

# A Study of the Relationship between Emotion Regulation and Job Burnout among Junior High School Novice English Teachers

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to examine the relationship between junior high school novice English teachers' emotion regulation and job burnout. To achieve this purpose, a survey consisting of various scales was administered to 133 primary school teachers selected from Yunnan Province in China. Statistical analyses revealed gender differences in job burnout and emotion regulation among these teachers and highlighted the association between these two variables. The findings established that male novice English teachers in junior schools generally experience lower levels of job burnout and possess better emotion regulation skills compared to their female counterparts. Additionally, a strong negative correlation was identified between job burnout and emotional regulation skills, indicating that the stronger the emotional regulation skills, the less likely novice English teachers are to experience job burnout. The study further emphasized caution in the use of cognitive reappraisal as an emotion regulation strategy, as it may have an adverse effect on mitigating job burnout. This study concluded with recommendations for providing junior high school novice English teachers with opportunities to develop and enhance their emotion regulation skills to reduce job burnout effectively.

**Keywords:** Job burnout; Emotion regulation; Novice English teacher

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## 1. Introduction

The most widely cited and recognized definition of burnout by Maslach *et al.* is “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity”<sup>[1]</sup>. Since the 1970s, scholars have analyzed the phenomenon of job burnout from different perspectives and found that jobs that involve helping people, such as teachers, are the most likely to contribute to job burnout<sup>[2]</sup>. Especially novice teachers, who are in the transition stage from student to teacher, are more prone to feel exhausted and have a strong sense of failure in uncomfortable working conditions<sup>[3]</sup>. The reason is that, on the one hand, they are immature in teaching skills, inexperienced in classroom control, and unfamiliar with class management. On the other hand, novice teachers are faced with new teaching materials and

curriculum reform, so they often find it overwhelming especially when students do not cooperate.

According to scholar's definition, teachers with a professional title of Level 3 and graduates in school, with teaching experience between 0–4 years, are called novice teachers<sup>[4]</sup>. Those teachers, as the primary facilitators of foundational education, hold a pivotal role in molding the future of our society. Yet, the persistent issue of teacher burnout poses a significant obstacle to the advancement of education and teaching practices. With the deepening of China's basic education curriculum reform, the community has increasingly concerned about teachers and has placed higher demands on teaching work, making the problem of teachers' burnout increasingly severe<sup>[5]</sup>.

Extensive evidence has demonstrated that teacher burnout significantly impacts on teachers' occupational health and students' adaptive development. For example, job burnout is related to lower job satisfaction and higher absenteeism rates<sup>[6]</sup>, and teachers become vulnerable to emotional disorders, such as anxiety and depression<sup>[7]</sup>. In addition, teachers' burnout status also affects students' development and is related to the quality of education and teaching. On the one hand, teacher burnout may make teaching less effective and produce poor teaching outcomes<sup>[8]</sup>, negatively affecting students' autonomous motivations and academic performance<sup>[6]</sup>. On the other hand, teacher burnout tends to cause more teacher-student conflicts and is associated with more disruptive behaviors in students<sup>[9]</sup>.

When these conflicts emerge, how to regulate negative emotions triggered by job burnout is the key issue faced by every novice teacher. Furthermore, these emotions will be transmitted to students through teaching activities, which will then affect students' physical and mental health<sup>[10]</sup>. Focusing on the emotional regulation of novice teachers not only has positive significance for improving teachers' emotional states but also enhances students' physical and mental health through their teachers' emotional states.

Emotion regulation was defined by Gross in 1999 as the occurrence and experience of one or more emotions that affect one's self, as well as the process of experiencing and expressing these emotions. Gross *et al.* believed that two commonly used emotion regulation are cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression<sup>[11]</sup>. Cognitive reappraisal is to make individuals change their understanding and cognition of emotional events, that is to say, to rationalize events in a positive way to suppress the upcoming or ongoing emotional expression behavior. While suppressing their emotional behavior through the use of self-control is expression suppression.

Teacher burnout is physical and emotional distress as a result of prolonged exposure to school-related stressors. Zhao conducted a survey of special education teachers and found that the use of positive emotion regulation can reduce job burnout<sup>[12]</sup>. Based on a sample of primary school teachers, Fiorilli *et al.* established that burnout is tied to teachers' appraisal of their negative emotion intensity and with ability to recognize teachers' own emotions and hence to appraise stressful emotional events<sup>[13]</sup>. Based on the inconsistency in the aforementioned findings and insufficient research on the aspect of novice English teachers, we sought to clarify the relationship between novice English teachers with different levels of emotion regulation and their job burnout.

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- (1) What is the level of job burnout in general and the frequency of use of emotion regulation among novice junior high school English teachers?
- (2) What is the gender difference in the level of job burnout and the frequency of use of emotion regulation?
- (3) What is the correlation between job burnout and emotion regulation among novice junior high school English teachers?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study sample

A random sample of 133 novice junior high school English teachers participated in this survey, including 11 male and 122 female teachers. A total of 126 teachers are aged 18 to 25 years old, and the rest of them are aged 25 to 30.

A total of 98 held a bachelor’s degree, and 35 had a master’s degree. The junior high school English teachers who participated in this survey were all Chinese. The data are shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Basic information about novice junior high school English teachers

Information		<i>n</i> (%)
Gender	Male	11 (8.2)
	Female	122 (91.7)
Degree	Bachelor	98 (73.7)
	Master	35 (26.3)
Age	18–25	126 (94.7)
	26–30	7 (5.3)

## 2.2. Measurement

### 2.2.1. Emotion regulation questionnaire

The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire <sup>[11]</sup>, which is used to measure the individual’s preference for using emotion regulation strategies, has been confirmed by many researchers that the reliability and validity of the Chinese version have reached a high level <sup>[14]</sup>. The questionnaire has a total of 10 items scored on a 7-point scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree). The questionnaire has the following two dimensions: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The higher the score, the better the teacher’s emotion regulation skills. The Cronbach’s alpha of the questionnaire used in the research is 0.75.

### 2.2.2. Job burnout questionnaire

The job burnout questionnaire developed by Maslach and Jackson <sup>[1]</sup> and validated by Shi and Gao was used to test the job burnout of novice junior high school English teachers in China <sup>[15]</sup>. The questionnaire has a total of 22 items scored on a 5-point scale (1 = never, 5 = always) with three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The Cronbach’s alpha of the questionnaire is 0.72. Higher scores indicate more serious job burnout. This questionnaire was tested and widely used in the investigation of job burnout.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Descriptive statistics

The results of the independent sample *t*-test showed that there were significant differences between male and female novice teachers in the total score of job burnout, emotional regulation, and their corresponding dimensions. On the emotional regulation strategy, male teachers scored significantly higher than female teachers, and the scores of male teachers in two dimensions (expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal) were generally higher than those of female teachers. At the same time, female teachers scored significantly higher than male teachers in job burnout. Moreover, in the two dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, the scores of female teachers were also significantly higher than those of male teachers. However, male teachers scored significantly higher than female teachers in personal accomplishment. These results are presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Gender differences in burnout and emotion regulation

		<i>n</i>	Mean	Standard deviation	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Emotional regulation	Male	11	49.36	7.46	2.24	0.026
	Female	122	43.76	7.96		
Cognitive reappraisal	Male	11	33.09	4.53	1.78	0.076
	Female	122	29.75	6.03		
Expressive suppression	Male	11	16.27	5.35	1.45	0.14
	Female	122	14.00	4.90		
Job burnout	Male	11	57.45	5.43	-3.89	< 0.001
	Female	122	66.14	7.22		
Emotional exhaustion	Male	11	20.63	3.44	-5.04	< 0.001
	Female	122	28.78	5.25		
Depersonalization	Male	11	9.63	2.20	-3.06	0.003
	Female	122	12.82	3.39		
Personal accomplishment	Male	11	27.18	5.33	2.00	0.048
	Female	122	24.53	4.10		

### 3.2. Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis indicated that the total score of job burnout and its two dimensions (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) have a significant negative correlation with the total score of emotional regulation and its dimension of cognitive reappraisal. However, there is a significant positive correlation between personal accomplishment and both emotional regulation and cognitive reappraisal, as shown in **Table 3**.

**Table 3.** Correlation analysis of job burnout and emotion regulation

	Emotional regulation	Cognitive reappraisal	Expressive suppression
Job burnout	-0.243**	-0.354***	0.032
Emotional exhaustion	-0.314***	-0.435***	0.015
Depersonalization	-0.304***	-0.501***	0.110
Personal accomplishment	0.23**	0.352***	-0.052

Note: \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $P < 0.001$

## 4. Discussion

First of all, a gender difference test on job burnout and emotional regulation was conducted. The results showed that, overall, the emotional regulation skills of male novice teachers in junior school are significantly better than that of females. Further analysis shows that males are better at using two emotional regulation strategies, namely, expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal. As far as job burnout is concerned, female novice teachers are generally more likely to have job burnout than males and are more inclined to have a sense of expressive suppression and cognitive frustration in their work. In contrast, in terms of personal accomplishment, males are not as likely to have a sense of accomplishment as females.

These findings have also been verified in the subsequent correlation analysis. There is a negative correlation

between emotional regulation and job burnout, which shows that novice junior school English teachers with stronger emotional regulation skills are less likely to have job burnout. Combined with the previous discussion, male novice teachers can suppress job burnout because of their better emotional regulation skills. Secondly, there is a negative correlation between job burnout and cognitive reappraisal, which shows that the use of cognitive reappraisal will accelerate the generation of job burnout.

## 5. Conclusion

Through the above analysis and discussion, this paper draws the following conclusions. Firstly, the job burnout of male novice English teachers in junior school is generally lower than that of females, and male novice English teachers have better emotion regulation skills. Secondly, there is a strong negative correlation between job burnout and emotional regulation skills. The stronger the emotional regulation skills, the less likely novice English teachers are to feel burnout in their jobs. Thirdly, in the choice of emotion regulation strategy, we should be cautious in using cognitive reappraisal, which has the opposite effect on restraining job burnout.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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