout, the influence of the Vietnamese cultural context on burnout and reflective teaching, differences in burnout experiences and coping strategies across career stages, and the personal coping strategies and resilience-building techniques employed by teachers. Notably, the study found that while reflective teaching initially might exacerbate burnout for novice teachers, it becomes an effective tool for managing and preventing burnout for mid-career and near-end career teachers. Additionally, the findings emphasized the need for tailored institutional support and highlighted the significant influence of cultural context and personal coping strategies on the experiences of burnout and engagement in reflective teaching.

Based on these findings, the study offers several recommendations for school policy that could help lessen the factors contributing to teacher burnout. Firstly, institutions should consider implementing comprehensive support systems tailored to the different career stages of teachers. This could include mentorship programs for novice teachers, providing them with the necessary guidance and support to navigate the challenges of reflective teaching without exacerbating burnout. Secondly, mid-career and near-end career teachers could benefit from professional development opportunities focused on advanced reflective practices and resilience-building techniques, helping them to maintain their enthusiasm and effectiveness in teaching. Additionally, it is crucial for schools to foster a supportive and collaborative work environment where teachers feel valued and appreciated. This can be achieved through regular feedback and recognition programs, as well as opportunities for teachers to share their experiences and strategies with their peers. Institutional support should also extend to ensuring manageable workloads and providing resources that facilitate effective reflective teaching practices without overwhelming the teachers. School policies should also consider the cultural context, recognizing the unique pressures faced by Vietnamese EFL teachers. This could involve promoting a healthy work-life balance and offering counseling services to help teachers manage stress and burnout. Schools could also encourage the adoption of mindfulness and well-being programs that align with the cultural values and practices of the Vietnamese education system.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study, while providing valuable insights into the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching among Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers, is not without its limitations. Firstly, the sample size, comprising only nine participants from two institutions, limits the generalizability of the findings. The experiences and perceptions captured may not fully represent the broader population of tertiary EFL teachers in Vietnam. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study, though rich in detailed insights, lacks the statistical power to establish causality or broader trends. Another limitation is the potential for response bias, as participants might have provided socially desirable answers or been influenced by their current emotional states. Furthermore, the study focused solely on the context of Vietnamese tertiary education, which means the findings may not be directly applicable to different educational contexts or cultural settings.

Given these limitations, future research could explore this topic with a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Studies employing a mixed-methods approach could combine the depth of qualitative insights with the robustness of quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between burnout and reflective teaching. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural and educational contexts could offer a broader perspective on how these dynamics play out in various settings. It would also be beneficial for future research to examine the long-term impact of reflective teaching on burnout, potentially through longitudinal studies. Such research could provide deeper insights into how teachers' experiences and strategies evolve over time and contribute to the development of more effective support and intervention programs for educators at different stages of their career.

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