

Study on Intervention Strategies for Occupational Burnout of Local College English Teachers

Taking J Province as an Example

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Abstract—A total of four intervention strategies are proposed in this paper from the levels of society, organization and individual taking J Province as an example in combination with the local college English teacher occupational burnout survey data of J Province and relevant regulations on local college management and assessment of J Province with an eye to local college English teachers, to improve local college English teachers' senses of occupational happiness, occupational identification and belonging, self-efficacy, and subjective happiness, so as to prevent or relieve their occupational burnout.

Keywords—occupational burnout; intervention strategy; local college; English teacher

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of "occupational burnout" is used to describe a state of extremely tired of the staff in the helping profession caused by excessive working strength and working time while neglecting their own individual demand, and it is also resulted by the pursuit of unpractical individual or social expectation with excessive effort. "Occupational burnout" was first proposed by American psychologist Freudenberger in the magazine of Occupational Psychology in 1974. No consensus has been reached about the definition of occupational burnout, yet what is widely quoted by scholars in the literatures is the definition defined by Maslach & Jackson, namely "a symptom of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment of an individual in the working field with people as the serving object".

Teachers' occupational burnout refers to the state of emotion, attitude and behavior exhaustion of a teacher due to the incapability of coping with various pressures and setbacks in education and teaching in a timely manner. Specifically, it is reflected in the following aspects¹: First, emotion exhaustion. The teacher is tired physically and mentally without passion for work, thinking that working as a teacher is dull and boring, so he/she is weary of the current work and alienates himself/herself from others, making it difficult to get along with him/her, and he/she often exaggerates the normal obstruction encountered in teaching with overreaction of

emotion. The second is depersonalization. The teacher with occupational burnout will push aside students, mock colleagues, tend to be tired of social contact, and care nothing about students' problems. The third is reduced accomplishment. The teacher reduces the significance and value evaluation of the work he/she is engaged in, feeling unable to complete the work with the sense of inferiority, and the teacher tends to depreciate himself/herself, ascribes the failure in work to his/her incapability, having the sense of helpless and losing work motivation, which ultimately lead to the teacher's resignation due to the extreme tiredness of work.

The research objects are in the helping profession without teachers when occupational burnout was officially proposed for the first time. In 1979, Wilard, Chairman of American National Education Association (NEA), mentioned the phenomenon of teachers' occupational burnout for the first time. Teachers' occupational burnout was adopted as the topic of annual reference of NEA in the same year. As a result, teachers' occupational burnout gradually gets into the vision of researchers, becoming a hot point attracting attention from domestic and foreign scholars, and the researches relating to teachers' occupational burnout are also widened and deepened gradually.

In 2004, China Human Resources Development Network launched a 'China "Work Burnout Index" Survey' jointly with a lot of famous media in China. Results of the survey show that, among the 15 investigated industries, teachers' occupational burnout degree ranks the third, second only to that of the public servant and the personnel engaged in logistics and transportation. In 2005, a survey named "China Teacher's Occupational Pressure and Psychological Health Survey 2005" was launched jointly by School of Public Administration and Policy of Renmin University of China, Institute of Human Resources and Sina Education Channel, and the result indicated that nearly 90% of the surveyed objects had working burnout to certain extent, and about 30% of them have serious working burnout.

To learn the actual condition of local college English teachers' occupational burnout further, the author and her team investigated 160 English teachers from 15 local colleges in J Province in 2017. The SPSS statistical analysis result shows that, the average value of occupational burnout of the investigated objects is 2.6678 (standard deviation 0.90807),

¹ Liu Ping. On the Relationship between Self-efficiency and Occupational Burnout of College English Teachers [J]. Foreign Language Education, 2014, 35(6):68-72.

closing to the average value of 3, indicating that the investigated objects have quite high level of occupational burnout. In addition, 97.5% of the surveyed objects have the occupational burnout of different degrees, 31.9% of the surveyed objects have the problem of serious occupational burnout. Among them, the most outstanding is emotion exhaustion, followed by depersonalization and reduced accomplishment. This survey result apparently shows that, J province is facing severe problem of local college English teachers' occupational burnout, and it is urgent to face up to such problem.

II. INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR LOCAL COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHERS' OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT

The method of internal intervention is adopted for the intervention research of occupational burnout at the early stage. Internal intervention is easier with low cost compared with the external intervention which has better effect, because external situational factors have bigger influential effect on occupational burnout in comparison with individual factors. Therefore, the author and her team put forward the following four intervention strategies starting from three aspects, namely the external social factor, organizational factor and internal individual factor, in combination with sociology, management and psychology on the basis of comprehensive analysis of relevant regulations on local college management and assessment of J Province and the result of semi-structure interview with 5 surveyed objects.

A. *Taking into Consideration Teachers' Natural and Social Roles, Balancing the Natural Desire and Occupational Ideal, and Improving the Sense of Occupational Happiness*

Teacher's occupational burnout has profound social origin. First of all, people have always advocated respecting teaching and education from the ancient times till now, and the expressions of "industrious", "making painstaking efforts", "candle", "cattle", "spring silkworm" and many other words are often used to praise teachers. With respect to these praises, on the one hand, they are the confirmation and high evaluation of the occupation of teacher, on the other hand, these spirits praised by people all take sacrificing as the essential element which should not be neglected. This cause an image in the mind of the masses and the teacher, that is, teachers should pay everything for work and students, and teachers should sacrifice their own life and individual benefits. It is because the higher expectation and requirement for the image of teachers by the public masses and the teachers themselves, teachers require themselves to be perfectionist unconsciously. To keep the perfect occupational image and maintain the public's requirement and imagination of them, teachers often conceal their own emotion, constrain and deny their own normal desire. In the circumstances in life beyond education, however, teachers have to face up to the differences between occupational ideal and actual life. Such conflict between social role and natural role will impose load on teachers' mentality and cause personality conflict, which is easy to cause various psychological problems to teachers with the lapse of time. Second, under the social background of rapidly developed

market economy, the new principle measuring social position and evaluation standard by wealth has threatened the old tradition evaluating social position by knowledge. Facing the new measurement standard, many teachers feel the inferiority and embarrassment brought by the deviation of praises and reality.

Therefore, to prevent and relieve college English teachers' occupational burnout effectively, a harmonious humanistic social environment should be created for teachers, to pay attention to the normal desire of a teacher as an ordinary, natural person, to care about, understand, support and encourage teachers, and help teachers with their difficulties in life (for example, their children's education, medical treatment, income, housing, transportation, welfare, etc.), and to give enough humanistic solicitude to teachers, the special group with sacrificing as basic characteristics, so as to relieve their mental pressure, and improve the sense of occupational happiness.

B. *Weakening the Administration Color of Local Colleges in J Province, Improving Teachers' Autonomy Toward Teaching Affairs and Their Participation in School Affairs and Management, Rationalizing the Assessment and Evaluation Method, and Improving the Sense of Occupational Identification and Belonging*

One of the profound organizational origins of local college English teachers' occupational burnout in J Province is the administrative dissimilation of universities and colleges as academic organization. The college organizations after administrative dissimilation are mainly reflected in two aspects:

The first is irrational management system. Academic freedom, teaching and school management are the main occupational characteristics of college teachers. They associate their own value and human's innovation in knowledge field in light of the pious and rigid pursuit of the truth of knowledge. The management administration in college organization, however, makes teachers loss freedom and autonomy in education and teaching. With respect to scientific research, the creative knowledge innovation should be converted to the standardized thesis writing and project filing according the administrative standard. "Teachers should be driven by the administrative power, and they have to unwillingly follow the occupational path, so the free exploration in occupational life is encountered by embarrassment, and the occupational ideal and passion tend to be exhausted."² In addition, the administrative management system often adopts the single association method from upper level to lower lever. Teachers are unable to participate in the decision and development planning of the school effectively, and they loss the right to speak in terms of the problems relating their own business (for example, the construction of teaching syllabus, teaching objective, etc.), so they have to be controlled, punished, and stimulated, while their awareness of masters is gradually worn down in the administrative operation. Teachers' right of knowing, participation and speaking cannot be respected fully

² Liu Kai. Research on Organizational Factors Analysis of College Teacher's Occupation Tiredness and Countermeasures [J]. Education and Vocation, 2013,27(38):78-79.

in the true sense. As a result, the teachers are short of identification of organization development and their own work, which lead to their indifferent and negative attitude. According to the interview data, English teachers from college of engineering are marginalized to a greater extent in the administrative management due to the absence of specialty support.

Another one is unreasonable evaluation system. The first is misplacement of evaluation function caused by stressing and abusing rewards and punishments. In addition to the tooling value and management function, evaluation still has the function of promotion. In the administrative evaluation system, however, on the one hand, the excessive rewards and punishments dissimilates teaching evaluation as the external means and strength to distinguish, control and regulate teachers; on the other hand, they will also make teachers learn to pursue the benefits and avoid harm, pay attention to the pursuit of rewards or avoiding punishments, neglect the exploration and observance of basic law of teaching, so they dare not to try the new teaching forms, which has restricted their creative spirit to certain extent. In addition, too many reward and punish evaluations may also develop teachers' fear of teaching and jealousy of other teachers, which will harm teachers' interpersonal relationship, destroy their team cooperation, erode their social support system, weaken their sense of occupational identification and belonging. The second is the misplacement of evaluation dominated by administrative personnel with student evaluation, colleague evaluation, and supervision expert evaluation as the main part. As the main body exercising teaching, the major evaluation position of teachers is lost as teachers' self-evaluation of their own teaching activities is not included in the evaluation system, and they have no right to speak about evaluation index, they have no enough right to participate in evaluation, and they even have no right to know the evaluation result, so they are outside the evaluation. Teachers will finally attribute such passive psychological feeling to the occupation of teacher. The third is the imbalance of evaluation method giving priority to quantity evaluation, stressing scientific research while neglecting teaching. In the actual evaluation, some factors (such as teachers' moral accomplishment, emotion input, cultural foundation, personality features, teaching style, etc.) quantized even they have no such characters; different majors (such as science and engineering, social science) are "regarded as one" even they have no unified standard for quantification; with respect to teaching and scientific research, colleges should give priority to teaching and talent cultivation, but they measure teachers' teaching level by scientific research achievements, project quantity, thesis level. Such misplaced evaluation method has denied teachers' effort and attempt in the aspect that cannot be quantized and it has weakened teachers' enthusiasm in exploring innovation.

As a result, to prevent and relieve local college English teachers' occupational burnout in J Province from the organization origin, colleges should make great efforts in weakening college administrative color, improve teachers' autonomy of teaching affairs and their participation in school management and evaluation, to evaluate by layer, classification and stage, strengthen communication, weaken rewards and

punishments, enrich evaluation methods and means, so as to improve teachers' sense of occupational identification and sense of belonging.

C. Innovating the Continuing Education, Expanding Resources of Continuing Education, Satisfying Teachers' Professional Development Aspiration, and Improving Teachers' Self-efficacy

The famous American humanistic psychologist Abraham H. Maslow believes that people's demand can be divided into five grades from lower grade to upper grade: the first is physiological demand, the second is safety demand, the third is demand of love and belonging, the fourth is the demand of respect, and the fifth one is the demand of self-achievement. In the current era of information with rapidly updated knowledge, teaching technology, theory and mode change constantly, and the era of "what is obtained in learning can be used lifelong" has gone far away. Teachers are no longer imparting knowledge with authority. In order to strengthen their professional position, autonomy and dignity and to prevent recession of occupation, college teachers have urgent need and requirement in on-the-job learning and development, updating knowledge, improving business level and scientific research ability. Compared with teachers of other majors, local college English teachers of J Province have no professional identity, but they assume overloaded work. In addition to completing the heavy work, they also have to cope with the affairs of many aspects, such as assessment, scientific research and promotion. Viewing from the teachers themselves, it is impossible to realize long-term learning without working, so the conflict between working and learning is hard to coordinate; viewing from the resources of continuing education, the fund and resource for local colleges are limited, so the continuing education resource provided for English teachers in local colleges of engineering is much less. Such limitation of objective conditions and teachers' urgent demand of knowledge updating will absolutely increase teachers' sense of anxiety of knowledge exhaustion and the sense of frustration of self-depreciation. Therefore, to prevent and relieve the local college English teachers' occupational burnout in J Province, various colleges should make innovation in continuing education mode and expand the continuing education resources based on actual situation of their colleges, to satisfy teachers' expectation of knowledge updating and professional development according to local conditions, so as to improve teachers' self-efficacy. In addition, attention should be paid to provide optional continuing education resources in combination with different demand in teachers' occupational development cycle, and to avoid the problems of mandatory effect of formalization and separating from the actual condition of teachers' work.

D. Molding Positive Personality, Keeping Active Emotion Experience, and Improving Subjective Sense of Happiness

According to the working pressure cognition interactive model of psychologist Lazarus, R.S. & Folkman, S (1984), the possible pressure source cannot become the actual pressure source before individual cognitive evaluation, yet the evaluation at this time is affected directly by the individual

self-efficacy and the ability of controlling and predicting pressure source. The pressure source will become the real pressure event if the individual feel unable to cope with it after evaluation, arousing the definite pressure reaction, making the individual nervous and low-spirited. Only the long-term influence by pressure can form chronic pressure symptom, and show the reaction of tiredness. Bandura (1986) believes that pressure felt by individual is related to the psychology and personality; positive self-concept is helpful for the individual to generate greater driving force for work, and the stronger self-efficacy can help to confirm the self-ability and develop better control force. As a result, although teachers' internal intervention effect is far less than that of organization's external intervention, individual's internal intervention is more direct and faster, so researchers encourage college English teachers to shape the positive personality of confidence, hope and optimistic consciously, give positive explanation of problems with positive psychological indication, face up to our own shortcomings, learn to apply the strong points, talent and advantages to the specific circumstances of work and life, so as to reduce the sense of frustration, increase positive emotion experience, improve the ability to resist pressure, and enhance the sense of subjective happiness. In addition, the teachers should also learn how to coordinate themselves, lay equal stress on work and leisure, improve the mentality in colorful spare time, adjust the emotion and seek opportunity to give vent to the pressure.

III. CONCLUSION

On the one hand, teachers' occupational burnout will influence their physical and mental health, causing students' psychological barrier of "teacher source", which will affect students' physical and mental health; on the other hand, it will influence teachers' occupational development and the stability of teachers, and results in great passive influence on teaching quality. To construct the harmonious, stable, positive local cultural and social environment for education and teaching, the author and her team put forward from the level of society that, both the natural and social roles of the teachers should be taken into consideration, and we should balance natural desire and occupational ideal, improve the sense of occupational happiness; from the level of organization, they put forward that, on the one hand, the college administrative color should be weakened, to improve teachers autonomy relating to teaching affairs and their participation in college affairs and management, rationalize the assessment method, and improve the sense of occupational identification; on the other hand, we should also innovate the continuing education mode, expand the continuing education resources, satisfy teachers' expectation of professional development, and improve teachers' self-efficacy; they propose from the level of individual that, teachers should shape positive personality, keep positive emotional experience, and improve the sense of subjective happiness. Last, what needs to be stressed is that, local department of college education and teaching management and assessment should understand teachers' ideas and demands thoroughly starting from teachers themselves, so as to face up to and solve this problem, and avoid the "false, exaggerated and empty" formalism and bureaucratism.

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