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A Qualitative Study of Contributing Factors of Early Career Teacher Burnout

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CONTRIBUTING FACTORS OF EARLY CAREER TEACHER BURNOUT

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ABSTRACT

Understanding factors contributing to teacher burnout is important to understand so it can be prevented. Teacher attrition is on the rise and is directly affecting student achievement. To combat this prevalent issue in our schools today, districts and school leadership need to support and develop teacher self-efficacy. To do this, they need to provide support to their teachers through positive affirmation, checking in frequently, and providing proper time and resources needed for teachers to feel successful at their job. This qualitative study explored the contributing factors of early career teacher burnout. The research questions (RQ) for this study are as follows: RQ1: What do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools identify as contributors to stress and burnout? RQ2: What factors do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools perceive as contributing to their self-efficacy? RQ3: How do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools develop self-efficacy? The data was collected through a single 20–30-minute interview with each of the 18 participants. This research examined several issues: (a) what teachers identify as contributing factors to stress and burnout, (b) what teachers perceive as contributing to their self-efficacy, and (c) how teachers develop self-efficacy. Results showed a lack of support, resources, and time led to their feelings of stress and burnout, and support from administration and the proper amount of time and resources to prepare their lessons contributed to higher self-efficacy levels. Research results were organized into three themes: Theme 1: Teacher Confidence; Theme 2: Teacher Stress Factors; Theme 3: Administration and District Support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

There is a national crisis of high teacher attrition and few individuals entering the teaching profession (Pop & Turner, 2009). Research has shown 25% of new teachers leave the profession in their 1st year (Aloe et al., 2014). If early career teachers are not provided with support, they may experience burnout and possibly leave the profession (Boyd et al., 2008). Therefore, there is a need to explore early career teachers' perception of what has built their self-efficacy and what they perceive contributes to stress and burnout to combat this issue prevalent in our schools.

Purpose Statement

Research shows the number of early career teachers leaving their positions is on the rise due to lack of support, being ill-equipped for classroom management, and work overload (Aloe et al., 2014). Each of these factors leads to exhaustion, uncertainty, and burnout (Aloe et al., 2014). On the other hand, burnout may be mitigated when teachers possess high levels of self-efficacy (Aloe et al., 2014). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine new teachers in grades PreK–8, in their first 3 years of teaching, in two separate Oregon public school districts on their perceptions of support and other factors contributing to their levels of self-efficacy, and their perceptions of what factors contribute to burnout.

Burnout has been defined as emotional exhaustion, loss of a sense of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (Mazidi et al., 2017). Research has shown these factors can have a significant impact on students (Mazidi et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Specifically, students exhibit lower student achievement and have an increase in behavior issues

when their teacher experiences burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Supportive structures and policies should be implemented to retain early career teachers so they do not struggle with feelings associated with burnout.

Self-efficacy has been defined as an individual's belief in their capabilities to influence a particular course of action (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy has played a critical role in influencing student learning, specifically student achievement and motivation (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Also, self-efficacy has influenced teachers in areas such as job satisfaction and commitment (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Research Questions

Due to the high level of early career teacher burnout, there is a need to understand factors contributing to teacher burnout and what can be done to alleviate it. This study answered the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools identify as contributors to stress and burnout?

RQ2: What factors do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools perceive as contributing to their self-efficacy?

RQ3: How do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools develop self-efficacy?

Background, Context, and History of the Problem

Early career teacher burnout has been attributed to a lack of support, being ill-equipped for classroom management, and work overload. However, a teacher with higher self-efficacy can counter these effects as they may experience higher job satisfaction and lower levels of job-

related stress (Zhu et al., 2018). Addressing these issues could potentially provide more support for teachers, reducing burnout and teacher attrition.

Background and Contexts

Well-structured formal support of early career teachers is critical to both job satisfaction and retention **(**Kelly et al., 2018). Unfortunately, significant evidence has shown many early career teachers do not receive any type of support **(**Kelly et al., 2018). Early career teachers often experience feelings of alienation and insecurity without formal support structures like mentoring and programs designed to help them transition to the workplace, leading to teacher attrition (Buchanan et al., 2013).

Teachers' classroom management practices have a direct impact on their students' probability of success (Gage et al., 2018), as classroom management is critical to whether students are able to learn. A teacher's ability to create a functioning learning environment depends on their classroom management skills (Hochweber et al., 2014). Good classroom management skills can be difficult to develop and may take many years to refine due to changing demographics and students' needs. These skills consist of setting high expectations for all students and differentiating to meet their needs. Boundaries, expectations, and rules are clearly established to create a predictable and safe environment. Unfortunately, when a teacher does not establish these three things, they experience higher burnout rates due to higher stress levels (Shen et al., 2015).

Teachers' workloads increase every school year due to budget cuts and other factors (Shen et al., 2015). Teachers' job duties are not limited to student instruction. The job responsibilities also include maintaining a classroom, communicating with parents, and keeping up on current teaching strategies. Teachers are more susceptible to burnout symptoms when there

is an imbalance between the demands and expectations of their job and resources available to deal with the demands (McCarthy et al., 2009). Additionally, teachers are often unable to handle increased stress levels, resulting in job dissatisfaction (Sass et al., 2011).

History

Teacher burnout was first explored in the 1970s. Throughout various research studies, teaching has been characterized as one of the most stressful and exhausting professions (Gavish et al., 2010). In particular, as a result of stress and exhaustion, one third of all new teachers leave the profession in the first 5 years (Hanushek, 2007). Teacher attrition affects the entire school community, especially in poorly performing schools (Lindqvist et al., 2014).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this study was based on theoretical contributions to social learning theory by theorists Julian Rotter (1954) and Albert Bandura (1986b). Rotter's (1954) locus of control theory became the foundation of teacher self-efficacy research, although Bandura (1986b) suggested a teacher's beliefs effect their efforts (Dibapile, 2012). Both theories play a crucial role in understanding the influence of environmental and biological factors on an individual's behavior. As self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief of their capabilities to influence a particular course of action, teachers who have a higher level of self-efficacy believe they can have a direct impact on students' behaviors and overcome any environmental challenges that may arise (Dibapile, 2012).

Definition of Terms

Burnout is defined as a condition resulting in emotional exhaustion, loss of a sense of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (Mazidi et al., 2017).

Confidence is the state of feeling certain about the truth of something, whether positive or negative.

Early Career Teacher is a teacher with less than 5 years of teaching experience.

Elementary Educator is a person trained to educate primarily grades K–5/6.

Locus of Control is how strongly a person believes they have control over a situation.

Self-Efficacy is defined as the belief one has in their capabilities to manage situations (Bandura, 1986a).

Social Learning Theory is when individuals learn by observing the behavior of others.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

There are several limiting factors for this research design. Because self-efficacy cannot only by inferred, one limitation was uncertainty of when exactly teachers developed self-efficacy, leading to the potential for over or under confidence in perceived ability. Furthermore, a person's level of self-efficacy is lower if they have experienced failures or challenges they cannot overcome. Therefore, even if the person has the skill set, they are more likely to be unsuccessful or not accomplish tasks. Also, self-efficacy may not develop linearly. It could come and go; therefore, there may be days when self-efficacy is stronger than others. In addition, findings cannot be generalized to other populations as this is a qualitative research study relying on a nonrandom sample; however, this limitation was offset by recognizing findings could be transferable to other educators with similar experience. Time was another limitation since the study was limited to the 2020–2021 school year. This was considered a limitation due to inability to take as much time as needed to collect and analyze data. Also, teachers during this specific school year may not represent the whole population due to particular situations that may have occurred during the course of the year, including the COVID–19 global pandemic. Interview

questions were reviewed and confirmed by a teacher in the field of education to ensure questions were aligned with the research. This was a limitation because the teacher was currently working in the field.

Each of these limitations were unavoidable due to various constraints. This study was mostly limited by time constraints as it was difficult to conduct an in-depth study in a limited time frame. In addition, there may have been potential bias as I was a classroom teacher. I may have expected certain responses and possibly misinterpreted information due to my prior experiences. It was critical to record the interviews and receive approval from participants on interpretations so biases were minimized. Bracketing helped mitigate potential effects of unacknowledged preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Writing memos throughout data collection and analysis allowed for exploration of feelings about the research process, leading to important insights such as one's preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Limiting the population to PreK–8 full-time, 1st-year through 3rd-year public school teachers at two different Oregon school districts was a delimitation of this study. Because the study was limited to one state and a specific population, results of the study did not provide a clear representation of all early career teachers. Moreover, study results may not be applicable to other districts with different demographics. All of these factors may have affected how participants answered interview questions, resulting in limitations of self-reported data.

Summary

Given the prevalence of teacher burnout, it was necessary to examine early career teachers closely about their perceptions of support and other factors building self-efficacy and their perceptions of what factors contribute to burnout to prevent or mitigate burnout. Several studies have indicated a significant relationship between self-efficacy and burnout (Aloe et al.,

2014; Dibapile, 2012; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Therefore, findings may help inform teacher preparation programs, school districts, and their leaders about strategies and trainings to help reduce teacher attrition.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Many studies have identified teacher burnout as a main contributor to teacher attrition (Aloe et al., 2014; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Pop & Turner, 2009). These same studies suggested self-efficacy to be a protective factor to decrease teacher burnout. Collie et al. (2012) determined perception could contribute to how happy someone is or will be. Studies have revealed an inverse relationship between self-efficacy and burnout; those who have had higher self-efficacy have had a lower rate of burnout. Conversely, those with lower self-efficacy, have had higher burnout rates (Betoret, 2006). The following literature review will outline the theoretical background and scholarly work demonstrating effects of teacher self-efficacy, social learning, and the relationship with teacher burnout.

Seminal works reviewed in this chapter include Bandura's (1986b) self-efficacy theory and Rotter's (1954) social learning theory; the two conceptual frameworks for this study. Databases provided pertinent empirical and theoretical publications for this chapter, including EBSCO, Proquest, ERIC, Dissertations, and Google Scholar. Key terms used to identify literature outlined in this review included self-efficacy, burnout, classroom management, teaching efficacy, and preparation programs.

Conceptual Framework

Teacher self-efficacy has been studied as it relates to burnout under the social learning theory proposed by social learning theorist Julian Rotter and social cognitive theorist Albert Bandura (Zhu et al., 2018). Although both theorists were attributed to similar labels, their respective theoretical frameworks emphasized different aspects of the human experience. For

example, Rotter focused more on vague internal states, and Bandura emphasized more of the cognitive process.

Bandura (1986a) stated self-efficacy as the belief one has in their capabilities to manage situations. In addition, Bandura postulated self-efficacy was related to how much effort someone may put into a task and how long they might persist with completing that task when faced with challenges (Zhu et al., 2018). On the other hand, Rotter's (1954) concept of internal and external control contrasted with Bandura's theory. When Rotter's concept was applied to self-efficacy, teacher self-efficacy increased if it was believed student achievement and behavior was influenced by education (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Reinforcement of teaching efforts may have been deemed out of their control if it was believed environmental influences were greater. However, a teacher may have believed it was in their control if it was not beyond their abilities (Zhu et al., 2018).

For this study in particular, the intended focus was Bandura's work on self-efficacy and the larger social learning theoretical. Bandura's framework was chosen for its social learning theory concept where observation and modeling play a critical role in learning. This is important to understand when examining teacher burnout, as teacher development plays a key role in burnout prevention.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Teacher burnout has been a widely researched topic. Most studies have used a variety of tools to provide evidence of the many factors playing a crucial role in teacher burnout. In reviewing various literature sources, a primary issue has addressed the effect of teacher burnout on student achievement. Dimitri and Mieke (2015) used multiple sources of data to support this claim. Many teacher burnout studies also discussed importance of teacher preparation. The

higher quality teacher preparation program, the more likely a teacher is prepared to handle today's classroom challenges (Burstein et al., 2009). Moreover, Brackenreed and Barnett (2006) explained teacher preparation programs should provide teachers with classroom management skills necessary to cope with demands of teaching in inclusive classrooms.

Overall, most research discovered teacher self-efficacy plays a critical role in burnout prevention. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy has guided various research studies, including how behavior is learned through observational learning. Rotter's (1954) social learning theory was mentioned throughout the literature review, including how both theories led to building a foundation to understand burnout prevention.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is the belief someone can both control and change their environment (Bandura, 1993). Through their self-efficacy theory, Bandura discovered a person with a high sense of self-efficacy set higher goals for themselves and possessed an ability to persevere when faced with difficult situations. Furthermore, Bandura stated people's strength of conviction in their effectiveness determined their ability to cope with various situations. The lower a person's sense of self-efficacy, the more likely they would experience stress and be unable to cope with certain situations. These findings were crucial in examining teacher burnout prevention. The strength of people's beliefs in their effectiveness would most likely affect whether they would attempt to cope with certain situations (Bandura, 1977). The lower the level of self-efficacy, the less likely a person would persevere when faced with adversity. People avoid threatening situations if they believed their skills to cope were exceeded (Bandura, 1977). On the other hand, if they perceived themselves as capable of handling an otherwise intimidating situation, they thrived. Distinction between whether or not a person could handle certain situations was critical

for teacher burnout. If a teacher had confidence to succeed, they were more resistant to burnout and were able to cope appropriately with stressful situations (Bandura, 1977).

Differing Perspectives on Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy has also been used in other theories of human behavior. However, theoretical perspectives differ in origins and process by which perceived self-efficacy affects behavior (Bandura, 1977). The theoretical framework in efficacy theory focused almost exclusively on how one's own actions produce the effects. This differs from social learning theory where it is believed self-efficacy arises from a variety of sources where information is conveyed by direct and mediated experiences (Bandura, 1977). According to social learning analysis, choice behavior and effort expenditure are ruled in part by perceptions of self-efficacy instead of by a drive condition (Bandura, 1977).

Impact of Self-Efficacy Theory

Teacher self-efficacy directly affects student achievement (Dimitri & Mieke, 2015). The more a teacher believes in their teaching abilities, the more motivated students will be, resulting in higher student achievement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Through the development of self-efficacy, teachers will be equipped with tools needed to combat burnout and increase student achievement. If teachers believe in themselves, students will too (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Furthermore, research showed development of self-efficacy in teachers led to stronger problem-solving skills, and an increase in interactions and motivation among students (Martin et al., 2009).

Social Learning Theory

Rotter (1954) examined the impact of the environment on behavior. He believed motivation depended on the expected effect or behavior outcome. If negative consequences were

expected in a particular situation, people avoided it altogether. Conversely, people were more likely to engage in behavior if they believed it would result in a positive outcome.

Rotter's (1954) social learning theory was a new idea in the 1950s. Prior social learning theories were mainly based on Freud's (1896) psychoanalysis theories. Freud focused on people's instincts as a determinant of their social learning. Freud felt people's actions were developed in childhood; and it was necessary to analyze these long-held experiences to treat their behavioral actions. For example, if a traumatic event occurred in a person's past, it may cause issues later in their life because it became hidden from consciousness.

On the other hand, Rotter (1954) developed a social learning theory focused on a person's environment and how individual interacts with the environment. The theory included the effect of the environment and the person's instinctual learning championed by Freud (1896). Rotter believed personality has to do with a person's interaction with their environment and is dependent on learning experiences and life history (Strickland, 2014).

Rotter's (1954) theory focused on four main points: behavior potential, expectancy, reinforcement value, and psychological situation. Behavior potential acted on the impulse that gives the greatest degree of satisfaction a person wants to achieve. According to Rotter's social learning theory, reinforcement strengthened expectancy of particular behaviors or events followed by similar future reinforcement (Rotter, 1966). People would connect with the response most likely to achieve the outcome they desired. If their expectations were correct, the assumption they were on target was reinforced and they obtained the expected outcome (Rotter, 1966).

Reinforcement value (RV) was a formula developed by Rotter (1954) to predict behavior of a person's response to social situations. The formula included behavior potential (BP),

expectancy (E) and reinforcement value (RV), written as BP = ƒ (E&RV). The formula indicated if expectancy and reinforcement value were high, potential would also be high and vice versa; if these values were low, potential was also low.

Psychological situations were not part of Rotter's formula; however, they must be considered when studying social learning in response to certain situations as individually determined for a specific person's interpretation (Rotter, 1966). Also, behavior expectancies were typically generalized and applied across similarly perceived situations. Furthermore, Rotter (1966) stated the relationship between one's behavior and experienced consequences might affect behavioral choices across a broad band of situations in their life.

Bandura (1977) expounded on various theories in the field of social learning. Agreement was shown with prior theories such as classical and operant conditioning; however, additional observations and theories were included. Specifically, Bandura felt there were interactive processes between external stimuli and behavioral responses, resulting in learned behavior through observation.

Bandura (1977) felt children observed and imitated behaviors they encountered from a young age and further postulated these behavior imitations were more likely to be important to children when the behavior came from people more like them, compared to those unlike them. If the imitated behavior was praised and they were rewarded, the behavior would be reinforced. However, if the behavior resulted in punishment, it would act as a deterrent. Based on this continual trial-and-error process during childhood, it would give the child a set of reinforcing behavior and deterrent behavior to develop a set of expected responses (Bandura & Walters, 1977). According to Bandura, the interactive response was more cognitively based; feeling a

response did not lie solely with childhood observations; instead, there had to be other mental factors at work to respond in a certain situation (Bandura, 1977).

Differing Perspectives on Social Learning Theory

Theorists such as B.F. Skinner (1938) agreed there was a connection between behavior, reinforcement, and punishment. However, connection or influence of reinforcement and punishment made solely through observation was one perspective in which theorists differed. This perspective stated personal experience was not necessary for expected behavior outcomes to be determined.

Rotter's 1954 study built on Freud's 1896 theories, including expected outcome and the value placed on outcome. Rotter (1954) also included internal and external variables. Internal variables were classified as controllable events, and external variables were believed to be events outside the realm of control (Rotter, 1966).

Bandura (1977) included cognitive factors in the equation and their relationship to social learning. These included imitations and how children mimicked learned behaviors during childhood from people similar to them. In addition to imitation, Bandura felt there was a cognitive aspect to social behavior, including how it influenced responses, and if a person believed this response would be expected (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

Impact of Social Learning Theory

Many studies have shown correlation between internal and external control, and the relationship between job performance and attitudes. People who believed they had control in their lives have taken initiative to improve their environment and placed a stronger value on achievement reinforcements (Rotter, 1966). This phenomenon was explained in Rotter's (1954) locus of control (LOC) An individual with a perceived connection between what they have done

and what happened to them was controlled more internally controlled (McLeod et al., 2015). On the other hand, an individual was controlled more externally when these connections were not seen and they perceived what happens to them to be based on luck and/or chance (Rotter, 1966).

It is important for school leaders to fully understand LOC because internally motivated people were more successful in situations where they relied upon their own skills to solve situations (McLeod et al., 2015); whereas externally motivated individuals have done better with more structured situations when given specific instructions (Rotter, 1966). School leaders with this knowledge could ensure teachers are given supports tailored to fit their needs to prosper. Furthermore, developing a teacher's internal LOC is crucial to create individuals who persist longer at tasks and build coping mechanisms needed to handle stressful situations that arise (Rotter, 1966).

Critique of Previous Research

The lack of studies about classroom management and teacher burnout were the largest deficits found in the research review. Numerous studies discovered poor classroom management as a contributing factor to teacher burnout. Furthermore, teachers reported classroom management as one of the most critical factors resulting in high stress levels (Dicke et al., 2014). However, few studies show the direct link between management and burnout. When a teacher possessed a high level of self-efficacy, they were able to effectively manage difficult students (Dibapile, 2012). Higher self-efficacy was directly correlated with quality teaching and appropriate student behavior, resulting in higher job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Also, there should be more data on specific teacher preparation programs helping prevent burnout (e.g., classroom management, student teaching). Research shows new teachers may lack

skills in classroom management strategies; therefore, more literature exploring strategies used to prevent burnout in relation to classroom management would be extremely helpful.

Further research could be done on what school districts can do to hire principals and other school leaders who foster a nurturing and caring environment to reduce burnout rates. The more data and studies available, the greater amount of information could be gathered to prevent burnout before it happens.

Critiques of Self-Efficacy Theory as Related to Teacher Burnout

Since Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory was introduced, researchers have challenged the idea of outcome expectancies influencing self-efficacy (Williams, 2010). These researchers have found if an individual is unmotivated toward a behavior, they will most likely believe the behavior is difficult; therefore, they will lack confidence needed to respond appropriately, regardless of their skills (Rhodes & Courneya, 2003). It is necessary to understand people's expected outcomes to determine what they say they are capable of, as this is shown to be highly predictive of behavior (Williams, 2010). This concept connects directly to teacher burnout, as a teacher's perceived beliefs affects how they handle situations and whether they feel they are equipped with necessary tools to succeed.

Gaps in Self-Efficacy Literature

Further development in self-efficacy literature related to teacher burnout needs to be explored. Throughout the literature review, authors stated it was critical for teachers to have a high sense of self-efficacy to prevent burn out; however, hardly any discussed what could be done to develop self-efficacy (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006; Dicke et al., 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). There were also a lack of studies exploring how self-efficacy specifically impacted classroom management. In various research studies, a link was discovered between

teacher burnout and classroom management; however, few studies showed the link between self-efficacy, classroom management, and teacher burnout.

Critiques of Social Learning Theory as Related to Teacher Burnout

Social learning theorists, such as Bandura (1977), put more emphasis on how observations of particular behaviors shaped one's responses; however, the role of the environment has been questioned widely throughout the process. Richards et al. (2018) found behavior was an interaction more likely found between the environment and an individual's experiences. Environments create cultures in the workplace. Combative cultures showed a higher burnout rate, whereas nurturing and supportive cultures were better equipped to handle stress (Richards et al., 2018). To help prevent burnout, individual teacher experiences and the environment must be addressed.

Gaps in Social Learning Literature

It is important for teachers and school leaders to understand social learning theory, as it is crucial for them to understand not only how they learn as educators, but also how their students learn. Unfortunately, few studies have explored the importance of teaching and understanding social learning theory. In addition, the relationship between social learning theory and teacher burnout is missing from literature. Research studies exploring the link between social learning theory and burnout would provide school leaders more complete idea about what role the work environment plays in employees' lives and shed light on burnout prevention.

Classroom Management

Classroom management consists of a wide variety of skills and techniques a teacher uses to maintain an environment for instruction and learning to occur (Prior, 2014). The ability to create a functioning learning environment depends critically on the teacher's classroom

management skills (Hochweber et al., 2014). Relationships, consistency, and engagement appeared throughout the literature as key classroom management methods to create a positive classroom culture.

Relationships

In a meta-analysis of more than 100 studies, Marzano et al. (2003) reported 31% fewer discipline issues when teachers had high-quality relationships with students. A positive teacher-student relationship reduced disruptions, increased student motivation to learn, and even had a favorable effect on teacher health (Scherzinger & Wettstein, 2019). Teachers who made it a priority to build positive relationships with their students were more likely to help students develop positive, socially appropriate behaviors (Beaty-O'Ferrall et al., 2010). Furthermore, teachers who focused on building positive relationships used a variety of strategies to meet students' diverse needs.

Consistency

Consistency has involved creating an environment where students know what has been expected of them with constant and consistent follow through of rules and procedures (Prior, 2014). Consistency has been one of the keys to a successful classroom (Wong & Wong, 2009). With a consistent and predictable environment, students were able to thrive because they had a clear understanding of classroom procedures, saving time and putting the focus back on academics.

Widely used behavioral frameworks such as positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) have used a proactive and systematic approach for classroom management. PBIS established consistent routines and expectations and provided behavior-specific language to help

correct behavior (Myers et al., 2017). In addition, PBIS has provided a solid, evidence-based foundation for proactive classroom management to maximize the learning environment.

Engagement

Successful teachers have also maximized the learning environment through interactive instruction (Prior, 2014). Fun and interesting classroom experiences have captured students' attention and helped to keep students engaged in the learning process (Prior, 2014). If students have been engaged, their behaviors were under better control. Effective and engaging instruction has been the foundation for any well-managed classroom (Myers et al., 2017).

Classroom Management Preparation for Preservice Teachers

Several preservice teachers who participated in this research study mentioned they have not received adequate training on effective classroom management strategies. Managing a classroom is a critical skill needed to maximize student achievement and to create a positive climate and culture (Myers et al., 2017). Furthermore, student behavior has had a direct effect on teacher job satisfaction and their inability to properly manage student behavior, likely leading to teacher attrition (Myers et al., 2017). Myers et al. (2007) conducted an extensive literature review and identified five categories of evidence-based classroom management practices: (a) maximizing structure and predictability (b) posting, teaching, reviewing, monitoring, and reviewing expectations; (c) active engagement of students in observable ways; (d) continuum of strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior; and (e) a continuum of strategies to respond to inappropriate behavior.

Teacher Burnout Prevention

School districts and principals have played critical roles in teacher retention. Four specific key areas were identified: fostering positive and supportive relationships in school

communities, providing support for teachers to alleviate high workload, providing greater job security and flexibility, and offering new opportunities for career advancement (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015).

Also, research showed principals could prevent emotional exhaustion and burnout through nurturing and trusting relationships (Dimitri & Mieke, 2015). Richards et al. (2018) explained nurturing and supportive cultures were better equipped to handle stress. Burnout has been lower in schools where teachers perceived the principal cared about their well-being and mutual trust was established (Dimitri & Mieke, 2015).

School districts need to offer their employees greater flexibility and new opportunities, but they also need to take time to find leaders who will foster caring and supportive work environments. Improvement in working conditions such as workload and classroom environments need to be addressed to prevent burnout (Shen et al., 2015).

Shen et al. (2015) thought offering workshops on stress relief and time management could strengthen teachers' resistance to burnout. If teachers were given proper tools to deal with their workload, they might not have become so overwhelmed and tired. Furthermore, Shen et al. suggested burnout could be prevented through preparation programs, offering physical activities to reduce stress, and general public awareness to help increase status of teachers.

Support for Self-Efficacy and Preventing Burnout

To prevent burnout on a macro scale, major system changes need to take place. First, school bonds, taxes, and policies should be allocated to schools. Local, state, and federal governments recognize the importance of PreK–12 education through the substantial gain of opportunity and earnings (Neher et al., 2017). Research showed there have been many social benefits of students graduating from high school, including lifetime effects on tax contributions,

decreased health costs (Medicaid), decreased welfare costs, and decreased criminal costs (incarceration; Neher et al., 2017). However, budget cuts have continued, and the teaching profession has not been taken seriously. Neher et al. (2017) showed the government has made decisions based on today's cost, rather than considering the cost of ignorance tomorrow.

Conventional university teacher preparation programs need restructuring to improve recruitment, preparation, and retention of teachers (Burstein et al., 2009). Burstein et al. (2009) explained a focus on school and university collaboration with high levels of support can help accomplish in fostering an environment where preservice teachers can strengthen their skills to be better prepared to face the many challenges of today's classrooms.

Incorporation of professional development and workshops focusing on teacher self-care has been shown to reduce stress factoring into burnout. A program called cultivating awareness and resilience in education (CARE for Teachers) aimed to promote teacher social and emotional competence and worked to improve classroom interaction quality (Jennings et al., 2017). These programs helped foster an environment for all staff members where self-care was at the forefront of their minds and everyone was held accountable for taking care of themselves.

Self-efficacy must be supported for teachers to continue developing their skills. Bandura (1997) suggested workplace environments and past experiences influence self-efficacy beliefs. The combination of verbal support from stakeholders, successful past experiences, and opportunities for observing successful peers builds self-efficacy for teaching (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). However, the influence of self-efficacy sources may change over time and differ between early career teachers and veteran teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Self-efficacy beliefs in the workplace also develop over time and flow according to personal attributes

(e.g., honesty, dependability) and interpretation of environmental circumstances (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Summary

Burstein et al. (2009) stated teacher retention has been critical in providing high-quality education. According to Collie et al. (2012), teachers who experienced lower perceived stress encouraged greater student achievement. Burnout would diminish if teachers were able to meet job demand, had support from all stakeholders, and had tools necessary to succeed. Teacher burnout has been a critical issue, and if it is not addressed and taken seriously, our society will have serious repercussions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Teacher burnout has been an issue across the nation and has been linked to every stage of a teacher's career (Aloe et al., 2014). Teachers who have experienced higher levels of burnout have been more likely to leave the profession (Aloe et al., 2014). These findings suggested burnout has been a pervasive problem in the profession, and it is critical to discover mitigation options. The following chapter discusses the methodology used throughout this research. This chapter includes details on research design, sampling plan, data collection, and ethical considerations. It is important to note these interviews took place during the COVID–19 global pandemic. During completion of interviews from December 2020 to March 2021, one school district had gone back and forth between hybrid and in-person learning, while the other district was strictly online.

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored:

RQ1: What do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools identify as contributors to stress and burnout?

RQ2: What factors do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools perceive as contributing to their self-efficacy?

RQ3**:** How do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools develop self-efficacy?

Research Design

This study examined contributing factors of burnout for early career teachers. Exploring contributing factors of teacher burnout was key to help school leaders see how burnout could be

prevented. The collection of interviews was used to gather data from study participants. Qualitative researchers must always be sensitive to ways they conceptualize and act in relation to institutional boundaries surrounding the studied phenomenon (Mills et al., 2010).

Target Population and Sampling Method

The population examined for this study were 1st-year through 3rd-year teachers practicing at one of two chosen school districts in Oregon. This qualitative study used criterion sampling due for proper binding. Study participants had characteristics in common, as they were all in their first 3 years of their full-time teaching career and were licensed PreK–8 teachers in a public school. Two school districts were chosen due to similar demographics, student achievement, and willingness to participate. Charter and private school teachers were excluded. Private schools are tuition based and not under state supervision; therefore, they are able to create their own curriculum standards. Charter schools also operate differently than public schools. Both private and charter schoolteachers do not have to be licensed. Consequently, study results might have been skewed.

This qualitative research study had 18 participants. This number was chosen to complete interviews in 1 school year. The chosen school districts were also smaller in size, so the number of participants who met the study criteria guided the number of participants available for the study. The study originally included teachers in grades K–6 at a public elementary school; however, the elementary K–6 teacher criteria was removed as sixth grade was located in the middle school of one district. The PreK criterion was added because PreK programs were now a part of public elementary schools. In addition, an original criterion stated teachers could not have had any prior educational experience. This criterion was eliminated as many participants were substitutes prior to gaining their first teaching position.

Criterion sampling required decisions to be made about the sample size, participants, and type of sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling was used in this study because individuals were selected who could purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First-year through 3rd-year, full-time, PreK–8 public school teachers at two particular districts were purposefully chosen for this study because they were knowledgeable in how they were prepared for their teaching career. They were able to articulate their teaching preparation and how they developed self-efficacy over the course of the school year.

Data Collection

Once I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and both district IRB processes, an email was sent to the district offices explaining the purpose of the study and participant requirements. Participants were selected as they were recruited and chosen until I met the participant limit, nine per district. Once selected, participants received an informed consent letter explaining the study in detail. This explanation was clear about why their participation was needed and explained potential benefits of determining how self-efficacy is developed. The ease of participation in one 20–30-minute Google Meet interview was also highlighted so teachers were more likely to be a part of the study. All interviews took place virtually via Google Meets.

Participants were assured their privacy would be protected through the use of codes instead of names. To further protect their identity, participants' real names were kept on a master list stored separate from their interview. Because all notes were taken using technology, more attention was given to how data were organized and stored (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collected were uploaded into a well-organized matrix so information was easily located. Google documents and sheets were used so all files were automatically backed up. Furthermore, each interview was audio recorded to assure interviews were properly heard and conversations were

not misconstrued. Any identifying information was eliminated by replacing people's names and places with generic descriptions. All interviews were transcribed and organized into a Google Sheets spreadsheet. All steps were necessary to protect not only participants' identities, but the reliability of the study as well.

Instrumentation

This qualitative study incorporated interviews as the primary source of data (see Appendix A). Before beginning the study, IRB approval was sought to provide evidence the study design followed specific guidelines for conducting ethical research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants received a detailed outline of the study and expectations for commitment to one interview to take part in the study. This outline included any associated minimal risks so their participation in the study was transparent. Participants were unknown to me so they did not feel obligated to participate. It was important participants understood their participation in the study was voluntary, and it would not put them at any undue risk (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once they gave their consent, each participant was referred to as "Participant A," "Participant B," etc. This helped to ensure their responses remained confidential and were only used to keep the data organized.

Interviews

One-on-one virtual interviews were conducted with chosen participants. These interviews provided insights and perceptions on what early career teachers' perceptions of support and other factors building self-efficacy, and their views about what factors contributed to stress and burnout. Interview questions were open ended to elicit greater responses from participants. Interviews took place virtually, were audio recorded, and took approximately 20–30 minutes per

participant. Follow-up questions were asked to have the participant further elaborate on their answer. The types of questions asked contained questions about their experiences, their self-efficacy levels, burnout levels, support, and where they developed their skills.

Interviews were conducted using Google Meets due to multiple levels of security. Each meeting link had a unique code, making it impossible for outsiders to get in. Audio recordings were recorded using a digital recorder and stored in Google Drive requiring a password and was encrypted by default.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interviews were used as the data source for this qualitative study. Participants had to meet the inclusion criterion to be involved. Teachers were allowed to continue with the study once it was established they were a full-time, licensed PreK–8 grade teacher at the chosen public school districts in their 1st, 2nd, or 3rd year in teaching. Data from these participants were included in the data analysis. Participants were required to participate in one interview. Processes for data collection, data analysis, and report writing were interrelated and often happened simultaneously in the research project (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout these processes, it was essential to ensure participants' identities were protected, and participants were protected from harm and disclosure of findings from the study.

First, data analysis for this study consisted of preparing and organizing the data, followed by reducing data into themes through the process of coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once data were collected and organized, they were described, classified, and interpreted through the formation of codes. The codes emerged during the data analysis portion. Coding is essential to qualitative research because it involves making sense of the text collected from interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Once coding was completed, data were interpreted and represented. This interpretative process required careful judgments about what was meaningful in the patterns, themes, and categories generated by analysis (Patton, 2015). Themes were formed through formation of codes. Redundant codes were grouped into themes representing a common idea (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Charts and diagrams were created to represent research findings. Theme narratives for this study can be found in the findings section. Interpretation of this study included summarizing overall findings, comparing findings to the literature, and discussing personal views of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Validation: Credibility and Dependability

Identifying and minimizing potential threats was crucial for the study to maintain validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Transferability examined whether or not results would be valid for other groups outside of the study sample (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). To reduce, eliminate, or control threats to validity throughout the study, the threats needed to be recognized first.

Validation

Validation in qualitative studies looked to assess accuracy of findings as described by participants, the author, and the readers or reviewers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection process was important to reduce threats to validity. Examining specific chosen school districts helped understand what processes were in place leading to low or high teacher turnover. This information will lead to prevention of teacher burnout through identification of how self-efficacy was developed and supported during the school year.

Potential threats to validity arise when incorrect inferences from the sample data are drawn upon by the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Threats to validity of this study were provided in the limitations section**.** The main threat was ability to determine how a teacher

specifically developed self-efficacy. To mitigate this threat, questions were included in the interview asking participants about their preparedness regarding their teacher education programs.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent a research study is believable and appropriate. It is one of the most important considerations when assessing trustworthiness of a study (Mills et al., 2010). Findings of this study have been transparent and representative of multiple sources of data collected and analyzed; however, potential biases do exist, as I have experienced the explored topic. Awareness of my biases helped shift my focus to participants' perceptions of the study. Use of bracketing methods like writing memos throughout the research process drew awareness to my presuppositions (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I used open-ended questions so participants' answers were not potentially guided by me.

Dependability

Dependability is the stability of data over time and involves participants' evaluation of findings, interpretations, and recommendations supported by the data gathered from participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure accuracy and dependability throughout the study, audio recording was employed so accurate notes could be taken. The use of notes was also important to the dependability of the study to provide availability of a first-hand account. Moreover, notes were used to cross-reference interview recordings to ensure interview accuracy. Interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience before the scheduled deadline.

Ethical Issues in the Proposed Study

It is critical to uphold moral standards any time human subjects are involved in a research study (Mills et al., 2010). Therefore, before soliciting participants and collecting data, this study

was submitted for IRB approval. The IRB ensured this study did not violate participant rights and ensured participants' protection throughout the study. Ethical concerns are raised in most studies in development of strategies and research procedures (Maxwell, 2008). To minimize these concerns, permission and consent were granted by the IRB before the study began.

Before the study began, I anticipated maintaining confidentiality through interviews as an ethical issue. Maintaining confidentiality throughout interviews was a top priority for this study; however, there was always a risk study participants may be identified. This is an ethical issue because participants may not want their employers to know how they are truly feeling about their work. In addition, keeping all participants' identities confidential was a challenge as there were multiple participants with unique identifying codes. The data had to be well organized and secured from outside threats so participants true identities remained confidential.

Due to extensive use of computers throughout this study, more attention was given to how data were organized and stored to ensure participant privacy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All data were kept confidential in a password-protected laptop and notes were locked in a file cabinet. Audio recordings were destroyed after interview transcription. Any study related data will be kept for 3 years and then shredded.

Because the sample size was relatively small, there was also a risk of potential repercussions by administrators for any negative comments made by participants once results were disseminated. However, this risk was minimized because a composite of findings was created for each of the two school districts focused on recommendations to foster growth for their individual school district. Interview transcripts were not used, and the composite of findings were shared with district leadership, not individual school buildings. As mentioned previously,

any potentially identifying information such as names and places were replaced with generic descriptions.

Summary

Through the use of interviews, this qualitative study examined how early career teachers perceived support and built self-efficacy, and what factors contributed to stress and burnout. Participants who met the study criteria as a full-time, licensed public school teacher in their 1st, 2nd, or 3rd year of teaching were asked to participate in one interview during the 2020–2021 school year. Purposeful sampling was used in this study as individuals who could purposely inform an understanding of the research problem were selected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, coding was essential to make sense of the text collected from interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data were then interpreted to find patterns, themes, and categories.

Limitations were identified such as time constraints. Inability to pinpoint where a teacher's self-efficacy was truly developed was noted as having a possible effect on the study. Findings from this study helped school leaders understand how self-efficacy developed in 1st-year through 3rd-year teachers to prevent teacher burnout.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine early career teachers' perceptions of support and other factors contributing to their levels of self-efficacy, and their perceptions of what factors contribute to stress leading to feelings of burnout. Data was collected through interviews. This method was chosen based on firsthand account of information provided to answer the study's research questions. Interviews were conducted via Google Meets, ranged from 20 to 30 minutes, were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for overarching themes. Research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools identify as contributors to stress and burnout?

RQ2: What factors do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools perceive as contributing to their self-efficacy?

RQ3: How do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools develop self-efficacy?

Interview questions one through seven were connected to RQ2 and were designed to see what teachers thought contributed to their self-efficacy. Interview questions eight through 14 were connected to RQ1 to see what early career teachers identified as contributing factors to stress and burnout. Finally, RQ3 was tied to interview questions six, seven, and nine to see how teachers developed self-efficacy. See Appendix B for research questions.

Participant Profiles

There were 18 participants interviewed for this study from two different Oregon public school districts. All participants were in their first 3 years of teaching in grades PreK–8 at a

public school. There were 11 1st-year teachers, four 2nd-year teachers, and three 3rd-year teachers. Grade levels PreK–8 were widely represented by participants. There were 14 classroom teachers and four specialists (music, resource room, physical education, and English language development). All teachers had an undergraduate degree, seven participants had an undergraduate degree in a discipline other than elementary education, and eight participants had a master's degree or were currently working on one at the time of the interview. Three participants were male. Participant codes were created based on their district, either D1 or D2, and then the order they were interviewed, A–R. An example of a code is D1C. This participant was from district number one (D1) and was the 3rd person (C) interviewed. See Appendix C for more detailed participant information.

Thematic Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through a coding process, assisting in development of themes related to the study's research questions. After interviews were transcribed and member-checked, initial coding took place by highlighting key components of interviews as they related to the research questions. After key components were identified, they were loaded into a spreadsheet to assist in organizing data. From there, information was used to create thematic codes. This process resulted in identification of three general themes with accompanying subthemes.

The word confidence was used by participants throughout the themes. It was important to make the distinction between the terms self-efficacy and confidence and how they connected with one another. Confidence referred to strength or certainty of belief but did not specify what the certainty was about (Bandura, 1997). For example, a person could be confident they would fail at running a mile. Confidence could be related to positive or negative outcomes, whereas

self-efficacy related to positive outcomes. Self-efficacy has been the belief one had in their capabilities to manage situations (Bandura, 1986a). Bandura (1997) described how confidence allowed for failure, but a person with a higher level of self-efficacy believed they would succeed in the given task. The higher the self-efficacy level a person had, the more confident they would be. It has been important to develop one's self-efficacy since it directly impacted their confidence for positive outcomes.

Participants in this study used the term confidence rather than self-efficacy. The questions asked about confidence rather than self-efficacy because it was more likely participants would have a clearer understanding of the word confidence rather than self-efficacy. Moreover, it was important to elicit participants positive and negative experiences as opposed to only positive. Though participants used the word confidence, due to the connections mentioned in the previous paragraph, self-efficacy was used to interpret and describe participants' overall thoughts and feelings based on their experiences.

Theme 1: Teacher Confidence

Several factors contributed to teachers' confidence, and as a result, their level of self-efficacy. These included seeing excitement on students' faces when they learn something new, students taking charge of their own learning through inquiry, and positive feedback and recognition for their teaching efforts. When teachers had time to properly prepare a lesson, they felt more confident in their ability to deliver a lesson. In addition, they felt more confident when they saw their students were engaged with the material and asked questions to gain a deeper understanding of the content. Participant D1H stated:

> When I am watching students make those milestones. To see them come in at the beginning of the year and feel frustrated or just feel like they don't know something.

> Then to see that moment when they have that in themselves, and they're like, oh my gosh, I could actually do this. It's really exciting. It is also not just with the academic piece, but also the social emotional.

When this participant saw the excitement their students experienced when they learned something new or were able to understand the content, the participant felt more confident in their teaching ability. In addition, Participant D2R explained, "I am confident when I can see my students engaging with the content that I'm teaching. It's not just, yes, no answers, but they are asking questions to gain a deeper understanding. That's when I feel successful". Based on participant interviews, teachers felt most confident when they saw the impact the lessons they developed and delivered through their teaching had on their students. When their students felt confident in their understanding of the material, teachers felt confident in return in their ability to deliver a lesson.

Another participant stated when they received positive feedback from an observation, they felt reassured they were doing their job correctly, leading to feeling more confident in their abilities as a teacher. The teachers' self-efficacy was further developed due to the increase in confidence in their capabilities as a teacher. Participant D2M shared their experience about an observation with positive feedback:

> When I prepared for an observation and I was given positive feedback, I felt really confident in the feedback. It felt really nice to hear from somebody that has a lot of experience in that specific area, give me positive and constructive feedback. I felt like I was on the right track and that's always something good to hear, especially when you're on your own and in the classroom, it's hard to know if I am even doing it right.

Teachers felt less confident in their teaching abilities due to their lack of experience in the teaching field and when dealing with difficult student behaviors. Participant D2R noted they felt unsure and overwhelmed because they were a newer teacher:

> My 1st year of teaching ever there were a lot of firsts. As a recent grad, I remember the 1st week of school I cried so much because I was so overwhelmed. I didn't have a mentor and it felt like I got a bunch of curriculum and was just left alone in a classroom. I felt so lost and confused that I didn't know what to do, so I did not feel confident at all. I feel like I failed.

Participant D2N explained:

> The 1st 2 weeks of teaching was probably the time where I thought I didn't know what I was doing and everything was virtual and it was my first experience with virtual teaching. I also knew that I had parents watching me which added a whole lot more stress. I remember that my 1st couple of weeks I over-planned because I had this added pressure of parents sitting there and watching me. I felt like I butchered a lot of my lessons, I was mumbling my words, and I kept stuttering.

These teachers described specific times when they did not feel much confidence or self-efficacy, with their feelings stemming from a lack of experience as they were new teachers. Participants also expressed the number of tasks required of a new teacher was overwhelming and led to a decrease in confidence. Participant D1E stated:

> At the beginning of this year, I did not feel confident at all. I had to do this online learning thing, I was a 1st year teacher, and I felt like I did not know what was going on at all. All these things were being thrown at me and I felt like I did not know how to teach any of the subjects. I was like, I don't remember anything from college. On top of

> that, there are all these random things you don't really think about like talking to parents, PLCs, equity trainings, and then learning all this to online technology. I didn't feel confident in any of it because it was just so much at once. So that was really hard for a while.

This teacher, and most likely others, did not understand the full scope of responsibilities for teachers. This teacher specifically mentioned there were many other tasks for teachers to do in addition to teaching a lesson to students.

In addition, many participants expressed difficulties they faced when dealing with student behaviors which led to a lack of confidence. When a teacher felt their abilities to manage certain situations exceeded what they believed they were capable of, the teacher experienced a lower level of self-efficacy, as Participant D1F said, "My first year teaching I had a particularly hard group of sixth grade boys. When I could teach them individually, I could handle them. However, when I had to teach them as a group, they took away a lot of confidence." However, Participant D2Q described their experience:

> My 1st year in the district I had a really challenging class with challenging behaviors and personalities. I had never experienced any behaviors like them before so I wasn't sure if I was handling the situation the best. I was trying to do what was best for the student, but I had all these other kids that needed my help too and I was responsible for handling all of it. Trying to manage difficult individual behavior situations in addition to having the whole class at the same time when I didn't have any other help in the class was very overwhelming and I did not feel confident in my ability to handle everything going on all at once.

Participants expressed their concern about the lack of preparation for dealing with difficult student behaviors. They were not sure how to handle them or where to go if they needed help, directly affecting their belief in their abilities

Four of the 18 participants wished they had more training in behavior management through their college preparation courses. Moreover, they indicated more hands-on training with constructive feedback and coaching would have helped them feel more confident in dealing with difficult student behaviors. Participant D2I shared, “I was definitely disappointed by my classroom management class.”

Additionally, a participant indicated how their student teaching experience was invaluable as they had really strong mentors throughout, but they thought a focus on classroom management would have been more helpful during their coursework. Participant D2Q shared:

> I think that my student teaching was an invaluable experience and I had really great mentor teachers which was probably more meaningful than any specific class I took. To be honest, anything you are reading out of a book like the different learning theories sounds good on paper, but every student is going to be different. Every situation is going to change that up. I wish that there was a little more focus on classroom management. I didn’t feel like there was a ton of class or conversation about that throughout my coursework. As much as it was like, you need to make sure you have classroom management, but it’s hard to do that without experience.

One participant shared they did not understand the full extent of their job as a student teacher until they were in front of a classroom alone. They quickly realized knowing how to prepare a lesson was very different than delivering it in front of a group of students with different needs.

Theme 2: Teacher Stress Factors

Thirteen of the 18 participants have considered a different career or a different position in the field of education. The main reason was due to work overload. Participants from this study shared lesson preparation takes an incredible amount of time to develop. Not only have teachers created multiple lesson plans in a variety of subjects, but they have had to manage student and parent concerns and attend meetings during the small window of non-student contact time. Participant D2R explained:

> After my 1st year teaching, I was so burnt out and exhausted. I wasn't happy. I was going home tired and I was crying and I was like, I need to get out of this hole. I kept asking admin for help and they kept saying, Oh, we'll support you in some way, but it was a bunch of empty promises. So, I tried to leave. I tried to quit before the school year was over, and I was going to choose anything, literally anything. I was like, I don't even care where I work, I need a job that appreciates me and I feel like I'm getting help.

Another participant stated the workload for teachers was overwhelming. They expressed there was never enough time to complete all teaching tasks in the time given and the overwhelming workload affects teachers in a negative way creating increased stress levels. Participant D2O stated:

> I feel like teaching is a lot of unpaid overtime. I think that there would not be a functioning teaching system if teachers only worked their contract hours and didn't do any work they weren't paid for. Therefore, I work very long days. I often work more than 12 hours a day and I feel like I kind of have to, and I just wish that there were enough teachers hired that the workload would be manageable.

Due to the high amount of teacher workload, teachers in this study expressed they were unable to meet the job's demands. Some participants described high expectations for teachers also added stress. Participant D1F shared, "There are high expectations for teachers and not enough time to meet them, which in turn causes teacher stress and exhaustion." Participant D2M added:

> When you have high expectations from the people that you work with to the parents and families that you serve and just from the public eye in general, it always comes down to people love to blame the education system for things, and that's a lot of pressure. I think that the expectations on teachers are extremely high and it causes a lot of stress. I think what causes us to sometimes overwork ourselves and burnout.

Participants expressed the COVID–19 global pandemic presented a diverse set of challenges. The biggest challenge participants conveyed was teaching in an online environment. Student accountability, connection with students, and student engagement and participation were the main factors contributing to difficulty teaching online as stated by participants. For 1st-year teachers, their student teaching was interrupted by the COVID–19 global pandemic and they expressed concern not knowing how to handle a regular classroom as they transitioned to hybrid teaching. The COVID–19 pandemic created an unusual school year filled with many uncertainties. Teachers had to constantly adapt to meet changing expectations. All the uncertainty and change led to difficult challenges in student accountability and motivation.

Participant D1G explained they were never trained to teach solely online and yet they were expected to know how to do everything. Another participant noted the struggle to hold students accountable because they were not in the school building. They stated:

> The biggest struggle I've had is due to COVID and keeping kids accountable since they're not in my classroom. It's difficult because we have to trust that they're doing

> what they're supposed to be doing. A lot of students don't have their cameras on so I can't see what they're doing. I think it's an equity issue to force them to have them on because they might be uncomfortable with their surroundings. There might be something happening in the background of their video or their surroundings that other students shouldn't see, or they would be uncomfortable for other students to see.

Participant D1H spoke about the uncertainty of going back and forth between a hybrid model and an online model:

> It's kind of a toss-up because I think that COVID has created a lot of uncertainty. Part of my challenge this school year I would say is just not really knowing how we're teaching. Initially we were online and we did online learning different than how we did it last year. There were new platforms to learn, new things to introduce to parents with trying to make it accessible to students online and then adjusting to in-person. I just got a flow. I just figured it out. I felt like we were doing good things. Then being in person, I'm like, how do I do this again? How do I even show my materials and present this, and now we're going back to online and I'm like, how did I do that again? I don't remember. I think it had been really difficult with the constant switching back and forth and the unknown.

At the time of interviews, one district was switching back and forth between online and hybrid in-person learning, while the other district remained online. Participants from both districts spoke about struggles they had with not knowing whether they were going to be hybrid or fully online, and participants from one district shared the challenges of switching back and forth between the two models.

Building relationships and getting to know students was a challenge due to the pandemic. Teachers have felt disconnected in knowing their students and their home life situations. Without

a strong relationship, teachers have had a hard time connecting with their students, which has played a major role in student motivation. Participant D1D spoke about the challenge to build relationships with students and motivate their students while online, sharing:

> I think one of the biggest challenges is how to appropriately push and motivate students without truly knowing your students since building relationships in an online environment is extremely tricky. I have been working hard on getting to know them, but I don't know their home lives so I only get bits and pieces. I don't know the story of why some of my students never turns on their camera because they won't tell me. I don't know if it's a shy thing, if it's a self-esteem thing, it's the family, a lot of that unknown of what's happening with just our students and our family right now is really challenging. You want to push them and motivate them, but you also don't want to push them over the edge if they could be stressed at home and you don't want them to completely disengage.

As participants mentioned in the previous section, it can be difficult to not know the full story of students' home lives due to the emotional investment teachers develop with their students. Building relationships with students is an important part of creating a safe and welcoming environment for students. However, participants expressed difficulty caring for their students in an online environment, or when they leave the school building. Participant D2P expressed:

> I get very emotionally invested in my kids and I don't know if it's healthy, honestly. It keeps me up at night. I am thinking constantly about if they're okay...I haven't figured out a way to set healthy emotional boundaries get and it is detrimental to my personal relationships.

Due to teacher workload, there has been a lot of time spent teaching which included unpaid time, and emotional time spent worrying about their students; therefore, teachers have sacrificed a lot to do their job. Participant D2Q described their emotional investment with students as a weight on their shoulders, “There are students that you go home and you worry about them. Teaching is not just about the physical work, there is this mental load that takes a toll. There’s only so much you can do as a teacher and that weighs heavy on you.”

Theme 3: Administration and District Support

Every participant in this study mentioned the impact administration and district had on their stress levels. When participants felt supported, their level of self-efficacy increased. They felt more confident in their abilities as a teacher and were able to better manage their stress. Types of support included building a relationship to connect and being acknowledged for efforts made. Participant D1A shared:

> I think just continually being encouraging. My principal does an awesome job at it. Even just sending us a text at the end of the week like, “Awesome job teachers, thank you so much for your hard work.” Those encouraging pieces are so nice and they really do build you up and really make you realize, oh wow, I have been working hard and they are noticing my efforts.

Similarly, Participant D2I mentioned checking in on them makes a difference in their confidence and stress levels. They shared:

> I think checking in and being encouraging is a great way for administration to support us. Just knowing from someone who is above you, that they are confident in you and that they want to help and get to know you and that they care about your kids. It’s nice to know that other people care about your kids, not just you. I think my principal does a

> really good job with that. He knows my kids that need that extra love and need that extra time. He's not just sitting in an office, he is out and about having conversations and advocating for us to get help. Really being approachable, takes some stress off of teachers.

Teachers wanted to feel like the work they have done was noticed and appreciated. A simple note or check-in from administration could help boost a teacher's confidence and decrease their stress levels.

Participants in one district described how helpful it was to have a set mentor and a dedicated day set aside for professional development and planning time. Participant D1A shared:

> The district has a part-time mentor who works with all of the 1st-year teachers. This person checks in with us on a weekly basis at first, and then alternates since there are quite a few new teachers to work with. It's kind of limited how many times we get to see them, but it is a really nice resource to have. It is also nice because they can act as a mediator if we have a challenge with our administration. We can tell them things and they can help mediate any situations or difficulties we are having.

Regular and dedicated assistance and support was very helpful for many participants. They needed someone to go to for help in navigating the many tasks beyond planning and delivering lessons. They also appreciated constructive feedback and reassurance they were doing their job correctly. Regarding professional development and planning time, Participant D1C pointed out:

> My district has provided us 1 day a week for professional development and planning/collaboration time. We usually get about 3 hours for planning and collaborative planning time, which, you know, this is an unusual year since we normally never get that much time. It's been really incredible to have that time to plan together. We need that

> time to work collaboratively because of the structure of like A and B schedules or we are sharing students.

The participants asserted teacher burnout would be greatly diminished if administration or districts placed greater priority on extra planning time. The extra time would have allowed teachers to properly plan their lessons and not spend as much time outside of work on unpaid time. This could have also led to a more balanced home/work life and less stressed teachers.

To reduce stress levels and feel supported, participants requested more planning time to properly prepare their lessons to meet needs of the diverse learners of their classroom, more adult support, and more relevant resources. Participant D2K explained these supports in detail:

> The three things that I think should be implemented would be more planning time, in a perfect world an assistant for every room, and the right materials. We ordered new materials last year, but unfortunately we are not using them right now since they do not fit well with online teaching.

Participant shared they did not need more resources, but instead needed more relevant resources pertaining to their needs at different points during the year. Participants felt professional development sessions were not always relevant to their immediate needs. For example, participants requested professional development about the gradebook when it was grading time and attendance training before the 1st day of school so they knew how to take attendance. The participants shared professional development was critical when directly tied to their immediate needs. They asserted these activities would have offered practical benefits and not merely represent additional tasks piled on their heavy schedules.

Participant D2L expressed need for adult support, smaller class sizes, and funding for more relevant resources for their classroom:

> I mean, in a perfect world, I would want every single classroom to have an aide. I have worked in schools that had one aide per classroom, and it was amazing. I would also appreciate smaller class sizes. Especially now that I am able to work in groups of four to six, not that classes are ever going to be this small again or ever get that small, but I feel like I'm able to actually teach the kids and manage the behaviors. Finally, I personally wish there was more effort put into providing resources for teachers to use in their classrooms. By which I mean possibly more effort at the school or district level to provide classes with a little bit more money to allow teachers to go out and explore little tangents.

Participants felt many resources made available to them were out of date. They would prefer to have access to relevant and updated resources to use in their classrooms. In addition, participants from the district in the hybrid model preferred this year's smaller class sizes in comparison to other school years. They felt they were able to provide students with more individualized help and wished it could continue.

Similarly, Participant D2M offered their thoughts on having more adult support, centralized resources, and more planning time:

> I think in a dream world, having more than one adult in the classroom is always really, really helpful. You have one other person there to either bounce ideas off or you have extra support when you need it. That's a big one. I also think it would be helpful if there were centralized resources. It seems as though nobody really tells you how complicated it is to become a teacher, especially about everything you need to do once you are a teacher beyond just the actual teaching.

Many participants were split on whether they felt valued and supported. Mostly, participants felt respected; however, when they thought about having value, 10 of 18 participants stated they did not feel their opinions were taken into consideration. Participant D21 explained this as not having a voice:

> I think it is respected; however, I don't think it is always quite understood the work and the amount of time that it takes up in your life that it is not your job. I also don't think it's always quite understood how much we care about our students. I do wish sometimes that teachers were given a little bit more voice and understanding like the heart behind it and the reason.

Additionally, Participant D2M said:

> I guess my knee jerk reaction would probably say that teachers are not necessarily supported. I mean, even as we're seeing this year with the push to open schools and to kind of bend over backwards to do all these things that we've never done before. If we don't do it then they're just going to force us to so it's really hard to feel like the teacher's voice is being heard and valued right now. I think that's being put on full display this year.

Participants did not feel they were supported and their input valued. They explained how people have not understood expectations and pressures teachers face. They wished their voices were heard and understood.

Participant D1B acknowledged school is viewed more as a babysitter and the amount of money teachers make compared to other professions makes it not feel valued at all:

> I think it feels like for a lot of people school is more of a babysitter or like a childcare. People have some appreciation, but don't quite understand the full impact that a teacher

> can have. When I was an assistant for example, I was making at the poverty level of income and now I'm making more which I am thrilled about, but in comparison to other positions that are not in teaching it doesn't feel like a valued position.

This participant mentioned people might not understand the impact teachers could make on students. They also pointed out the pay does not reflect the importance a teacher's impact can have on a student.

Participant D2R described their experience having their voice heard as facing several roadblocks. They spoke about the union as where you are supposed to go with concerns, but the union does not always represent the whole population:

> I feel like our input is meant to be valued, but it's not validated exactly because our voices aren't really heard. If a teacher wants to change something or has concerns, we have to go through our union first, before we should speak up and talk to our superintendent or a principal. There's a lot of roadblocks when it comes to getting our input, because they're like, teachers need to speak up because we don't know what's going on in the school. You try and set-up all these meetings with union members, but it is only a small representative of the whole school. There are only two union members per school that are supposed to represent teachers. Unfortunately, it only represents a small amount.

The teacher union in Oregon is quite strong. Unfortunately, this participant felt the school union representatives did not fully believe in the same things, making it difficult to have their voice heard.

Additional Findings

This study revealed additional findings beyond those related to the research questions listed above. These included: (a) teachers went into teaching for a variety of reasons, and (b) teacher preparation programs needed to incorporate more student teaching experiences.

Reason for Teaching

Participants stated they went into the teaching profession because a family member was a teacher, they were inspired by a teacher when they were younger, or they felt safe at school. Participants who had teachers in their family tried to avoid teaching, but eventually realized they found joy in working with students, eventually becoming teachers. Participant D2M shared:

> I come from a family of teachers and so I kind of tried to avoid it for a long time, but after I graduated high school, I took a year off and worked at a YMCA in the childcare center and I realized that I really enjoyed working with kids and with families. I also grew up in a bilingual education program and always had a really great admiration for the women and mothers and teachers that helped to build that program so it just seemed like something really incredible and fulfilling to be able to do.

Participant D1E explained they wanted to be a teacher from a very young age:

> I actually wanted to be a teacher since I was in like 2nd grade or 3rd grade. I remember I had a really cool third grade teacher and I wanted to be like her. I also had some little cousins who were a lot younger than me and I just loved playing with them and teaching them so I quickly realized I wanted to be a teacher and I never really strayed away from it.

Interestingly, participants who came from a family of teachers tried to avoid the teaching profession at first due to the constant unpaid overtime they witnessed and the emotional toll it took on their family. On the other hand, if they were inspired by a teacher when they were

younger, they wanted to be a teacher from a very young age. In addition, a few participants said they liked the routine of school and found it to be a safe place. Participant D1C shared:

> For me, school was my saving grace as a kid. I came from a family that was dysfunctional and teachers were my stable place and I wanted to be able to make a difference. So like most teachers, I became a teacher because I wanted to make a difference.

Participant D2R acknowledged she became a teacher because she found teachers she could rely on:

> School was always the safe place for me to be. I am a first-generation student, so my parents came to this country from Mexico and we didn't know a lot of people, we didn't have any family, so having school and having a routine and having teachers that I could rely on was like a lifesaver for me. School has always been kind of like that safe haven.

Participant D2R described the importance of stability and the safe environment school offered. These were two very important aspects provided by school. They described further how this safe haven played into their choice to become a teacher:

> When I went to college though, I actually tried to do nursing. I wanted to help people in a way, but I moved to education within a year because I knew that this is what I wanted to do. It was a hard decision because financially it's not the best decision, but my heart and soul definitely just went with this. I want school to be that safe haven for others, especially the students in our community who are like me growing up and need someone that they could feel comfortable with.

These were all important reasons why participants wanted to become teachers. Teachers work very hard to make school a safe and stable place for students, especially when their student's home life may be in disarray.

Teacher Preparation Programs

When participants were asked whether or not they felt their college education courses had properly prepared them to handle their own classroom, they were split. Most participants who were unsure about whether their college education classes had properly prepared them wished they had more hands-on experience. They shared their student teaching was invaluable and where they gained the most knowledge about how to effectively run and manage a classroom. Participant D1G shared:

> My college program has felt very overwhelming at times because there's so much we are doing, but honestly in the long run, I feel more prepared than other 1st-year teachers in the building that I've spoken with. I feel like my program definitely is really comprehensive and very hands-on. We had a lot of hands-on experience that we're expected to do, which I think was the most beneficial thing. At least for me as a learner, I learn best by trial and error and having a tangible experience doing the actual thing I'm learning about, not just reading about it.

Likewise, Participant D2L indicated:

> I think the best experience I had was being in the classroom. I wish we would have discussed more stuff. I was in a really small, short program, that was about 10.5 months and we were just zooming through. I think it would have been better if we had had some moments to sort of decompress what we did in our classrooms. We just really didn't get those opportunities as much as I would have liked.

Participants said the hands-on experiences gained during their college teacher preparation program was an invaluable experience. More real-world classroom situations need to be incorporated into preparation programs so teachers could build a higher level of self-efficacy when handling the many difficult situations in the classroom.

> Participant D2M compared their college course to their field experience:
>
> I'm not sure if the courses themselves necessarily prepared me to have my own classroom, but the field experience helped a lot. Especially with things like management and behavior in the classroom. There's only so much that you can read about and talk about before you're actually there.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, more hand-on experiences would help teachers build a higher level of self-efficacy, especially in the area of classroom management. Additionally, teachers would feel more confident in their abilities to handle challenging situations if they had experienced them more before they had their own classroom.

Summary of Thematic Analysis

Early career teacher burnout factors were evident in emerging themes from data analysis. Teacher confidence, stress, and support were all intertwined to complete a picture about why teachers may burnout. When a teacher felt supported and encouraged by their administration and district, their self-efficacy levels increased; they felt less stress and were more confident in their abilities to handle their own classroom and the numerous tasks required in teaching. Consequently, when a teacher did not feel supported or encouraged by their administration and district, their self-efficacy levels decreased; they felt more stress and were far less confident in their ability to run their own classroom and the numerous tasks of teaching felt too overwhelming to handle.

There were additional findings which did not directly fit under three main themes. These themes were focused on why participants decided to become teachers, and whether or not participants felt their teacher education program properly prepared them to handle their own classroom. An analysis of these discoveries will follow in Chapter 5.

Answers to the research questions for this study were compiled from data analysis of interviews into themes and subthemes. Research questions were important to answer so educational leaders and institutions who may benefit from the findings of this study were provided with needed information to make informed decisions moving forward for their organization.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1

What do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools identify as contributors to stress and burnout? Participants described a variety of contributing factors for stress and burnout. These included workload, lack of support from administration and colleagues, inability to separate school and home life (e.g., emotional investment), high expectations and demands without resources given to meet those expectations and demands, and pressure from parents.

Theme 1 linked teacher confidence to lesson preparation and student engagement. Teachers felt less confident due to their lack of experience and difficulties with student behaviors. Participants stated they were not sure if they were doing things correctly because they were a 1st-year teacher or had not experienced particular situations before. As mentioned previously, self-efficacy related to a teachers' belief in their abilities to manage certain situations. The lower a teachers' confidence level was, the lower the development of their self-

efficacy was and the more likely they would be unable to persevere when handling difficult situations like student behaviors.

Theme 2 linked teacher stress mainly to work overload. This theme also played a role in answering this research question, pointing out teacher stress was mainly due to work overload. Participants expressed concerns there was not enough time to meet job expectations job. Interestingly, participants noted workload was the cause of their stress, yet most of them accepted it as a part of their job and out of their hands. One participant mentioned there was more than just planning and delivering lessons to students. Professional development seminars, equity team meetings, and parent phone calls quickly add extra tasks to a teachers' already long day**.**

This year in particular, the COVID–19 global pandemic created unusual circumstances mandating remote teaching and learning. Due to the nature of switching between hybrid and online learning, participants expressed how student accountability was very challenging. It was also conveyed they did not feel prepared to teach solely online and yet they were expected to know what to do. One participant depicted their experience by saying they felt like they were being thrown to wolves and left on their own to figure things out.

Teachers also developed an emotional investment with their students. Participants spoke about how hard it was to leave work issues at work. They worked hard to build a strong relationship with their students and were often found worrying about them when not at work. This could take a toll on teachers' personal relationships and affect them both physically and mentally.

Additionally, Theme 3 regarding administration and district support also addressed this research question. Administration and district support helped relieve teacher stress connected

with this research question on whether or not teachers felt supported and their input valued. When participants were asked their opinion, they indicated teachers did not have a voice. Additionally, they felt their job as a teacher was not highly valued by others outside of the profession. One participant described how it felt like many parents viewed them as a babysitter.

Research Question 2

What factors do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools perceive as contributing to their self-efficacy? Theme 1 supported the answer to this research question, linking teacher confidence to lesson preparation and student engagement. When teachers had the time, resources, and support to properly prepare a lesson, they felt confident in their teaching abilities. Unfortunately, based on participant interviews, properly preparing lessons resulted in working many hours outside their contract hours.

In the additional findings section of the thematic analysis, participants evaluated their teacher preparation programs and identified how they need to incorporate more hands-on experiences throughout. They talked very highly of their student teaching experiences and wished they had more opportunities to experience the wide variety of issues classroom teachers face daily. They mentioned hands-on experience helped prepare them and they appreciated the constructive feedback they received to help them grow as a learner and future educator.

Research Question 3

How do early career teachers grades PreK–8 in public schools develop self-efficacy? Early career teachers develop self-efficacy through student teaching (e.g., hands-on experiences), properly prepared lessons, and affirmation from the administration team. As mentioned in Theme 1, participants believed more in-depth training with behavior management classes in college would have led them to feel more confident. They thought by having a more hands-on

experience with behavior management, it would have helped them understand how to handle the challenges they face when dealing with difficult student behaviors.

In addition, Theme 3 revealed needed programs and support to develop self-efficacy in teachers: a strong mentor program and three areas of support implemented to better assist teachers. A strong mentor program provides teachers with a safe place where they can discuss the many challenging aspects of being a 1st-year teacher. It could also support them by answering any questions they have and providing constructive feedback to help them develop their skills as an educator. Only one district in this study had a mentoring program and every participant in the district spoke very highly about having the mentor as a resource. However, they wished the mentor had more time to spend with them.

Participants also named three areas of support districts and schools should implement to better assist their teachers: more planning time, adult support in the classroom, and more relevant resources. If teachers have the support, time, and resources available to do their job, they will feel more confident in their abilities to do the job well. In addition to this support, affirmation from administration could help boost teacher confidence and raise their self-efficacy levels. Participants spoke highly of encouragement and administration checking in the most important items to make a solid difference in whether or not they feel supported. The higher a teacher's self-efficacy level was, the less stressed they would feel since they were able to better handle the daily challenges of having their own classroom.

Summary

This chapter presented themes developed from qualitative interview data. These themes were presented as specific responses to the appropriate research questions. When teachers felt supported and were given appropriate resources and time to develop their lessons, feelings of

stress and burnout were reduced. Moreover, teacher self-efficacy levels were higher with more support and affirmation from administration. The following chapter includes discussions and conclusions based on findings from this section, including recommendations for districts, school leadership, and college preparation programs.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study was conducted to determine what factors contributed to early career teacher burnout so it could be prevented. Three themes emerged from thematic analysis of the data: (a) teacher confidence was linked to lesson preparation and student engagement, (b) teacher stress was mainly due to work overload, and (c) administration and district support helped to relieve teacher stress. Data analysis from the study and compilation of themes and subthemes contributed to conclusions outlined in this chapter. Research questions from the study were answered based on findings from interviews and extraction of data into themes and subthemes. In addition, there is a discussion of implications based on findings for both district and school leadership, and college preparatory programs. Lastly, there are suggestions for possible future research to further explore the widely discussed topic of teacher burnout.

Implications for Educational Practitioners

Although there many factors contribute to feelings associated with teacher burnout, research conducted in this study revealed teachers became more equipped to handle stress created from their job and their levels of self-efficacy increased when they felt supported. It was important to note stress was a contributing factor of burnout. Teachers shared support from administration was one of the biggest factors influencing their stress levels. The more support they received from administration, the lower their stress levels were. Support from administration also improved their level of self-efficacy, and in turn improved their confidence in their teaching ability.

Recommendations for Practice

Data collected and analyzed for this study serves as a guide for school and district leadership and teacher education preparation programs. A list of suggestions is offered below. The first six suggestions are for school and district leadership, followed by suggestions for teacher preparation programs.

1. Support early career teachers by listening to them. Show them their opinions matter and are taken into consideration when creating schedules and professional development agendas. Professional development should be focused on relevant to the teacher at the time they are needed.
2. Support early career teachers by developing a strong early career teacher mentor program. This includes full-time mentors who can devote time to developing early career teachers' skills. Teachers want someone who can help guide and mentor them through their first few years as a teacher.
3. Support early career teachers by checking in often, giving praise, and feedback on how they are doing. They need affirmation and encouragement to feel supported. Feedback should be honest and offer suggestions for improvement.
4. Support early career teachers by advocating for them. Their workload is already high. Maximize the amount of planning time they have during the school week. If possible, reduce the amount of district mandated programs that take time to learn and implement.
5. Support early career teachers by creating strong grade0level teams and professional learning communities. Provide a solid team for an early career teacher to learn from and work with.

6. Support early career teachers by budgeting well and spending money on resources that count. This includes up-to-date resources for teachers, more support staff, and professional development on the topics mattering most to the teachers at the time the professional development is given.
7. More authentic learning environments need to be created to better prepare teachers to handle their own classrooms. Participants in this study spoke about to need for more situations during their preparation programs like they experienced in student teaching. Their assessments should match how they are going to use their skills. This can be done through simulation assessment coaching so the preservice teachers can get feedback, reflect, and be able to get a better sense of what a real classroom would be like.
8. Teachers also spoke about the need for better developed classroom management courses similar to what they would experience when they were in their own classrooms.

Implications for Policy

Because teacher burnout has a direct effect on student achievement, the U.S. education system could benefit from understanding the contributing factors of early-career teacher burnout (Mazidi et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). As a result, findings from this study are relevant to educational policy.

The first implication is teacher preparation programs should require specific coursework addressing management of difficult student behaviors. This study indicated the importance of a more hands-on experience when it came to learning about how to be a teacher in its full capacity.

If teachers felt more prepared, their stress levels would be reduced, potentially leading to a lower teacher burnout rate.

Additionally, school districts should be required to have a full-time, 1st-year teacher mentoring program. Every participant in the district with a mentoring program stated how helpful it was. However, participants also revealed there was only one part-time mentor serving many 1st-year teachers in the district. They explained they wished they had more time with the mentor because they felt it was a valuable resource. Participants in this study expressed they did not have as much confidence because they were new and could use more constructive feedback and encouragement to let them know they were teaching correctly. An assigned mentor who supports 1st-year teachers would be an invaluable resource to help boost teacher confidence and reduce teacher burnout.

One final strategy to better support teachers would be for each individual school to have dedicated personnel specifically for teacher support. Job duties could include curricular support, observing teachers and providing direct and timely feedback, and facilitating work in grade-level teams. A dedicated teacher support person in each building would be an important resource for early career teachers and the entire school staff community.

Implications for Scholarship

Findings in this study connect to previous research reported in scholarly literature. The critical role self-efficacy plays in teacher burnout prevention connects well with the literature. This is a critical piece when examining prevention of teacher burnout because self-efficacy was higher when teachers felt properly prepared.

Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) and Rotter's (1954) research and theories surrounding self-efficacy served as a guide for this study. Bandura discovered a person with a higher sense of self-efficacy was more likely to adapt and cope during challenging situations. Consequently, a person with a lower perceived sense of self-efficacy, was less likely to handle and adapt during challenging situations. Although this study did not align as well with Rotter's research, he believed teacher self-efficacy would increase if it was believed student achievement and behavior could be influenced by education (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Direct connections were made between Bandura's self-efficacy research and this research study, further supporting findings participants in this study felt most confident when they felt properly prepared. Preparation included lesson preparation and participants' teacher education programs preparation. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) stated the more a teacher believes in their teaching abilities, a higher self-efficacy level, the more motivated students will be, resulting in higher student achievement. Additionally, researchers Martin et al. (2009) discovered development of self-efficacy led to stronger problem-solving skills, and an increase in interactions and motivation among students. One participant stated this when speaking about student interactions. The participant explained how when they felt confident, students felt confident and vice versa.

Preparation

Researchers like Burstein et al. (2009) and Brackenreed and Barnett (2006) discussed the importance of teacher preparation programs and how a higher quality program led to a teacher's sense of a higher self-efficacy level. When interviewed, participants expressed their uncertainty in dealing with challenging classroom management situations and stated they wish they had been

more prepared and had more training throughout their teacher education program. Bandura's work ties this concept directly with confidence levels because a more confident teacher is more resistant to experiencing burnout due to their ability to cope appropriately with stressful situations. Other researchers like Dicke et al. (2014) connected to this research study by reporting when teachers felt dealing with student behaviors was a major challenge for them, it was named as one of the top leading contributing factors when it came to teacher burnout. Dibapile (2012) was similar to researchers like Bandura when they pointed out how a teacher who with a high level of self-efficacy is able to effectively manage difficult students.

In conclusion, this study connected to research such as Aloe et al. (2014), Howes and Goodman-Delahunty (2015), and Pop and Turner (2009) by exploring factors contributing to teacher burnout (e.g., stress levels), and factors potentially serving as a buffer (e.g., self-efficacy levels). Findings from this research are similar to those revealed by a number of other studies such as Betoret (2006), Burstein et al. (2009), Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007), and Martin et al. (2009). When teachers feel prepared, they experience a higher sense of self-efficacy, leading to a more confident, less stressed teacher.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study provided insight into future research benefiting school and district leadership and teacher preparation programs. The first suggestion for future research is to conduct a similar qualitative study, but on a larger scale with more participants. It would also be beneficial to do two interviews with the same set of participants, including one interview before the school year starts and one interview at least midway through the year. This would provide insight to see how teachers' perspectives and feelings might shift as the school year develops.

Another area for suggested future research specifically relates to teacher preparation. This study would address the following question: Does a faster licensure track result in under-prepared, less confident teachers? Three of 18 participants were on a restricted teaching license (e.g., emergency license). All three participants explained they did not feel properly prepared to handle their own classroom due to their very fast paced and quick teacher preparation program of less than 1 year. These types of programs may potentially lead to a higher teacher burnout rate.

Finally, a third area for suggested future research addresses planning time. The research question posed is: Does going to a 4-day school week reduce the stress on teachers so they are able to have one full planning day a week? Will this in turn increase their self-efficacy levels due to more time for lesson preparation? Participants in this study spoke highly of their planning and collaboration day and wished it would not just end once the COVID–19 global pandemic was over. Although some participants from one district felt most of their day was spent on required professional development not helpful to their immediate needs, overall, participants felt this day was helpful to relieve some of their workload stress. Moreover, participants described the dedicated day to plan and collaborate helped reduce time teachers would have spent during their noncontract hours.

Conclusion

As an educator for the past 10 years, I believe this study shed light on many of the important factors contributing to burnout. When teachers feel supported and properly prepared, they have a higher sense of self-efficacy and feel more confident, resulting in their ability to better handle and cope with stressful situations. They are also more confident in their abilities as a teacher, and in turn students feel more confident as well.

For teachers to feel properly prepared to handle their own classroom, it begins with a teacher preparation program offering hands-on experiences. Preservice teachers need to experience a variety of difficult situations in a safe environment where they can receive constructive feedback and encouragement. Once teachers have their own classroom, administration needs to support them by checking in on them often, build strong relationships with them, and give them frequent positive affirmation. This is increasingly important, as research has shown 25% of new teachers leave the profession in the first year (Aloe et al., 2014). If this statistic is to be reduced, teachers need to feel supported and encouraged so they can continue to develop and maintain a higher level of self-efficacy, as this study has shown.

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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Participating Teachers

Dear Professional Educator,

My name is Mindi Helmandollar-Armatas and I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also an English Language Learner (ELL) specialist at a public elementary school in Oregon. As a requirement of my program, I will be conducting research and have chosen to examine early career teachers and their perceptions of support and other factors that build self-efficacy, as well as their perceptions of what contributes to stress and burnout.

You are invited to engage in one virtual interview regarding your experiences as an early career teacher in your school district and discuss what factors contribute to your stress levels. The questions are open-ended and relate to your background, views on teaching, professional experience as an educator, and career plans. I hope the findings of my interviews will shine light on the issues facing teachers in today's classrooms in order to help mitigate burnout.

The risks associated with this research study are minimal. The interview questions are not personal and will relate to your background and experiences. The interviews should not create any discomfort. Nevertheless, please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to continue at any time or decline to answer any question at your discretion.

The results of this study will only be used for research purposes, including presentations at a professional conference and/or academic publications. Personal interviews will be conducted on Google Meets. The interviews will also be audio recorded and later transcribed by me. Information will be analyzed and presented in a confidential manner and you will never be personally identified. Once you give your consent, you will be given a name such as "Participant

A," "Participant B," etc. that will be used over the course of the study. This will ensure responses remain confidential and will only be used to keep all the data organized.

All research materials (e.g., recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms) will be locked in separate, secure locations for a period of no less than three years. I will be the only individual who will have access to these materials. After three years, I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete the recordings.

Thank you for your time in considering this project. If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at (XXX) XXX–XXX, or my advisor at George Fox University, at (XXX) XXX–XXX.

If you understand the use of this research and agree to participate, please sign below.

Participant Signature_____ Date: _____

Researcher Signature_____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Time of Interview:

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee (Code):

Position of Interviewee:

Questions:

1. Why did you go into the teaching profession?
2. What brings you joy in your classroom?
3. Could you tell me about a time when you felt confident?
4. How about a time when you did not feel confident?
5. Can you give me an example of what confidence looks like?
6. Has your district offered support for the school year? If so, what kinds of support have been offered?
7. What are the top 3 things you think should be implemented to support teachers in the classroom?
8. What do you feel is your biggest challenge this school year?
9. Do you feel the courses you took throughout your teacher education program properly prepared you to handle your own classroom?
10. Do you feel educators are supported and their input valued? Why or why not?
11. Do you feel stressed at work?
    a. If so, what factors contribute to your stress?
    b. Has your district and/or administration offered support to help you deal with stress?
12. What do you feel causes teacher exhaustion?
13. How may administrators and those in leadership make changes to prevent teacher exhaustion? Or help lighten their load?
14. As an educator have you thought of pursuing a different career? Why or why not?

Appendix C: Interview Participants

Identifying Code	Years Taught	Grade-Level Taught
District 1 Participant A (D1A)	1st-year	Specialist
D1B	1st-year	5th Grade
D1C	2nd-year	2nd Grade
D1D	1st-year	4th Grade
D1E	1st-year	2nd Grade
D1F	3rd-year	Specialist
D1G	1st-year	5th Grade
D1H	2nd-year	2nd Grade
District 2 Participant I (D2I)	1st-year	Kindergarten
D2J	3rd-year	Specialist
D2K	2nd-year	5th Grade
D2 L	1st-year	2nd Grade
D2M	1st-year	6th and 7th Grade
D2N	1st-year	Preschool
D2O	1st-year	6th Grade
D2P	1st-year	7th Grade
D2Q	3rd-year	Kindergarten
D2R	2nd-year	Specialist