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EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION & CREATIVITY AMONG GOVERNMENT & PRIVATE SECTOR TEACHERS IN PAKISTAN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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KEYWORDS

Emotional exhaustion, Creativity, Teachers, Government & Private Sector, Teachers, Pakistan & Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine correlation between creativity and emotional exhaustion and to find out the difference in the variables in government and private sector teachers. The study aims are: to explore the relationship between emotional exhaustion and creativity among teachers in private sector and government sector, to compare differences between creativity in the two groups, and to compare the differences in emotional exhaustion in the two groups. To direct the study, we made the following hypotheses. The convenience sampling was used to select a sample of 240 aged 25 to 60. There were 120 government school students and 120 students of private schools. The result shows that there is no significant correlation between creativity of the teachers and emotional exhaustion. The results suggest that the relationship between emotional exhaustion and creativity could be different according to coping styles and employment relations. Research highlights the fact that more research is required on protective factors that can enable teachers be creative despite emotional depletion. The results can assist administrators & educational policy makers develop programs that ensure the well-being of teachers and encourage innovative teaching methods.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational system is a very important component of the development of any society and teachers are invaluable in determining the course of this development (Hussain, Khan, Hussain, Muhammad & Kamal, 2025). The teaching, according to Takahashi, Austin and Morimoto (2000), should be purposeful, interactive and creative. The creativity of a teacher, then, is one of the pillars of effective

teaching, allowing teachers to be creative in their work, and effectively deal with various classroom needs and facilitate the valuable learning outcomes (Richards, 2013). The Maslach Burnout Model describes the burnout as multidimensional construct which includes the personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2002). Emotional exhaustion, which represents psychological and emotional forces, is main element among these. Nevertheless, even though the creativity is a crucial aspect of learning, educators encounter obstacles that can diminish their abilities to be creative. The profession of teaching is a stressful one (Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor & Millet, 2005) and some of factors that are prone to causing emotional fatigue and apprehension that include workload & time constraints among others (Jackson, Schwab & Schuler, 1986).

The emotional exhaustion can be defined as the mental and physical exhaustion as a result of work requirements. This exhaustion may have an impact upon the mental health of the teachers and their innovative thinking (Tuxford & Bradley, 2015). The relationship is thus explained more by the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Model that argues that demands of work that are over-challenging can deplete psychological resources, cause mental exhaustion & diminished creative work (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001). Occupational burnout is a syndrome that is marked by the following three emotions; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization & low personal accomplishment (Reddy, Srijampana, Rajana & Muddana, 2015). The teacher burnout is an issue of concern in the education industry of most countries and its effect is a very high in Pakistan. Emotional exhaustion is a chronic state of physical and emotional fatigue which is caused by high levels of distress in the workplace (Koutsimani, Montgomery & Georganta, 2019). This realization brings to the fore the critical element of emotional exhaustion in burnout process; it offers platform to analyze the effects of burnout on well-being and work performance. Creativity is defined as the capacity to generate innovative solutions.

The creativity of teachers helps them to develop the fascinating lesson plans and create a learning environment. Innovation requires intellectual ability and motivation. All these valuable skills may be brought down by emotional exhaustion and limit the ability of teachers to think out of the box (Amabile, 1996). The person, process, product, and press-the four Ps framework has also been used to have understanding of creativity. It establishes the influence that personal traits and environment can have on creativity (Rhodes, 1961). Additionally, working conditions and organizational support might be different, which might result in more, less emotional exhaustion and creativity in teachers of private and government schools (Maddock, McCusker, Blair & Roulston. 2022). Teachers in the private-sector encounter more work and pressure to perform, and those in the government-sector encounter procedural obstacles and severe structures (Cabrera, 2014). To teachers, the creativity encompasses creative practices and problem-solving skills. This entails flexibility and originality which is required in teaching. Emotional fatigue highly affects teachers' professional satisfaction. Therefore, increasing workplace stress and lack of privacy create an atmosphere in which creativity becomes inhibited.

The same cannot be said of teachers in the private and government sector schools since stressors are different in each sector. Wright and Cropanzano (1998) identified that lower job performance over

time is produced due to emotional exhaustion. Such variations validate the fact that organizational factors such as work support, privacy, and expectations at workplace significantly affect creativity, and not just the capabilities or traits of an individual (Chang & Taxer, 2021). The work of a teacher is highly demanding, and teachers have to cope with numerous duties, which donate to emotional burnout (Kavita & Hassan, 2018). Emotional exhaustion impairs the teacher's problem-solving and creative the thinking depleted of their psychological and emotional resources due to prolonged exposure to job-related stressors (Gong, Sun & Li, 2021). Even after many theoretical explanations that creativity is reduced by emotional exhaustion, there remains a strong need for further research, as empirical findings remain ambiguous. Thus, this study aims to provide a comparative analysis of emotional exhaustion and creativity among teachers in private and government sectors. For this drive, for promoting teachers' creativity in both private and public schools, understanding these dynamics is essential.

Problem Statement

The consequences remain inconsistent, although the existing literature suggests that the emotional exhaustion may negatively affect creativity. Very limited comparative analysis on this relationship between educators in the government and private sectors is the present, especially in Pakistan. It is, therefore, still unclear whether the educators can maintain their creative performance even under stressful conditions.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the connection between emotional exhaustion and creativity among private & government sector teachers.
2. To measure the difference in creativity among private and government sector teachers in the particular research context.
3. To assess the difference in the emotional exhaustion among private and government sector teachers in particular context.

Research Hypotheses

1. There will be an inverse relationship between emotional exhaustion and creativity among teachers in the particular context (H1).
2. There will be a significant difference in the scores of private and government sector teachers on the Short Scale of Creative Self (H2).
3. There will be a significant difference in the scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory among private and public sector teachers (H3).

LITERATURE REVIEW

An inverse relationship between creativity and emotional exhaustion has been most consistently reported in prior studies. Gazelci, Guven and Ogelman (2022) examined the relationship between emotional exhaustion and creativity among special education teachers and found that as burnout levels increased, SETs' creative ideation decreased. The emotional exhaustion increases & divergent thinking decreases. Hur, Moon and Jun (2016) led a study examining how emotional exhaustion at work reduces employees' internal motivation, in turn hinders their ability to be inventive. Gong,

Sun and Li (2021) evaluated how emotional exhaustion acted as mediator in interaction between over-qualification and creativity. The mental fatigue was adversely correlated with creativity. In teaching, this phenomenon is especially salient because profession inherently requires continuous emotional engagement, interpersonal interaction, and cognitive effort, making educators highly vulnerable to fatigue and stress accumulation over time (Naz, Bano & Leghari, 2018). A recent study by Santiago (2024) investigated correlation between emotional exhaustion and creativity and found that though creativity initially boosts adaptability, over long term, it reduces creativity as well as flexibility.

Similarly, according to Wang, Xia, Yue and Teng (2024), the emotionally exhausted teachers often exhibit lower levels of idea generation, which negatively impacts creative behavior in workplace. The results of studies align with the job demands resources model, which posits that performance outcomes like creativity decline when psychological resources or supplies are low. Trillo, Jiménez, Ocampo, Mansanillas and Bretones (2025) found that job expectations are drivers of emotional exhaustion, which then reduces psychological resources, like flexible thinking, needed for creative behavior in workplace. Considering organizational factors is essential, alongside individual-level activities. Dinibutun, Kuzey and Dinc (2020) revealed that elements of organizational environment, such as workplace support, significantly reduced burnout among teachers at private and public universities. The rate of emotional exhaustion in teachers is shaped by systemic, organizational, and socio-cultural factors (Tuxford & Bradley, 2015). Compared with public-sector educators, private-sector educators showed greater internal motivation and flexibility (Fidan & Oztürk, 2015). This study therefore revealed that the school environment had smaller effect, while internal motivation played greater role.

The recent research on burnout conducted by Li (2023) and its findings demonstrated a significant relationship between burnout, ingenuity, and emotion control in Chinese EFL teachers. The findings also revealed that the intensity of teacher burnout was greatly impacted by creativity and emotion regulation. In another recent study, Orzechowski, Gruszka and Michalik (2023) discovered that the attentional capacity and working memory of people are restricted in cases of long-term emotional fatigue, which may influence idea generation and out-of-the-box thinking. Although it is easy to forget about the opportunities that teachers still stick to their educational practices, they might still be engaged in creative work despite the feeling of exhaustion (Hur et al., 2016), and the existing literature tends to believe in an indirect connection as both sectors generate emotional exhaustion through distinct pathways, yet converge in their impact on teachers' psychological well-being. Not all studies reveal ongoing indirect correlation amid creativity and emotional exhaustion (LePine, LePine & Jackson, 2015). A study done by Hu (2023) found that teachers may be able to continue their creative work even under pressure when they have greater adaptability or greater emotional regulation skills.

Another example is a study by Landeche (2009) conducted among public school teachers, which found no correlation between the creativity and burnout or emotional exhaustion. This difference suggests that other factors, such as coping strategies or self-efficacy, might reduce the impact of emotional exhaustion on a person. Some of research focuses on moderating and mediating factors.

Kim (2024) examined the study that showed that cognitive reappraisal mediates the association between creative self-confidence and emotional exhaustion. Moreover, Farber (2000) conducted a study and found no associations between burnout and creativity. Even with the growing body of research, the outcomes remain inconsistent, especially in educational environments (Gong, Sun & Li, 2021). The studies further suggest that practices like reflective teaching and supportive work environments can mitigate burnout and enhance the teachers' engagement, indirectly supporting creative teaching outcomes. Comparing the public and private sectors, research is very limited. The working conditions in these different places might have a different impact upon the creativity and emotional exhaustion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study, we used a correlational research design to examine the assumed hypotheses and extracting the anticipated information for reaching the conclusion and making decisions about the research variables. Additionally, independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare (public vs. private teachers).

Sample & Instrument

120 from government schools and 120 from private schools and college teachers in Mardan City, make up total of 240 teachers, the study's sample. To select participants, study used convenience sampling. The Maslach Burnout Inventory–Emotional Exhaustion Subscale (MBI-EE, Maslach & Jackson, 1981). It is a seven-item self-report tool. Its Cronbach's alpha rating is 0.90 for exhaustion. The Short Scale of Creative Self (SSCS, Karwowski, 2011). It is an 11-item questionnaire with good reliability ($\alpha = .90$).

Research Procedure

The convenience sampling was employed to gather data. Accessible public and private schools, colleges, and institutions were visited for gathering data. The study included 240 teachers in total, 50% were from government institutions and 50% were from private institutions through the equal distributions in study. We clarified the study's purpose to participants to ensure they understood the questions. Data was gathered using a paper-based questionnaire. The data-gathering process took one week.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Sample of Study

Variables	n	%
Age		
25-40	203	85
41-60	37	14.16
Gender		
Male	120	50
Female	120	50
Education		
BS	53	22.1

Masters	79	32.9
MS	15	6.25
MPhil	47	19.58
PhD	43	17.91
Other	3	1.25
Employment Sector		
Government	120	50
Private	120	50

The demographic characteristics of participants across gender, age, educational level, employment sector, and duration of service are shown in Table 1. There were 120 (50%) male teachers and 120 (50%) female teachers with a mean age of 35.28 years (SD = 6.50). 120 (50%) were from the government sector, and 120 (50%) were from the private sector. The majority of the teachers, 203 (85%), belong to the 25-40 age group, while 37 (14.16%) belong to the 41-60 age category. In this linking, 53 (22.1%) reported BS qualification, 79 (32.9%) were the master's graduates, 15 (6.25%) were MS graduates, 47 (19.58%) reported MPhil qualification, 43 (17.91%) were PhDs, and 3 (1.25%) were other qualified in the current study.

Table 2 Outcomes of Bivariate Correlation

Variables	1	2
1. SSCS	-	-.009
2. EE	-	-

Note: SSCS= Short Scale of Creative Self, EE= Emotional Exhaustion

The table-3 displays the outcomes of bivariate correlation between the emotional exhaustion and creativity. In this connection, the Pearson product moment correlation was employed. The outcome indicates no significant relationship between the emotional exhaustion as well as creativity ($r = -0.009$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 3 Correlation between SSCS & Emotional Exhaustion (n=240)

Variables	1	2
1. SSCS	-	-.009
2. EE	-	-

Note: SSCS= Short Scale of Creative Self, EE= Emotional Exhaustion

The table-3 displays the outcomes of the bivariate correlation between emotional exhaustion and creativity. In this connection, the Pearson product-moment correlation was employed. The outcome indicates no significant relationship between the emotional exhaustion as well as creativity ($r = -0.009$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 4 T-Test Showing Mean Difference between Private & Government Teachers in Creativity

	Private (n=120		Government (n=120				95% CI		
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t	P	LL	UL	Cohen's d
Creativity	14.63	7.86	13.54	8.15	1.08	.78	-.95	3.12	0.14

The table 4 shows the mean difference between private and government teachers in their creativity questionnaire. Private (M = 14.63, SD = 7.86) and government (M= 13.54, SD = 8.15) have a Cohen's d value of 0.14.

Table 5 T-Test Showing the Mean Difference in Emotional Exhaustion

	Private (n=120)		Government (n=120)				95% CI		
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t	P	LL	UL	Cohen's d
EE	13.92	7.81	14.31	8.26	0.43	.66	-2.05	1.3	0.05

EE= Emotional Exhaustion

Table 5 shows mean difference between private and government teachers in emotional exhaustion questionnaire. Private (M = 13.92, SD = 7.81) and government (M= 14.31, SD = 8.26) have a Gohem's d value of 0.05.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this research was to examine the relationship between teachers' emotional exhaustion and creativity in both the public and private sectors. The study also sought to evaluate how government and private teachers differed in terms of emotional exhaustion and creativity. Convenience sampling was used to collect data from 240 Mardan teachers in a quantitative study design. The emotional exhaustion and creativity were measured using the Short Scale of Creative Self (SSCS) and Maslach Burnout Inventory-Emotional Exhaustion (MBI-EE) subscale, respectively. The findings showed that scales included in the study were reliable. The results of the analysis of the data were reported. According to the study's first hypothesis, emotional exhaustion and creativity would be negatively correlated among government and private teachers. However, the analysis in Table 3 did not support this correlation, showing no meaningful connection between creativity and emotional exhaustion (r = -0.009, $p > 0.05$. in this regard, outcomes of this study are similar to those of Landeche (2009), which also showed no direct relationship between the creativity and burnout among educators.

This implies that the relationship between these two variables may not be as strict as previously assumed. However, in existing literature, this outcome is not really supported, as previous research has consistently shown that creativity is adversely affected by emotional exhaustion. An example is that long-term effects of being exposed to work stressors deplete cognitive resources, and therefore, individuals may struggle to think creatively (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The emotionally drained staff also becomes less intrinsically motivated, which is also an essential element of creativity, as suggested Shalley et al. (2015). This negative correlation is evidenced by such empirical research as Gazelci et al. (2022) who carried out study and provided the results of research stating a significant negative correlation between creativity of special education teachers and burnout private sector teachers often encounter performance-driven stress & organizational pressures. Other studies have also reported similar results, such as Ceschi et al. (2017) who, in another study, found out that highly emotionally exhausted individuals shown unyielding alleged patterns that impeded their ability to produce new ideas.

This relationship has been explained by cognitive reasons because studies conducted by Zabelina and Robinson (2010) revealed that emotional exhaustion may delay cognitive flexibility, which is an important factor in creativity. Similarly, this point of view is reinforced by educational contexts, such as Kahn and Byerly (2014) determined that the ability to creatively solve problems was lower in employees in educational settings that had high emotional exhaustion. The studies in most of the high-pressure workplaces also echo the same results. In research carried out by LePine et al. (2005), it was established that emotional exhaustion affects capacity of workers to come up with original ideas especially when under pressure. Together, these studies can serve as a good indication of the inversely related correlation between creativity and emotional exhaustion. Based on results, which contradict present study, coping strategies, institutional support, and personal resilience can have a positive impact on reducing the expected negative impacts of emotional exhaustion on creativity. The second hypothesis of study was that scores of creativeness of private and public teachers would significantly differ.

Since the two groups had a minimal difference in their creative ratings, the data provided in Table 4 did not confirm this hypothesis (p =.782). This study has contrasting results with those of Fidan and Ozturk (2015), who discovered that teachers in government schools were less creative compared to their counterparts in private schools. But regarding creativity there was no significant difference between the government and the private teachers. This demonstrates that the results are not very consistent across studies. The situational factors such as culture, expectations, and teachers' coping methods can account for these differences. Prior research has indicated that institutional restrictions and organizational context significantly shape teachers' creativity. For example, Zhou and George (2001) discovered that more creativity is produced in work environments that support risk-taking and autonomy. On the other hand, this dynamic may work differently in the context of the private institutions. Inflexible workplaces stifle creative thought. Parents and administrators often pressure private school teachers to satisfy performance standards, can inhibit innovative teaching methods (Runco, 2014).

Similarly, other structural difficulties are shown by government institutions. Government educators are subject to bureaucratic restrictions, large class sizes, and few resources, all of which can make it difficult for them to use innovative teaching strategies (Richards, 2013). Despite of these contrasting conditions, the results of this study indicate that both teacher groups may adopt flexible methods to maintain creativity in their different work settings. According to the third hypothesis, the degree of emotional exhaustion experienced by government and private teachers would differ significantly. Although there were differences in the emotional exhaustion, that they were minimally significant. Although private and public educational institutions face different challenges, both sectors endure workplace strain, as per to earlier studies. According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017), bureaucratic obstacles and limited opportunities for career progression lead government instructors to be dissatisfied with their jobs, resulting in emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, job uncertainty and performance-based expectations often lead to burnout among the private teachers (Bakker & Costa, 2014).

Maslach and Leiter (2016) resisted that job demands have greater impact on emotional exhaustion than sectoral disparities, which could account for the current study's failure to detect a significant difference between government and private teachers. Previous studies have examined wider effects of emotional exhaustion beyond sectoral evaluations. Empirical studies validate that employees with high emotional exhaustion can decrease; this reduces involvement and efficiency (Taris et al., 2005). Wright and Cropanzano (1998) found that emotional exhaustion was a good predictor of low job satisfaction and increased absenteeism. These investigations show how emotional exhaustion affects cognitive and work-related results functionalistically. Westman and Eden (1997) found out that extended emotional exhaustion does not only degrade the ability to solve problems but makes individuals find it difficult to think creatively and adaptively. Although these findings exist, the results are in line with theoretical framework of job demands-resources model that proposes that high job demands deplete psychological resources, thus, impairing performance and well-being (Demerouti et al. 2001).

These results imply that the instructors' creativity is not always hindered by emotional exhaustion, contrary to earlier research. One potential explanation as to why this is the case is the role of coping strategies and self-efficacy in alleviating the harmful effects of burnout. Tierney and Farmer (2002) also report that individuals who possess a high creative self-efficacy are more inclined to continue with creative activities despite stress in workplace. In a similar vein, Sonnentag (2017) maintained that involvement in leisure activities and psychological disengagement from work-related stress can guard against the exhaustion of the creative energies. These findings, which contradict earlier studies suggesting that burnout hinders creative functioning, warrant investigation into protective factors that enable teachers to maintain creativity amid professional pressures. The future studies should examine how coping mechanisms, self-efficacy, and institutional support affect the teachers' capacity to remain creative in demanding work environments. Designing treatments that support teachers' well-being and encourage creative teaching methods requires an understanding of these diverse relationships.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to compare how teachers in both government and private sectors were affected by emotional exhaustion and creativity. Nevertheless, it did not show how these two variables differed across groups. Our outcomes showed no significant correlation between creativity and emotional exhaustion, nor did they show that these two diverse variables differed in creativity or emotional exhaustion. Data were obtained by analyzing responses from 240 teachers, 120 from government, and 120 from private schools. The outcomes show that teachers in both sectors may adapt different methods, like resilience, effective coping strategies & reliance on professional self-efficacy, despite different stressors; they still allow them to be creative even after becoming emotionally exhausted. The creation of treatments and regulations that are needed for creative teaching and teachers' well-being will be promoted if we could gain insight into these dynamics. A comparative analysis of public and private sector teachers provides deeper insight into how institutional environments impact emotional experiences & ultimately, creative capacities of educators in Pakistan's evolving educational landscape.

Limitations & Suggestions

1. The study utilized 240 teachers through a convenience sampling method, including 120 teachers from government and 120 from private schools. The findings may not accurately reflect all Pakistani teachers because participants were not selected randomly. For a more representative sample, the stratified or purposive sampling method should be employed in future studies.
2. Considering limited funds and resources, the study cannot examine other factors affecting creativity & emotional exhaustion. To examine the relationships over time, researcher should test a longitudinal design in future studies. Use of self-reported questionnaires could result in social desirability bias. For the deeper understanding, the researcher should combine it with interviews or observations.
3. Limited studies have been conducted comparing job responsibilities, working practices, and administration procedures in private and public schools. To provide sector-specific insights, future studies should focus more on these problems. In comparison with earlier studies, found no significant link amid emotional exhaustion and creativity. This insignificance may be due to unknown coping mechanisms. To realize association, researchers should study these factors in future research.
4. In this connection, without considering the discipline, we included teachers from different subjects. STEM and arts teachers, for instance, may experience varying degrees of emotional exhaustion and creativity. To examine these variations, future studies should focus on specific subject in order to highlight the leading differences in contextual and situational parameters for desired outcomes.

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