

## Emotional Exhaustion and School Environment on The Work Ethics of Rural Teachers

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### Abstract

This study investigated the emotional exhaustion of teachers in rural areas and the relationship of this to their work ethics and school environment. Emotional exhaustion, due to its negative impact on performance and general wellness, has become a prime concern for service providers, especially teachers in under-resourced rural schools. This study utilized a descriptive-correlational methodology and a questionnaire survey to determine the levels of emotional exhaustion in three dimensions: emotional drainage, overextension, and lack of motivation. It also assessed the school environment based on supportive leadership, collegial relationships, and available resources.

Results revealed moderate levels of emotional draining and lack of motivation, while a high scale of overextension among teachers. The school environment was perceived to be positive with strong collegial relationships and supportive leadership contributing towards a favorable atmosphere. The correlation analyses showed a significant association between the factors of work ethics and emotional exhaustion; of these, emotional drainage displayed the highest correlation. Finally, supportive leadership and collegial relationships moderated the influence of emotional exhaustion on teachers' work ethics.

These results underscored the vital need for policies and practices that fostered teacher welfare through better school environments, professional development opportunities, and political support. Eradicating emotional exhaustion is not only beneficial for teacher retention but also guarantees the delivery of optimal quality education in rural schools. The study pointed out the need to cultivate an encouraging-friendly learning environment to help counteract the issues of rural school educators, leading to a better-resilient teaching force and engagement and achievement of students.

**Keywords:** Emotional, Exhaustion, School Environment, Work Ethics

### 1. Introduction

The emotional exhaustion among teachers was one of the top priorities as it affected the productive efficiency and collective well-being of their performance in the learning environment. It was much more apparent in rural schools where the stressors were greater, and the resources were fewer, and with these limited resources, teachers were bound under more pressure. Indeed, research has found that emotional exhaustion had not only led to job dissatisfaction but also influenced greater resignations, thereby intensifying the problems faced

by schools. Thus, these problems caused harm both to the students and to the school setting and thus created an almost impossible-to-break vicious cycle of suffering. In this, this emotional exhaustion required to be addressed to develop a more health-based and productive learning environment for instructors and learners. Thus, a shift from this cycle of emotional exhaustion required for the benefit of the psychological well-being of educators. Providing a setting that promotes educators will increase their efficiency and lift their job satisfaction, which will then have a better result for students.

The system of education was quite demanding, and this was even more so along the managerial, technical, and financial lines. The strategy of teaching had been changed just recently to make the students think critically and are hence better placed to compete in the market arena. The teachers, through their licenses, were obligated to design session plans and provide teaching to the learners. Their duties included grading assignments, giving homework, conducting class activities, and checking student performance. Both teachers and students had mutual tasks while teaching the educators had the responsibility of educating while the students had the burden of assuming the responsibilities of their learning. Teachers were also motivated by a desire to serve their students. Although at times fulfilling, the profession is challenging and puts educators in many awkward positions, thus making ethical dilemmas common (Hutching, 2016 as cited in Bautista & Reyes, 2021).

The research falls into the large category of efforts toward counterbalancing teacher burnout and its effects on schools (Maslach et al., 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). For that reason, it was focused on investigating the way school setting conditions were involved in the augmentation or reduction of emotional exhaustion of instructors (Rapp et al., 2021). Following from such relationships between emotional conditions and work ethics, it studied which intervention strategies could improve the well-being of teachers (Zhang et al., 2020). These dynamics are very important as emotional exhaustion does not only impact the teachers personally, but may also have the potential to increase student outcomes as well as affect the overall quality of education. In short, all those studies could have fed into policies and practices that support healthier work environments and therefore fewer cases of burnout and more effective teaching.

Existing literature therefore revealed a huge gap that had existed in this respect by paying little attention to the experiences of rural teachers due to their infinitely different conditions of operation from their urban counterparts. With emotional exhaustion, how it influenced the work ethics of these educators was crucial because it might lead to actionable policy change and systems put in place to support these rural educators. More importantly, work that is emotionally demanding enhanced dramatically the well-being of teachers, which further has an impact on a conducive learning environment and the overall performance of students (Yu et al., 2015; Holmes et al., 2019). Failure to do so has resulted in higher rates of turnover, lowering job satisfaction, and negative effects on student learning (Wilkins & Balanskat, 2018). Given that it focused on rural settings, this study aimed at providing policies and practices that would foster teacher retention while improving the quality of education in the deprived areas.

Prior to this, research had already proved and guaranteed that the school context is what contributes the most to teacher emotional exhaustion. Factors taken into account included all those mentioned earlier, such as the administrative support, relationships with colleagues, and

resources available, which would describe a teacher's experience (Collie et al., 2023). Besides, the strategies for emotional labor among the teachers would also be a dynamic mediator between the school climate and emotional exhaustion (Zhang et al., 2023). In addition to that isolation of teachers and lack of any professional development opportunities resulted in these feelings of burnout too (Cobb et al., 2019).

Once teachers report to feel alienated from colleagues and found no outlet for development, emotional resources depleted quicker (Cobb et al., 2019). Professional development sharpened skill strength and created necessary networking opportunities that countered loneliness and improved job satisfaction. The methods of emotional labor explained how instructors dealt with their emotions when meeting the demands of work. The strategies could either alleviate or worsen emotional exhaustion since they were enacted. For instance, authentic expression of emotion by teachers mitigated stress; on the other hand, suppression of emotions led to increased emotional exhaustion (Zhang et al., 2023). This interaction probably implies that emotional regulation training might have assisted in developing resilience among the teachers.

Given these insights, schools should especially consider promoting a supportive school climate. For this purpose, strong administrative support systems should be encouraged. Collegial relationships and rigorous professional development should also be encouraged. All these factors could minimize the chances of emotional exhaustion among teachers to a great extent, thus enhancing the learning outcomes for students.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

In exploring the relationship between emotional exhaustion, school environment, and the work ethics of rural teachers, a theoretical framework can be constructed through the insights of key philosophers and theorists. Emmanuel Levinas (1961) emphasizes the ethical responsibility towards the. Others can be reflected in how teachers engage with their students and colleagues, influencing their emotional well-being. Martin Heidegger (1962) contributes to this framework by discussing "being in the world," highlighting how the rural school environment shapes teachers' experiences and identities. Moreover, Karl Marx (1867) underscores the impact of socioeconomic conditions on individual labor, suggesting that rural teachers' work ethics may be affected by the broader socioeconomic challenges they face, which can exacerbate feelings of emotional exhaustion. Abraham Maslow (1943) offers a perspective on motivation, indicating that unmet psychological needs in a challenging school environment can lead to increased emotional fatigue, ultimately impacting teachers' work ethics. Together, these philosophical insights provide a comprehensive understanding of how emotional exhaustion and the school environment interact to shape the work ethics of rural teachers, illuminating the complexities of their professional experiences.

## **3. Statement of the Problem**

The research aims to determine the level emotional exhaustion and school environment of the work ethics of rural teachers.

Specifically, this study endeavored to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of emotional exhaustion experienced by teachers in terms of;
  - a. emotional drainage;

- b. overextension; and
  - c. lack of motivation?
2. What is the level of the school environment experienced by teachers in terms of;
    - a. supportive leadership;
    - b. collegial relationships; and
    - c. resources and facilities?
  3. What is the level of work ethics experienced by teachers in terms of:
    - a. commitment of teaching;
    - b. professional responsibility; and
    - c. student engagement?
  4. Is there any significant relationship between emotional exhaustion and the work ethics of rural teachers?
  5. Is there any significant relationship between the school environment and the work ethics of rural teachers?

### **Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub>: There is a significant relationship between the level of emotional exhaustion and school environment on the work ethics of rural teachers.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the level of emotional exhaustion and school environment on the work ethics of rural teachers.

### **4. Review of Related Literature**

Emotional exhaustion among teachers, particularly in rural settings, has garnered significant attention in recent educational research. Emotional exhaustion is a critical component of burnout, characterized by feelings of being emotionally drained and overextended, which can severely impact teachers' work ethics and overall job performance (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Recent studies have highlighted the unique challenges faced by rural teachers, including limited resources, isolation, and increased workload, which contribute to heightened levels of emotional exhaustion (Hui et al., 2022; Klusmann et al., 2023).

The school environment plays a pivotal role in shaping teachers' emotional well-being and work ethics. Positive school climates, characterized by supportive leadership and collegial relationships, have been shown to mitigate feelings of emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Conversely, a negative school environment can worsen stress and burnout, leading to decreased job satisfaction and commitment among teachers (Bing et al., 2022). Research indicates that rural teachers often experience a lack of administrative support and professional development opportunities, which can further contribute to their emotional strain (Yin et al., 2019).

Moreover, the interplay between emotional exhaustion and work ethics is significant. Teachers who experience high levels of emotional exhaustion are more likely to exhibit reduced motivation and engagement in their work, which can negatively affect their teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). This relationship underscores the importance of addressing emotional well-being as a means to enhance work ethics among educators in rural settings (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017).

Recent studies have also explored the role of emotional regulation as a potential remedy for teacher burnout. Effective emotional regulation strategies can help teachers manage stress and maintain their work ethics, even in challenging environments (Ramdan et al., 2020). Additionally, fostering a supportive school climate that encourages open communication and collaboration among teachers can significantly reduce emotional exhaustion and promote a positive work ethic (Hakanen et al., 2006).

## 5. Methodology

The quantitative data was gathered and analyzed statistically. This study employed the descriptive-correlational technique. Frequencies of variables in descriptive statistics and their means, standard deviation, and variances were determined. It described the prevailing conditions of variables concerning emotional exhaustion and the school environment and their effects on the work ethics of teachers. Pearson-Product Moment correlation statistics and Simple Linear Regression Analysis assessed the relationship between emotional exhaustion and the school environment toward teachers' work ethics.

A typical questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was developed based on extensive readings and references, consisting of three parts: emotional exhaustion (10 indicators across 3 sub-variables), school environment (10 indicators across 3 sub-variables), and work ethics (10 indicators across 3 sub-variables). Instrument validity was established by consulting a panel of experts, and reliability was verified through pilot testing, resulting in a strong Cronbach's Alpha of 0.92. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), with an appropriate interpretive scale applied to the results.

## 6. Results and Discussion

**Table 1. Mean Scores of Emotional Exhaustion of Teachers**

| Sub-variables       | Mean        | Descriptive Rating | Qualitative Interpretation |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Emotional Drainage  | 3.48        | Neutral            | Moderate Level             |
| Overextension       | 3.80        | Agree              | High Level                 |
| Lack of Motivation  | 3.18        | Neutral            | Moderate Level             |
| <b>Overall Mean</b> | <b>3.49</b> | <b>Neutral</b>     | <b>Moderate Level</b>      |

LEGEND:

| Scale | Range     | Descriptive Rating     | Qualitative Description |
|-------|-----------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 5     | 4.51-5.00 | Strongly Agree (SA)    | Very High Level         |
| 4     | 3.51-4.50 | Agree (A)              | High Level              |
| 3     | 2.51-3.50 | Neutral (N)            | Moderate Level          |
| 2     | 1.51-2.50 | Disagree (D)           | Low Level               |
| 1     | 1.00-1.50 | Strongly Disagree (SD) | Very Low Level          |

Table 1 presented the data that provided an analysis of teachers' emotional exhaustion across three sub-variables: emotional drainage, overextension, and lack of motivation. Emotional drainage had a mean score of 3.48, thus having a neutral descriptive rating and, at the same time, a moderate level of emotional exhaustion. Overextension had a mean score of 3.80, which was the highest among all, hence falling under the Agree descriptive rating, which reflected a

high level of emotional exhaustion. Lastly, lack of motivation had a mean score of 3.18 and was even rated neutral with a moderate scale in emotional exhaustion.

The neutral rating combined with the level of emotional drainage showed that teachers felt drained most of the time but within manageable levels. This mirrored Alipio's (2020) conclusion: the switch to distance learning had left Filipino teachers facing huge emotional demands, but resilience countered this in maintaining a balance.

The high emotional exhaustion level in the overextension sub-variable stood out. Teachers might have become overwhelmed because of too much work and diverse multiple responsibilities, within high expectations. Bernales (2022) noted that teacher burnout was prevalent in public schools in the Philippines as due to systemic reasons like overpopulated rooms, lack of necessary resources, and administrative burdens. This was one of the reasons behind the feeling of being over-extended expressed by teachers in this study.

The neutral rating and middle level of lack of motivation indicated that teachers were not totally uninterested, as it showed that at times they lacked enthusiasm for their work. Dela Cruz and Santos (2023) maintained that emotional resilience heavily intervened to decrease the impact of professional stressors, which enabled teachers to stay motivated despite external pressures. The result led to the conclusion that teaching resilience and giving proper emotional support may lower feelings of lack of motivation.

**Table 2. Mean Scores of School Environment of Teachers**

| Sub-variables            | Mean        | Descriptive Rating | Qualitative Interpretation   |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Supportive Leadership    | 3.93        | Agree              | Very Good Environment        |
| Collegial Relationships  | 4.02        | Agree              | Very Good Environment        |
| Resources and Facilities | 3.69        | Agree              | Very Good Environment        |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>      | <b>3.88</b> | <b>Agree</b>       | <b>Very Good Environment</b> |

LEGEND:

| Scale | Range     | Descriptive Rating     | Qualitative Description |
|-------|-----------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 5     | 4.51-5.00 | Strongly Agree (SA)    | Excellent Environment   |
| 4     | 3.51-4.50 | Agree (A)              | Very Good Environment   |
| 3     | 2.51-3.50 | Neutral (N)            | Good Environment        |
| 2     | 1.51-2.50 | Disagree (D)           | Fair Environment        |
| 1     | 1.00-1.50 | Strongly Disagree (SD) | Poor Environment        |

Table 2 illustrated the fact that teachers perceived the school environment to be positive as the overall mean was 3.88, which was categorized as a very good environment. This concurred with the serious role of the supportive and collegial atmosphere in fostering the satisfaction and effectiveness of the teacher.

Collegial relationships received the highest mean score of 4.02, implying that teachers valued intense interpersonal connections and professional collaboration inside their schools. As shown by Mendoza and Dela Cruz (2023), being positive about collegial relationships made a huge difference in teacher morale and engagement because it provided teachers with a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

Supportive leadership, with a mean score of 3.93, is also reflective of a very good environment. This supported the findings of Cruz and Santos (2022), who highlighted that supportive leader inspired not only teacher confidence but also paved for an environment that inspired innovation and professional growth. Open communication, guidance, and assurance that teachers felt valued and empowered were aspects of effective leadership.

Finally, resources and facilities scored 3.69 that indicated that although the teachers believed resources and infrastructure available were adequate, there could be a scope for improvement. As Alvarez and Gomez (2020) highlighted, the use of resources and availability of updated facilities had a direct bearing on the quality of teaching and learning processes. In those schools, where resource allocation received more importance, teacher performance as well as results of students improved.

**Table 3. Mean Scores of Work Ethics of Teachers**

| Indicators                  | Mean        | Descriptive Rating | Qualitative Interpretation |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Commitment to Teaching      | 4.33        | Agree              | High Level                 |
| Professional Responsibility | 4.40        | Agree              | High Level                 |
| Student Engagement          | 4.60        | Strongly Agree     | Very High Level            |
| <b>Overall</b>              | <b>4.44</b> | <b>Agree</b>       | <b>High Level</b>          |

Legend

| Scale | Range     | Descriptive Rating     | Qualitative Interpretation |
|-------|-----------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 5     | 4.51-5.00 | Strongly Agree (SA)    | Very High Level            |
| 4     | 3.51-4.50 | Agree (A)              | High Level                 |
| 3     | 2.51-3.50 | Neutral (N)            | Moderate Level             |
| 2     | 1.51-2.50 | Disagree (D)           | Low Level                  |
| 1     | 1.00-1.50 | Strongly Disagree (SD) | Very Low Level             |

Table 3 presented the mean scores of work ethics among teachers in the Philippine setting, highlighting their commitment to teaching, professional responsibility, and student engagement. The indicators showed a generally positive outlook on teachers' work ethics, with mean scores indicating a high level of agreement across all categories. In particular, the average score was 4.33 on "Commitment to Teaching" that lies under the category "Agree." It can be interpreted as there is a high commitment of teachers. The Professional Responsibility indicator

averaged at 4.40 and also fell under the "Agree" category. This means the respondents considered themselves to be responsible professionals in their role.

The highest mean score was recorded for "Student Engagement" at 4.60, which fell within the "Strongly Agree" category, indicating very high engagement with students. This indicated that the teachers were not only committed to their tasks of teaching but also involved in encouraging student participation and learning. The overall mean score at 4.44 is categorized as "Agree," which further reinforced the notion that teachers in this study demonstrated a high level of work ethics.

These were significant findings, underscoring the importance of teacher work ethics in the educational landscape of the Philippines. For instance, high levels of commitment, responsibility, and engagement were crucial for enhancing student learning outcomes as well as overall education quality (De Guzman, 2023; Santos, 2023).

**Table 4. Correlation of Emotional Exhaustion and School Environment on the Work Ethics of Teachers**

| Variables                | Pearson's r | p-values |
|--------------------------|-------------|----------|
| Emotional Exhaustion     |             |          |
| Emotional Drainage       | .608**      | .000     |
| Overextension            | .511**      | .000     |
| Lack of Motivation       | .526**      | .000     |
| School Environment       |             |          |
| Supportive Leadership    | .435**      | .000     |
| Collegial Relationships  | .419**      | .000     |
| Resources and Facilities | .254**      | .000     |

Table 4 provided the relationship between emotional exhaustion and the school environment with the teachers' work ethics, and impressive correlations were shown between the variables measured. The different data did show significant positive relationships for emotional exhaustion subcomponents including emotional drainage  $r = .608$ , overextension  $r = .511$ , and lack of motivation  $r = .526$ , all the p-values equalled 0.000, which meant all significant at the 0.01 level. This implied that teachers with greater levels of emotional exhaustion were more likely to state emotional drainage, increased overextension in the role, and an evident decline in motivation, which was liable to impact their work ethics inversely.

In terms of school environment, supportive leadership was moderately correlated to teachers' work ethics ( $r = .435$ ), and collegial relationships ( $r = .419$ ) and the availability of resources and facilities ( $r = .254$ ) were also found to be positively, though weaker, than those related to emotional exhaustion. This means that a supportive school environment may offset some of the negative effects from emotional exhaustion. The strong associations between emotional exhaustion and its dimensions indicated that the handling of emotional well-being was important for enhancing teachers' motivation and overall work ethics. The contrary, developing supportive leadership and collegial relationships, might also act as a buffer against emotional exhaustion and promote a healthier work ethic among teachers.

The emotional exhaustion of teachers and their work ethics are linked with the school environment. These cannot be understated, especially in the Philippine educational setup. The findings from Table 4 show that teachers' work ethics have a very strong connection with



emotional exhaustion and that there is a strong inter-relationship with its components- emotional drainage, overextension, and lack of motivation. These results align with existing literature that highlights the detrimental effects of emotional exhaustion on educators' professional performance and commitment (Cruz et al., 2021).

Emotional drain shows depletion of emotional resources, which is a cause for great concern because its correlation with teachers' motivation levels is high at  $r = .608$ . This implies that as the level of emotional drain increases for teachers, their motivation to work decreases; hence, their work ethics may decline too. Overextension ( $r = .511$ ) further underscores the challenges teachers face, often overextending themselves with more than they can handle, to create feelings of burnout and disengagement (Dela Cruz & Santos, 2022).

In addition, work ethics are influenced by the school environment. Supportive leadership is positively correlated with work ethics ( $r = .435$ ). Collegial relationships correlate with work ethics at .419, suggesting that a nurturing and collaborative school culture can help to counter the adverse effects of emotional exhaustion. This is in line with studies indicating that supportive leadership enhances the school climate that can reinforce teacher's resilience and commitment (Reyes & Villanueva, 2023). While the link with resources and facilities is much weaker ( $r = .254$ ), it indicates that though adequate resources are crucial, yet essential would not be as crucial as interpersonal relationships and leadership support in influencing teachers' work ethics.

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