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Buffering Burnout: The Protective Role of Social Support Among Public Elementary Teachers

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Abstract: ***Burnout remains a serious issue in the teaching profession, particularly in public elementary schools where teachers face increasing demands and limited resources. This study investigates the relationship between perceived social support and burnout among teachers at Mantalongon Elementary School in Barili, Cebu. Guided by Social Support Theory and the Maslach Burnout Inventory framework, employing a descriptive-correlational design with 30 teacher-respondents. Data were gathered using adapted instruments that measured five domains of social support—emotional, informational, esteem, social network, and tangible—and three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Findings revealed a moderate negative correlation between social support and burnout ($r = -0.462$, $p < .05$), indicating that higher levels of perceived support were associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion. Emotional and informational support were reported as the most accessible forms of assistance among teachers. These results affirm that social support functions as a protective factor against burnout and underline the importance of strong peer and administrative support systems. With this, the study recommends the development of structured support programs in schools to promote teacher well-being and to encourage teachers to do self-care practices. These findings are relevant for school leaders, policymakers, and mental health professionals committed to fostering healthier and more resilient work environments for educators.***

Keywords: education, burnout, social support, social support theory, Maslach Burnout Inventory, Philippines, descriptive-correlational.

I. INTRODUCTION

Burnout is an emerging and serious issue in the teaching profession, specifically public elementary schools where teachers increasingly experience workloads, starving resources, and changes in educational demands. As a result, the emotional and psychological effects of these challenges increase vulnerability to burnout, burned out: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). This study aims to determine how perceived social support could work as a buffer against burnout among teachers in a public elementary school setting in the Philippines. Rooted in Social Support Theory and informed by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) framework, this study investigates the relationship of emotional, informational, esteem, social network, and tangible social support with the three dimensions of burnout. Teachers in rural and resource-poor schools are especially vulnerable to burnout because they do not have structured support systems to alleviate their burnouts. Thus, this inquiry is appropriate and necessary. This study was done in Mantalongon Elementary School located in Barili, Cebu to have a localized observation on how social support alleviates burnout among Filipino teachers.

Burnout not only affects teachers' mental health but also impacts the quality of instruction and student achievement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Prior research highlights the connection between high levels of social support and reduced burnout symptoms (Kim et al, 2017; Ran., 2024). However, limited empirical evidence exists concerning the Philippine public-school context, particularly at the elementary level, which underscores the need for this study.

The theoretical foundation of this research is drawn from Cobb's (2019) Social Support Theory, which posits that emotional and instrumental resources from one's network can alleviate stress. Additionally, the study aligns with the MBI model that operationalizes burnout into measurable domains. By integrating these frameworks, the research seeks to provide a holistic understanding of how different types of support can influence teachers' resilience and well-being.

This research aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by promoting mental wellness in educational institutions. It also supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) by addressing teacher sustainability, and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by advocating for humane work environments in the public sector.

Given this, the study seeks to answer the primary question: What is the relationship between perceived social support and the level of burnout among public elementary teachers at Mantalongon Elementary School in Barili, Cebu? Specifically, the study aims to: (1) describe the respondents' demographic profile in terms of age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, and years of teaching

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experience; (2) determine the extent of perceived social support across five domains—emotional, informational, esteem, social network, and tangible; (3) identify the frequency of burnout experienced in terms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment; (4) examine the relationship between perceived social support and burnout; and (5) propose an intervention plan based on the findings. The study hypothesizes that higher levels of perceived social support are significantly associated with lower levels of teacher burnout. By generating localized empirical evidence, the findings aim to inform the development of school-based support programs and contribute to educational leadership and mental health policy within the Philippine public school system.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between perceived social support and burnout among public elementary teachers at Mantalongon Elementary School in Barili, Cebu, during the academic year 2023–2024. The correlational approach was chosen to describe and assess the degree of association between social support dimensions and the levels of burnout experienced by teachers, without establishing causal relationships. The study was guided by the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model, where teacher demographics, social support, and burnout levels served as input variables; the administration of survey instruments as the process; and the development of an intervention plan as the output.

The entire population of 30 teachers in the said school served as respondents, selected through total enumeration. Two primary research instruments were utilized: the modified Social Support Questionnaire, which was based on De Leon (2025), and the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI-ES). The Social Support Questionnaire comprised 15 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, measuring informational, emotional, esteem, social network, and tangible support. Meanwhile, the MBI-ES, developed by Christina Maslach, included 22 items that assessed three core dimensions of burnout—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment—also rated on a 5-point scale. The reliability and validity of both instruments were supported by previous studies and were adapted to suit the local context. Before data collection, ethics clearance and permission were obtained from the School Principal. Participation was entirely voluntary, and confidentiality assured. Respondents were oriented towards the purpose, procedures, and right to withdraw at any time. Surveys were administered personally, and the obtained data had been encoded, listed, and subjected to statistical treatment. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the demographic profile, while the extent of social support and frequency of burnout were analyzed using weighted means and descriptive ratings. Finally, the relationship between social support and burnout levels was measured using Pearson's r at 0.05 significance level. This methodology ensured the study is ethical in research regard and yielded valid practical result interventions based on which to reduce burnout through better social support systems.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Herein are presented and analyzed the results of the survey examining the relationship between social support and burnout in elementary school teachers. The information is presented according to the survey objectives, with accompanying tables to facilitate interpretation. Theory-related literature and relevant concepts are referenced in support of the analysis.

A. Demographic Profile of Respondents

This section presented the profile of the participants in terms of age and gender, highest educational attainment, civil status, number of years of teaching, and the individual performance commitment and review (IPCR) rating as presented as the baseline information of the study.

Table 1. Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
31-40	11	36.67%
41-50	10	33.33%
51-61	9	30.00%

Table 1 displays the age distribution of the 30 teacher respondents from Mantalongon Elementary School. The majority were aged 31-40 years (36.67%), followed closely by the 41-50 age group (33.33%) and the 51-61 age group (30%). The mean age was 44.98 (SD = 8.34), suggesting a mature teaching population. This finding aligns with Odanga and Aloka (2024), who assert that as individuals age, work efficiency and reliance on support systems evolve, necessitating stronger social supports to sustain well-being and job performance.

Table 2. Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	22	73.3%
Male	8	26.7%

Table 2 shows that 73.3% of respondents were female and 26.7% male. This distribution reflects global and national trends in the feminization of the teaching profession (Drudy, 2008; Kammermeier et al., 2025).

Table 3. Highest Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's Degree	1	3.3%
Master's Units	22	73.3%
Master's Graduate	7	23.3%

Table 3 indicates that most teachers had earned Master's Units (73.3%), while 23.3% had completed a master's degree. Only one teacher held a bachelor's degree. This educational attainment suggests strong professional development, supporting Educational Trends (2018), which links higher education levels to increased instructional efficacy.

Table 4. Civil Status

Civil Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	23	76.7%
Single	5	16.7%
Separated	1	3.3%
Widow	1	3.3%

Table 4 highlights that 76.7% of teachers were married, suggesting the potential for a strong external support system. Prior research confirms the buffering effect of spousal support on burnout (Brown & Williams, 2017).

Table 5. Years in Teaching

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
6-10 years	9	30.0%
11-15 years	3	10.0%
16+ years	18	60.0%

Table 5 reveals that 60% of teachers have 16 or more years of teaching experience, indicative of a seasoned workforce. Brindley & Sims (2020) found that experienced teachers often have robust support networks, which may reduce burnout.

Table 6. IPCRF Ratings

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Outstanding	6	20.0%
Very Satisfactory	18	60.0%
Satisfactory	6	20.0%

Table 6 shows that most teachers (60%) received a "Very Satisfactory" IPCRF rating, reflecting generally high-performance levels.

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A. *Extent of Social Support*

Social support was assessed across five dimensions: informational, emotional, esteem, social network, and tangible. Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics for each type of support received by the respondents.

Table 7. Perceived Social Support

Dimension	Mean	Description
Informational	4.57	Strongly Agree
Emotional	4.63	Strongly Agree
Esteem	4.30	Strongly Agree
Social Network	4.33	Strongly Agree
Tangible Support	4.13	Agree

These findings demonstrate that teachers perceive a generally high level of social support, with emotional and informational support standing out as the most prevalent. Respondents strongly agreed that they could rely on others to provide encouragement, understanding, and useful information, which are crucial resources in managing stress and job demands. The elevated rating for emotional support suggests that teachers feel emotionally validated and cared for by their peers, colleagues, and immediate social circles. Informational support, with the second-highest mean, indicates that teachers have reliable access to feedback, advice, and guidance to navigate professional challenges, especially in post-pandemic adjustments.

These findings reinforce the assertions of Albrecht and Adelman (1987) as cited by Harden & Burke (2019) that both verbal and non-verbal supportive behaviors—such as empathy, advice-giving, and encouragement—can reduce anxiety and promote coping. Likewise, Barnes and Duck (1994) cited by Ko et al. (2013) emphasized the importance of routine supportive exchanges in bolstering individual resilience and sustaining well-being even in high-demand professions like teaching.

With this, the relatively lower yet still positive mean in tangible support (M = 4.13) reflects how practical assistance—such as providing materials or helping with workloads—is moderately accessible but may benefit from enhancement, particularly in resource-limited public-school settings.

These outcomes highlight that social connectedness is a critical factor in educators' professional functioning, and that fostering strong support structures within schools is essential in promoting positive mental health and job satisfaction.

B. *Frequency of Burnout Experience*

Burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), examining emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Table 8 summarizes the descriptive results.

Table 8. Burnout Experience

Burnout Dimension	Mean	Description
Emotional Exhaustion	3.20	Sometimes
Depersonalization	2.13	Rarely
Personal Accomplishment	3.87	Often

The findings show a moderate level of emotional exhaustion, with teachers reporting that they sometimes feel emotionally depleted due to the demands of their job. Although this level does not indicate chronic fatigue, it is a warning sign that sustained pressure can escalate into more serious burnout if unaddressed. The qualitative implication of a 3.20 mean score reflects fluctuating but recurring feelings of exhaustion, especially during high-stakes periods such as deadlines or performance reviews. Depersonalization, rated as rarely experienced (M = 2.13), indicates that most teachers maintain a sense of empathy and engagement with their students. This is an encouraging result, suggesting that cynicism and detachment—core markers of burnout—are not deeply entrenched in the sample population. Conversely, personal accomplishment scored relatively high (M = 3.87), meaning that teachers often feel competent, successful, and impactful in their roles. This is consistent with literature indicating that a strong sense of self-efficacy can buffer against burnout, particularly when emotional fatigue is present (Buonomo, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2017).

These outcomes validate the Maslach et al. (2001) model, which posits that burnout is not just defined by exhaustion alone, but by the combination of exhaustion, cynicism, and low accomplishment. In this case, burnout symptoms appear to be partially buffered by the teachers preserved sense of purpose and their emotional investment in teaching.

C. Relationship Between Social Support and Burnout

To determine the relationship between social support and burnout, the study used Pearson's r correlation. Table 9 presents the statistical outcome.

Table 9. Correlation Between Social Support and Burnout

Variables	r	p-value	Interpretation
Social Support & Burnout	-0.462	.032	Significant, Negative

The correlation coefficient of r = -0.462 indicates a moderate negative correlation, and the p-value of 0.032 confirms the relationship is statistically significant. This means that as perceived social support increases, levels of burnout decrease among teachers. This finding is consistent with the body of literature suggesting that social support acts as a protective buffer against the development of burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). Emotional and informational support provides both psychological and cognitive resources that reduce the burden of work-related stressors, thus improving teachers' resilience.

Kim and Stoner (2008) emphasize that perceived support, especially from colleagues and administrators, plays a critical role in reducing depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. Many times, when teachers face these challenges, support gives them confidence to reckon with the situation.

This implies that social presence isn't just a simple factor; it is a dynamic factor that can intervene on behalf of well-being. Any program that promotes supportive behaviors in schools—mentorship, peer-checking-in, or wellness interventions—will address burnout and ultimately improve teacher retention.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study point to social support being negatively correlated with burnout among elementary school teachers. In other words, when teachers perceive more emotional, informational, and esteem support, they generally end up with lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. At the same time, they show a stronger, more stable sense of personal accomplishment in what they do, kind of like their inner sense of efficacy holds up better. Overall, the results suggest that having solid social support systems works like a protective layer for reducing burnout. Teachers who benefit from supportive professional and interpersonal relationships are more likely to display resilience when dealing with stress connected to work. They tend to keep their emotional functioning in a better shape, marked by less exhaustion and less detachment, along with greater drive and a feeling of purpose in their teaching roles. These findings also underline how important it is to foster meaningful social, and professional connections in the school environment. With that kind of buffer in place, the emotional demands of teaching are less likely to overwhelm people, which supports improved well-being and also sustained teaching effectiveness. Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen social support and reduce burnout among elementary school teachers. Schools could consider setting up structured peer support programs, such as mentorship systems and teacher support groups, so that professional relationships grow and feelings of isolation decrease. Regular workshops on mental health awareness, stress management, and emotional regulation are also advised, as they can help teachers build coping routines and strengthen resilience against work related pressure. Also, counseling and psychosocial support services ought to become more available to teachers, especially those who are facing high levels of stress, or perhaps feeling emotionally drained. On top of that, professional development programs could bring in learning modules that stress how social support works in the workplace, so both school leaders and teachers can give support and also be supported, right there in the school setting. Then, schools could put in place more systematic monitoring tools to spot teachers who might be heading toward burnout. If you catch it early then you can use focused and time-based interventions, tackling the stress related issues before they start to get worse, or spiral out. If these ideas are put into action, they may lead to a calmer, more understanding school atmosphere, one that supports teacher well-being, improves day to day job performance, and in the end helps with better student outcomes.

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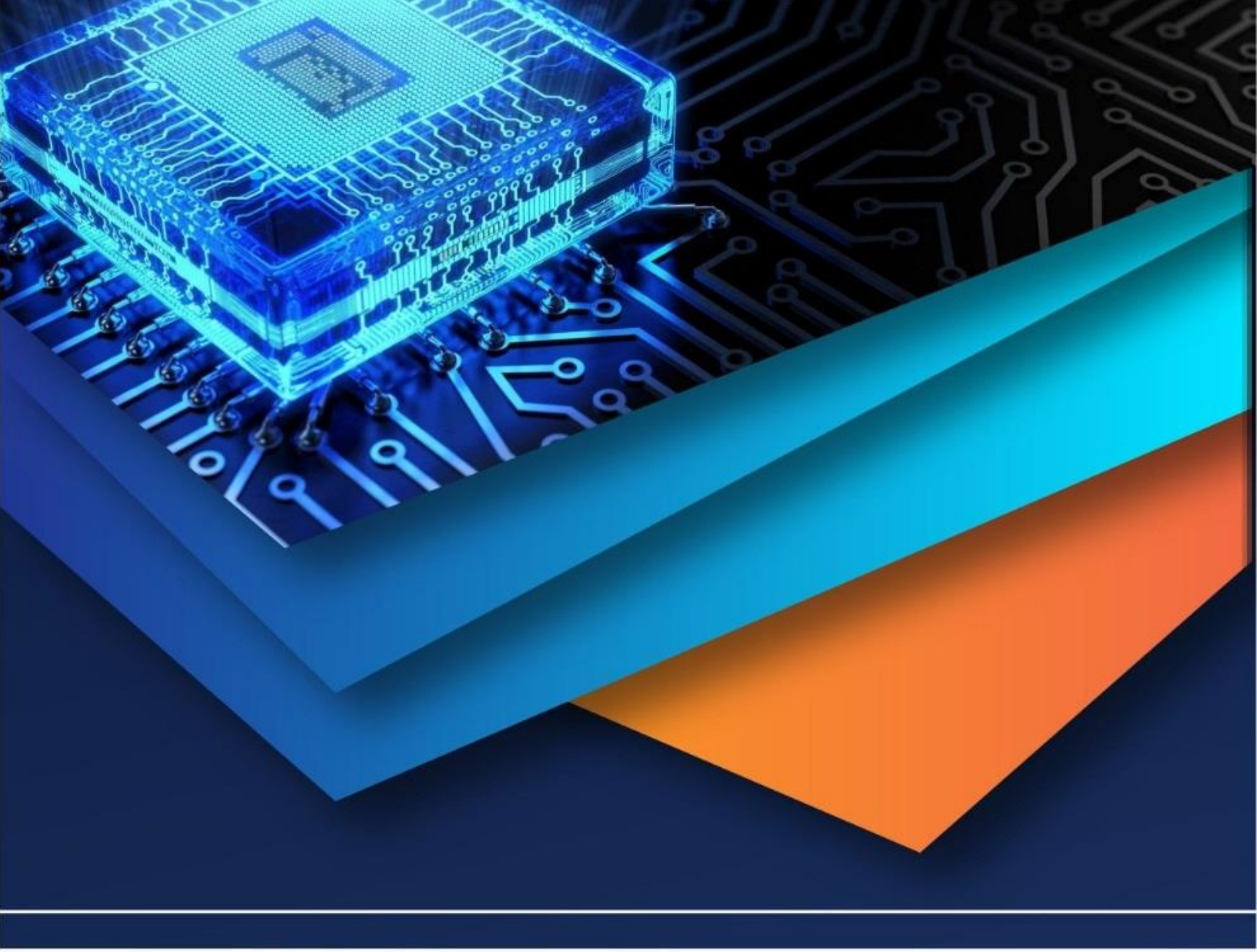

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