RISK FACTORS FOR TEACHER BURNOUT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract: Taking into consideration the continuous social change, rapid societal development, and the fact that teaching is one of the most stressful professions, it is crucial to frequently research and identify the factors that contribute to teacher burnout. Recognising the risk factors that can lead to burnout in teachers enables preventative action and the provision of appropriate support at all levels of the educational system. The aim of this study is to identify the risk factors for teacher burnout. The study applied the PRISMA guidelines while conducting an extensive literature search in the following academic databases: Scopus and Web of Science. Based on a survey conducted in February 2025, 138 articles were identified. The Rayyan programme was used to identify and remove duplicate articles, resulting in 127 articles for further analysis. Articles were included only if they met the following criteria: original scientific papers and research articles with a focus on teacher burnout and risk factors, research published in the five-year period before the present study was conducted (2020-2024), and peer-reviewed journal articles published in English and available to the researcher in full text. A total of 8 articles were selected for their relevance and full-text analysis. The results show that the most frequently reported risk factors for burnout in the teaching profession are: job demands, high expectations, lack of autonomy, and socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. These findings point to the need for further research on this topic, as well as the need for collaboration between educational institutions and government agencies with teachers in order to prevent teacher burnout and improve working conditions, expectations, and performance.

Keywords: teacher burnout, risk factors, prevention, support, educational system

1. INTRODUCTION

Burnout can be defined as a psychological syndrome that occurs as a result of long-term and chronic stressors at work (Salvagioni et al., 2022). This syndrome manifests itself in three main dimensions: a state of emotional exhaustion, a feeling of cynicism and detachment from work, and reduced effectiveness at work (Maslach et al., 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The first component of burnout – emotional exhaustion – refers to "the basic individual stress dimension of burnout". Here, the exhaustion dimension refers to "feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources". The second component of burnout – cynicism/depersonalisation – refers to "the interpersonal context dimension of burnout". In this case, the cynicism dimension refers to negative, insensitive, or overly detached reactions to diverse aspects of work. The third component of burnout – diminished professional effectiveness – refers to "the self-evaluation dimension of burnout", which relates to "feelings of incompetence, and a lack of achievement and productivity at work" (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 399). The importance of this three-dimensional model of burnout lies in the fact that it clearly positions the individual's experience of stress within a social context and incorporates the person's self-concept and the concept of others (Maslach et al., 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Similar to Maslach's approach on burnout, Demerouti and Bakker (2008) identified two main dimensions of burnout: exhaustion and disengagement (from work). They defined exhaustion as "a consequence of intense physical, affective, and cognitive strain" and disengagement as "distancing oneself from one's work in general, as well as work objects and work content" (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008, pp. 4-5). Furthermore, teachers who care the most are more likely to be at risk of burning out at work (Rankin, 2023).

Rankin (2023) mentioned that recent research suggests that burnout is widespread among teachers in Europe, Africa, South Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada, the Middle East, and many other countries. The causes of stress can vary and have different effects on the individual (Salvagioni et al., 2017, 2022). As the teaching profession is indeed a helping profession, teachers are exposed to extremely high emotional and professional demands, which can lead to a stressful state of the organism (Carroll et al., 2022; Hillert & Schmitz, 2004; Rankin, 2023). It is therefore of great importance and interest for teachers to work on preventing their professional burnout (Jukić & Ham, 2024). The importance of preventing burnout is also shown by the fact that it has a negative impact on a teacher's effectiveness (among other things) (García-Arroyo & Osca, 2017) and has negative consequences for a teacher's health (Braun et al., 2019; Larson et al., 2018). Studies in several countries show that teachers are increasingly considering leaving the teaching profession precisely because they are exposed to high levels of stress and show symptoms of burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Insufficient resources and high job demands contribute significantly to burnout, thus, a balance between demands and resources is crucial for a teachers well-being (Markovič et al., 2024). In addition, work-related stressors such as lack of autonomy, high demands, poor relationships, and workplace violence are the most important predictors of burnout (de Souza et al., 2023). Psychological risk factors include emotional intelligence, anxiety, and job dissatisfaction (Miniurova et al., 2024). A study reports varying burnout prevalence rates among teachers, with a significant proportion experiencing phases of resistance, tension, and exhaustion (Miniurova et al., 2024). The existing literature on this topic considers the role of the emotional demands of the teaching profession and there is broad agreement that socio-demographic factors and job characteristics should be considered when analysing burnout in teachers, although the results are mixed (Buonomo et al., 2017). At the same time, more recent research analysing the risk factors in greater depth has suggested that

positive resources must be taken into account in order to achieve better protection against the risk factors of burnout (Buonomo et al., 2017).

A systematic review on this topic is important for several reasons and can be considered from scientific, social, and practical perspectives. Firstly, summarising the existing research enables a synthesis of the existing knowledge on teacher burnout, as well as the identification of key risk factors and potential research gaps. It also enables a deeper understanding of risk factors for burnout syndrome in teachers, which may contribute to the development of new theoretical models. In addition, the present review highlights the methodological weaknesses of existing studies and suggests guidelines for future research. Secondly, teacher burnout has an impact on the educational system. It reduces the quality of teaching, increases employee turnover, and may have long-term consequences for the educational system (Braun et al., 2019; Carroll et al., 2022; García-Arroyo & Osca, 2017; Larson et al., 2018; Rankin, 2023; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Identifying the main risk factors can help education policy makers develop better prevention and support programmes for teachers. Burnout can affect the quality of interaction with students, their motivation, and their learning outcomes (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Thirdly, understanding the risk factors enables schools, government agencies, and other institutions to develop effective programmes to support teachers. Preventing burnout contributes to teacher well-being, which is crucial for the long-term stability and quality of the education sector (Rankin, 2023). Identifying risk factors can help in the design of professional development programmes aimed at strengthening teachers' resilience and helping them cope with burnout.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this systematic review, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines were used for paper selection (Grimshaw et al., 2021). In compliance with these guidelines, an attempt was made to conduct a systematic review that is as rigorous and comprehensive as possible.

2.1. Search strategy

In the search for relevant scientific articles, two online databases (Scopus, Web of Science) were examined in February 2025. Studies published in English between 2020 and 2024 were considered. The databases mentioned were chosen for their importance and relevance in science, and the time frame was chosen in order to examine up-to-date information on this topic. The following search strategies were used for each database:

- Scopus: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("teacher burnout" AND "teacher stress" AND "professional stress" AND "risk factors"),

- Web of Science: Topic ("teacher burnout" AND "teacher stress" AND "professional stress" AND "risk factors").

2.2. Study selection

The studies were collected in the Rayyan programme (Ouzzani et al., 2016). It was used to analyse duplicate titles and abstracts, cross-check the data in the studies, and eliminate inconsistencies. The studies were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. After the author had checked all the data obtained with the Rayyan programme, an independent reviewer repeated the entire procedure in order to avoid bias.

2.3. Inclusion criteria

The criteria for inclusion were:

- original scientific papers and research papers focused on teacher burnout and risk factors;

- research published within the five-year period before the present study (2020-2024);

- peer-reviewed journal articles;

- research published in the English language;

- full-text papers available to the researchers.

2.4. Exclusion criteria

The criteria for exclusion were:

- opinion pieces, book reviews, editorials, letters to the editor, research reports, supplement articles, or solely theoretical studies without empirical data;

- research published outside the scope of the pre-determined period of five years (2020-2024);

- non-peer-reviewed publications;

- research that was not published in the English language;

- papers that was unavailable to the researcher in full text;

- research that did not discuss teacher burnout and risk factors.

All data collected was saved and processed in the Rayyan programme.

2.5. Bias assessment methodology

The adapted Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (NOS) was used to assess the risk of bias (Table 1). In addition, the author endeavoured to review and select data according to the above-mentioned inclusion and exclusion criteria. The author checked the data several times to ensure that there were no ambiguities and biases in the methodology. Following which, an independent reviewer reviewed the entire process and the data to ensure impartiality of the research, and assessed the risk of bias based on the adapted NOS.

Table 1. *Risk of bias assessment of the studies included in this systematic review*

Study	Selection	Comparability	Outcome	Rating
Bensaid et al. (2024)	★★★	★★	★★	Low risk
Hongsa & Polyong (2024)	★★★	★★	★★★	Low risk
Kalinienė et al. (2024)	★★★	★★	★★	Low risk
Daumiller & Dresel (2023)	★★★	★★	★★★	Low risk
Fleming et al. (2023)	★★★	★★	★★★	Low risk
Safiye et al. (2023)	★★★	★★	★★	Low risk
Marić et al. (2021)	★★★	★★	★★	Low risk
Silva et al. (2021)	★★★	★★	★★★	Low risk

Rating scale: 7-8 stars = low risk of bias; 6 stars = medium risk of bias; 0-5 stars = high risk of bias.
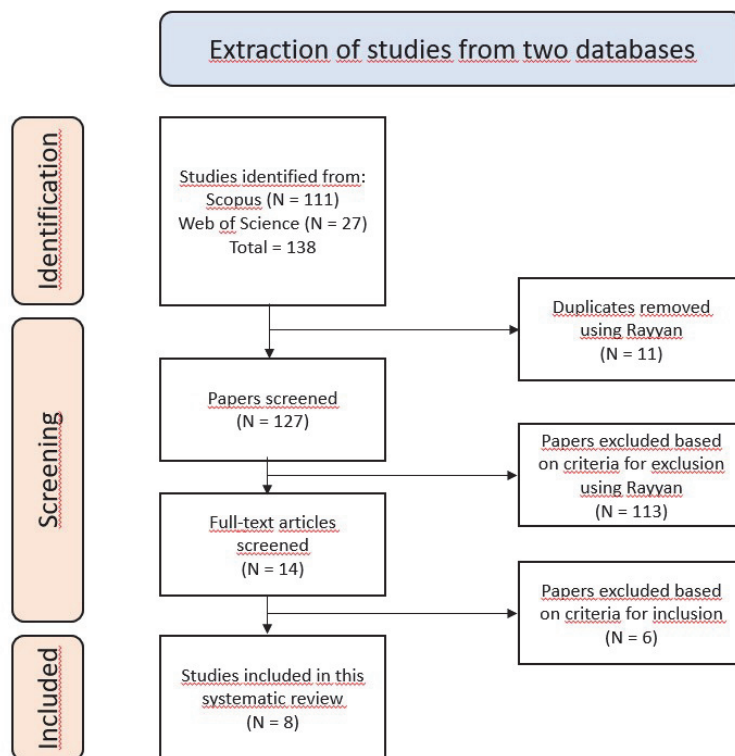
The risk assessment of the included studies showed a low level of bias in all studies, indicating high quality of research.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Search results

A total of 138 articles were identified from the two databases. The Rayyan programme was used to identify and remove duplicate articles, resulting in 127 articles for further analysis. After analysing keywords, abstracts, connection to the research topic, availability of the article, and applied methodology, the number of relevant articles was reduced to 14. After a detailed assessment of the research focus and the content of the studies, as well as a review of the characteristics of the studies based on the specified analysis criteria, 6 studies were excluded. Thus, the final sample consisted of 8 articles (Fig. 1) that met all of the above criteria and were retained for detailed full-text analysis.

Figure 1. *PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process*

3.2. Characteristics of included studies

The studies listed in this systematic literature review were conducted in various countries (Brazil, Germany, Lithuania, Morocco, Republic of Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Serbia, Thailand, and the USA), which demonstrates the significance of this topic and the importance of research on teacher burnout and associated risk factors.

The research methodology used in the studies included were quantitative in nature, while the type of study differed: six cross-sectional and two longitudinal studies. The Maslach Burnout Inventory scale was most frequently used to investigate burnout in teachers (in six studies), but other scales were also used depending on the research aim of each study.

The results of the selected studies in this systematic review indicate that the most common risk factors are increased job demands, high expectations, lack of autonomy, and socio-demographic characteristics of the subjects (gender, age, marital status, parental status). The most common limitation of the studies is fear of bias (as most of the results were self-reported information), as well as certain geographical and demographic characteristics. A more detailed description of the characteristics of the studies included in this systematic review can be found in Table 2.

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Table 2. *Characteristics of studies included in this systematic review.*

Citation	Country	Type of methodology (Study Type)	Scales used	Main results	Study limitations
Bensaid et al. (2024)	Morocco	Quantitative (cross-sectional observational study)	Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI); Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)	Of the total number of participants (i.e., 60 teachers employed at secondary schools), almost half of them are in a high state of emotional exhaustion (48.3 %) and in a high state of depersonalisation (43.3 %). Almost half of the participants are in a high state of accomplishments (41 %). Recognised risk factors for burnout in teachers are: unfavourable work climate, lack of teaching (didactic) aids, relationship with the principal, and means of transport.	Small sample of participants Gender bias in the sample (more male respondents) Geographical peculiarities Selection bias in sample selection Lack of research on burnout among secondary school teachers in their area Lack of data on the institutional context in the research Asymmetric performance measures Constraints on causality Using self-reported information as data may create bias Impact of seasonality and research timeframe Possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on burnout Lack of analysis of individual strategies for dealing with burnout Lack of consideration of the working environment and institutional factors
Hongsa & Polyong (2024)	Thailand	Quantitative (cross-sectional study)	Questionnaire obtained from a literature review	Of the total number of participants (i.e., 400 Thai and foreign teachers), 51.3 % had low stress levels. Teachers had moderate to high emotional exhaustion (52.0 %) and cynicism (41.8 %). Most teachers had moderate to high levels of professional efficacy (88.8 %). There were few gender differences in these dimensions. Recognised risk factors for burnout in teachers are: frequently or almost always having time pressure at work, a low level of job satisfaction, a low level of self-efficacy at work, and a low level of ability to refuse work beyond scope; having moderate to high levels of conflicts or problems at work, low level of their own ability to work; being a foreign teacher and teachers' ability to control work or work according to plan.	Self-reported information to quantify burnout may create bias Possible contextual and cultural limitations Study was conducted after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic No causal relationship could be established Influence of the specific educational context Possible selection bias in sample selection Unadjusted variables for individual groups of teachers (foreign and domestic) Limited context of working conditions

Author	Country	Study type	Instruments	Results	Limitations
Kalinienė et al. (2024)	Lithuania	Quantitative (cross-sectional study)	Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ); Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI)	Of the total number of teachers participating in the study (i.e., 291 teachers working in elementary and high schools), 33.7 % reported personal burnout, 35.1 % reported work-related burnout, and 25.4 % reported client-related burnout. Recognised risk factor for burnout in teachers are increased job demands.	The cause and the effect are analysed at the same time. Self-reported information can lead to bias Small sample of teachers
Daumiller & Dresel (2023)	Germany	Quantitative (longitudinal study)	Short Multidisciplinary Research Performance Questionnaire (SMRPQ); Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI); Students' Evaluations of Educational Quality (SEEQ); Short Multidisciplinary Research Performance Questionnaire (SRMPQ); Latent Change Score Modelling (LCS)	Participants in the study were 681 faculty members. The primary cause of development of overall burnout was research goals (with performance-avoidance and work-avoidance goals being risk factors), while high burnout levels were associated with subsequent reduction of adaptive mastery-approach goals in both domains. The main results indicate that normative and work avoidance goals in the research domain were risk factors for the subsequent development of burnout/engagement levels among faculty members. Similar results were shown for the teaching domain.	The survey was conducted longitudinally, and the analyses modelled latent changes. Self-reported information can lead to bias Measures of teaching and research performance were not symmetrical There is no information on the different types of institutions that faculty members come from. Possible contextual and cultural limitations
Fleming et al. (2023)	USA	Quantitative (longitudinal study)	Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI); Global Transformational Leadership Scale (GTL); School Climate Surveys (SCS); Edmondson's Team Psychological Safety Scale (ETPSS)	The longitudinal study with a sample of 769 teachers and non-teaching school employees showed an increase in burnout during the measurement period (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). For female teachers with average age and experience, burnout averaged 1.8 on the burnout scale and increased at a rate of 0.12 per year. Male gender and age were associated with significantly lower rates of burnout over time. Recognised risk factors for teacher burnout were: lower feelings of connectedness, less transformational leadership, and lower psychological safety.	Limited to annual collection of data Sample restricted to rural schools Geographical peculiarities Sample size and proportion of missing data Examined one small fraction in burnout
Safiye et al. (2023)	Serbia	Quantitative (cross-sectional study)	Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES); Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (RFQ-8); A custom questionnaire	823 teachers working in primary and secondary schools with higher socio-economic status, who are married, and have children, have less burnout. Hypermentalising was a negative predictor of depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion.	Lack of knowledge about cause-effect relationships Lack of ability to answer which dimensions of burnout reduce the ability to mentalise in teachers over time Self-report bias may be present Geographical and demographical peculiarities Study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic

Author (Year)	Country	Study type	Instruments	Results	Limitations
Marić et al. (2021)	Republic of Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	Quantitative (cross-sectional study)	General questionnaire; Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Study (MBI-HSS); Karasek's questionnaire (Job Content Questionnaire)	The study examined the presence of burnout at the beginning of the school year in 952 teachers in all regions. A statistically significant difference in the age of teachers and marital status of teachers were found between the regions. School type, examined work and life characteristics, and presence of occupational stress showed statistically significant differences between the regions. Potential risk factors for burnout: older age, greater number of years of work experience, higher job demands, lower job control and autonomy, and lower social support.	The design of the study makes it impossible to determine the causal relationship. Some burnout factors were measured using just one question Incomplete participation of some teachers
Silva et al. (2021)	Brazil	Quantitative (cross-sectional, multicentre, epidemiological study)	Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI); A sociodemographic questionnaire	Participants in the study were 210 university professors. Almost half of the respondents (41%) reported burnout. Younger professors (under 30 and 31-40 years old) had a significantly higher prevalence of burnout syndrome compared to older professors. Single professors and those without children had a significantly higher prevalence of burnout syndrome compared to married/divorced professors and those with children. Professors working at multiple institutions and those teaching in the natural sciences had a significantly higher prevalence of burnout syndrome compared to those working at a single institution and those teaching in other fields. Risk factors for burnout were: being under 40 years old, being single, being childless, teaching science, and working at multiple institutions.	The data originates from institutions located exclusively in Salvador. Small sample of university teachers Self-report bias may be present The study is intended only to serve as a theoretical basis for future research and interventions targeting burnout syndrome in university professors.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the studies included in the present systematic review showed several consistent results with regard to the risk factors associated with burnout among teachers, whereby contextual characteristics are also emphasised. Both Bensaid et al. (2024) and Marić et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of socio-economic and socio-demographic factors, and specifically pointed to the importance of work climate, lack of didactic means, and the limited autonomy of teachers as crucial factors for emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. Both are cross-sectional studies and they mention the Maslach Burnout Inventory as one of the instruments for data collection. However, even though it is a validated and recognised questionnaire and a similar research methodology, the self-reported responses collected using this questionnaire can lead to bias. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to further investigate the institutional context and try to determine the cause-effect relationship of teacher burnout through additional research.

Hongsa and Polyong (2024) found that almost constant time pressure at work, low level of job satisfaction, low level of self-efficacy, and low ability of teachers to reject work that is beyond their scope has influenced teachers' emotional exhaustion, while daily conflicts at work, or even the occurrence of problems in the work environment and low level of self-efficacy has led to cynicism among teachers. Teachers' ability to control their work (i.e., to work according to plan) influenced their professional efficiency. One specific aspect about their study is that it was conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact worldwide and whose consequences are still being researched in various contexts. In addition, there is a large proportion of foreign teachers among the respondents in this study, and they may be culturally different from Thai teachers. Therefore, it is possible that they deal with stressors differently and experience burnout risk factors differently. Furthermore, as in the previously mentioned studies, it is not possible to establish a causal relationship of teacher burnout. It would be useful to further investigate the influence and relationship between the institution, in terms of its characteristics, and burnout among its teachers, taking into account their socio-demographic characteristics and cultural differences.

Kalinienė et al. (2024) confirmed that external support, especially from supervisors, can mitigate the risk of burnout in teachers. This observation is consistent with Fleming et al. (2023), who found that transformational leadership and psychological safety are protective factors against the progression of burnout over time. In addition, gender was found to be a protective factor in both Kalinienė et al. (2024) and Fleming et al. (2023), where the likelihood and intensity of burnout was lower among male teachers. However, it should be noted that, we are comparing the findings of a cross-sectional (Kalinienė et al., 2024) and a longitudinal study (Fleming et al., 2023), and that both have certain limitations in terms of research methodology and the use of different questionnaires to investigate burnout. Kalinienė et al. (2024) simultaneously analysed both the cause and consequences of burnout, while Fleming et al. (2023) investigated a small fraction of burnout.

Regarding the psychological dimension, Safiye et al. (2023) contributed important insights by explaining that the ability to mentalise, especially hypermentalisation, serves as a mediator against teachers' emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, thus contributing a cognitive-emotional regulation aspect to burnout prevention. Meanwhile, Daumiller and Dresel (2023) emphasised how academic goal structures – particularly normative and work-avoidance goals – are risk factors for burnout, stating that motivational orientation plays a crucial role beyond contextual working conditions. However, it should be noted that the study by Safiye et al. (2023) was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have influenced the results, but there is insufficient data on which to determine a cause-effect relationship. There is also no data on which dimensions of burnout are associated with a reduction in the possibility of mentalising over time. Taking into account the demographic and geographical characteristics, it is also necessary to analyse the institutional context, especially when it comes to

teachers who are employed at a higher education institution. The study by Daumiller and Dresel (2023) lacks data on the types of institutions in which teachers are employed.

Finally, Silva et al. (2021) augmented the role of sociodemographic factors and showed that university professors who are under 40 years old, single, childless, and work at multiple institutions are more prone to burnout, emphasising the cumulative effect of personal life and employment structure. The limitation of this study certainly lies in the specific research sample, but at the same time, the findings are significant since this is the first study involving university professors in Salvador. The results cannot be generalised, but they are a significant indicator of the presence of burnout in this population group. Even though teachers are the respondents of all the studies listed in this systematic review, there are still certain specificities of the workplace at each level of the education system that should be taken into account when conducting research, as well as when analysing the data obtained.

Overall, the results of the above studies consistently show that burnout in teachers is multifactorial. Key risk factors include high job demands, low level of autonomy, inadequate material and emotional support, and poor leadership practises. Despite differences in national contexts, educational levels, and sample characteristics, the overarching patterns are remarkably congruent. The present systematic review underscores the view that effective burnout interventions and prevention must simultaneously address both systematic organisational deficiencies and individual coping mechanisms.

Furthermore, the results of the studies analysed provide a solid empirical basis for the development of educational policies, institutional practises, and future research directions. The findings of Bensaid et al. (2024), Hongsa and Polyong (2024), and Marić et al. (2021) clearly point to unfavourable working conditions, excessive job demands, and limited teacher autonomy – all of which require urgent policy interventions to improve the material and organisational infrastructure in educational institutions. Policy must therefore prioritise resource allocation, workload regulation, and the institutionalisation of professional autonomy in order to reduce the risk of burnout.

In addition, the findings of Fleming et al. (2023) and Kalinienė et al. (2024) emphasise the protective role of transformational leadership and supervisory support. Their findings suggest that leadership development programmes should be embedded in national strategies for quality assurance in education. At the same time, the findings of Safiye et al. (2023) and Daumiller and Dresel (2023) highlight the relevance of psychological competencies, which point to the need for continuous professional development that includes the improvement of psychosocial and emotional competencies.

In practice, educational institutions should implement a multi-level support system that combines structural improvements with teacher-centred interventions, including mentoring, peer support, and resilience training. Particular attention should be paid to groups and individuals that are especially vulnerable to burnout, such as teachers with low socio-economic status, those without strong support networks, or those working in multiple institutions (Silva et al., 2021). Education policy could therefore focus on developing strategies based on the results of scientific research and the specific needs of teachers, taking into account their well-being.

Future research should build on these findings by using longitudinal and cross-sectional studies to examine how institutional variables interact with individual psychological traits over time. In addition, researchers should examine how different leadership models, work environments, and policy frameworks influence teacher burnout and well-being in different educational systems.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This systematic review shows that burnout in teachers is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon that is influenced by the interrelationship between socio-demographic, organisational, psychological, and motivational factors. Unfavourable working conditions, high job demands,

low autonomy, and poor leadership practices consistently emerge as important external risk factors in different educational contexts, beyond the socio-demographic characteristics of the teachers. Psychological resilience, mentalisation skills, and supportive leadership act as protective factors that can mitigate the negative effects of workplace stressors. In addition, personal characteristics such as gender, marital status, and socio-economic status are also associated with a risk of burnout. A systematic review of the above-mentioned studies suggests that organisational factors appear to play a more influential role on teacher burnout than individual characteristics. The results support a paradigm shift towards institutional strategies that should focus on improving working conditions, the work environment, the quality of institutional leadership, and strengthening teacher autonomy. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the support network at all levels of the education system and to promote the resources of individual teachers to prevent and manage burnout. A comprehensive, holistic approach to the problem of teacher burnout is of paramount and crucial importance for promoting teacher well-being and maintaining quality education.

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