

## **A Study of the Relationship between Burnout of Pre-Service ESL Teachers in Sri Lanka and Their Perception of Mentoring During the Internship Period**

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**Abstract:** Burnout is a work-related severe problem that needs careful attention. Mainly, burnout of the beginning professionals is a more pressing issue since it affects the entire future of such professionals. This paper attempts to understand the burnout status of a group of pre-service English Language teachers who are on an internship for one year with a school mentor. At the same time, the paper attempts to understand the pre-service teachers' perception of their mentors and whether there is any association between their perception of mentors and their burnout level. The study was conducted with a sample of 109 pre-service ESL teachers who are on internship. Two tools were used to collect data during this study; the English version of the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) and an adapted version of the tool developed by Hudson (2004) to measure pre-service English teachers' perception of their mentoring. The original tool developed by Hudson (ibid) had been used with pre-service science teachers. When data were analysed, it was understood that the pre-service English teachers displayed a considerable level of burnout with 5.5% of the sample recording burnout levels above 50. When the data related to the pre-service English teachers' perception of their mentors were considered it was found that the majority of the respondents had a positive perception of their mentors. Very importantly it was revealed that their perception of mentors had a significant association with their burnout level. That is; when the pre-service teachers had a negative perception towards their mentors, they are more prone to higher levels of burnout. These findings invite the policymakers and the teacher educators in the country to be more sensitive to this issue when planning mentoring programmes for pre-service English teachers.

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### **Introduction**

Teacher burnout, particularly the burnout of beginner teachers, has been a significant work-related problem discussed all over the world. The aim of this article was to investigate the burnout level of a group of pre-service English as second language (ESL) teachers from the National Colleges of Education (NCOE) in Sri Lanka while they are engaged in their one year internship and to see if there was any relationship between their burnout level and their perception of the mentors.

One year internship period for the prospective teachers of English from the National Colleges of Education (NCOEs) is a critical component of the three-year initial teacher development course provided to them in Sri Lanka. It is during this period, where the pre-service ESL teachers get an opportunity to work with a full-time school mentor, their teacher competencies are developed. The internship period is an excellent opportunity for them to test their teaching skills in authentic situations and to obtain the support of an experienced teacher (mentor) to improve their competencies further. At the same time, it is during this period; the pre-service teachers begin to develop attitudes, either positive or negative, towards teaching, depending on the experience they gain. It is the conflict between high hopes and the realities of the classroom and the mentoring practices the pre-service teachers' encounter (Fives & Olivarez., 2007) that lead them to stressful

situations and finally towards 'attrition' (Hong, 2010). As a result, it is understood that there is an increasing need for those who are involved in pre-service teacher development at various levels to be aware of the realistic picture of pre-service teacher burnout in the system and to engage in a continuous monitoring process. Such an understanding of the situation achieved through extensive research can increase our ability to take corrective measures after identifying possible causes of pre-service teacher burnout and to improve teacher competencies through effective mentoring practices. However, in Sri Lanka, since there is less research focusing on the burnout of pre-service teachers the picture remains still vague making it difficult for stakeholders to act accordingly. Even though the practice of one-year internship of the NCOE trainees has been there for the past three decades what happens during this period has very rarely been scientifically investigated. So, there is a need for engaging in an in-depth study of the third year internship period to determine what happens between the mentor and the mentee. When the area of teaching English as a second language, the world's 'largest educational enterprise' as Mede (2009) identifies, is considered researchers cannot neglect the need for more research related to ESL teacher burnout at any cost. It is in this light the present study was conducted with a group of pre-service ESL teachers with the following objectives.

1. to arrive at an understanding of the burnout status among the pre-service ESL teachers in Sri Lanka,
2. to understand the pre-service ESL teachers' perception of their mentoring during the internship period, and
3. to examine if there is any significant relationship between the burnout of pre-service ESL teachers and the perception of their mentoring during the internship period.

The present study, thus conducted helps us increase the awareness of the teacher educators, mentors and the policymakers involved in initial teacher development process regarding burnout, a problem to be considered seriously.

### **Review of Literature**

In this section, it is expected to create a discussion on the fundamental theoretical aspects that guided the present study concerning the existing literature.

#### **Burnout as an Occupational Syndrome**

Introduced to the academic world in 1970s by Herbert Freudenberger, a clinical psychologist and Christina Maslach, a social psychologist through their independent research (Borritz, 2006, Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen, 2005; Schaufeli, 2003) based on individuals who displayed tiredness associated with their work (Cephe, 2010, Zang & Sapp, 2009, Engelbrecht, 2006), burnout, today, is a widely researched area both in psychology as well as in professional development and organizational behaviour. As defined by Maslach & Jackson (1981), burnout is a job-related problem occurred among individuals working mainly with people and can be "characterised" with three main dimensions a) emotional exhaustion, b) depersonalization, and c) reduced personal accomplishment. These three dimensions given in this definition provide directions to identify the three levels directly affected by burnout: personal, organisational and societal. As such the leading cause of burnout, stress that reduces the effectiveness of the workers is a serious problem that generates many adverse effects. It does not receive due attention very often (Maslach, 2014). It is based on this theoretical foundation, one of the most frequently used instruments to measure burnout; the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was developed.

However, we find another tool emerging in Denmark in the new millennium, the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI). In this process, Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen (2005) theorising the concept of burnout argue "fatigue and exhaustion" that occur as a result of the emotional demand of the work (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001) as the foundation of CBI. Further explaining this argument, they contend that it is the "attribution of fatigue and exhaustion to specific domains like work" that generates burnout within an individual. This division of tiredness; physical and emotional, is a more realistic explanation of what happens within an individual when they are exposed to stressors like work overload which may create burnout, ultimately, that has several adverse effects.

The adverse effects of burnout not only affect the very individuals burnt out but also those who obtain services from burnt out workers and the entire organisation such individual are engaged in (Maslach, 2014, Maslach & Jackson, 1981) creating an adverse cyclic effect on the entire society. Maslach (2014) giving a comprehensive explanation of the adverse effects of burnout presents "poor quality of work, low morale, absenteeism, turnover, health problems, depression, and family problems" as the results of burnout. It is in this light the burnout of teachers should be considered since teachers constitute one of the largest and perhaps the most critical cohort of professionals that shapes tomorrow's world.

### **Burnout of Preservice Teachers and Mentoring**

Teacher burnout is a challenging experience for teachers as well as for students. At the same time education systems and countries heavily suffer because of the continuously increasing numbers of teachers who complain some sort of symptoms associated with burnout (Zang & Sapp, 2008) and the increasing amounts of funds incurred because of burnout (Cephe, 2010) in terms of the costs for new recruitments and training of teachers. Teachers, as a professional group, are more prone to burnout because of the pressures they get from the system itself and the society as a result of the expectations associated with their job: educating and developing the next generation citizens (Mede, 2009). Pre-service teachers, mainly, are found to be vulnerable as suggested by Fischl & Sagy (2009 in Hoffenbartal & Bracha, 2016)) because of the blend of stressors received from the environment and within the individual emerging from personal aspirations. A direct result of this situation is the reduced performance of students that come through the reduced performance of teachers (Rodriguez-Hidalgo; Calmaestr; & Dios, 2014). It is in this context we need to look at means and ways of managing burnout.

As Borritz (2006) identifies, burnout is a syndrome that can be avoided through changes made in the work setting. One of the ways to achieve this can be identified as bringing up the standard of communication among those who are in the same environment. Among many of the techniques used to achieve this, mentoring is one of the instrumental techniques. Finding its origin in early Greek and Indian traditions of education, mentoring is a well established professional development practice that can be attributed to a Social Constructivist theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) early in the previous century (Samaraweera, 2011). As defined by Lian et al. (2013) mentoring is the process where we find an individual commits his or her capacity to develop the capacity of another individual. Mainly, mentoring is identified as a professional development practice that works well during the early years of an individual's work life (Al Hamdan et al., 2014, Samaraweera, 2011). When it comes to the teachers, it is during their "teaching practicum period" period within the initial teacher development programme they need to get the support of a mentor since their professional future is determined during this period where they are exposed to the realities of real classrooms (Bonilla & Rivera, 2008). It is on the ground of that argument this research was conducted to explore the Sri Lankan situation.

### **Methodology and the Study Setting**

This study was conducted with three primary objectives; to understand the level of burnout among pre-service ESL teachers in Sri Lanka, to investigate the pre-service ESL teachers' perception of their mentoring during the internship period, and to examine if there is any significant relationship between the burnout of pre-service ESL teachers and their perception of the mentors.

### **The Sample**

A group of 109 pre-service ESL teachers was selected as the participants of this study. They all were from the three National Colleges of Education (NCOE) where ESL teachers are provided initial teacher development. The initial teacher development programme at an NCOE runs for three years: two years residential at the NCOE, and one-year full-time internship. The internship period takes place at selected schools with full-time mentors. Since two of the objectives (objectives no. 2 and 3) were related to mentoring of pre-service ESL teachers, the participants were selected from among the NCOE students engaged in the third year internship period.

### **Research Instruments and Data Collection**

Measuring the two variables identified here; burnout of pre-service ESL teachers and their perception of the mentors was the next step of the study. Burnout of the pre-service teacher during the internship period was measured using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Kristensen, Borrits, Viladsen, & Christensen, 2005). The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) was developed in Denmark during the PUMA Project (Project on Burnout, Motivation and Job Satisfaction) and has been tested extensively for its validity and reliability. The CBI measures the construct of burnout under three dimensions, personal burnout, work-related burnout, and client-related burnout which are labelled as PB, WB, and CB in this research for ease of handling. The entire instrument has 19 items divided into three dimensions, 6, 7, and 6 items respectively. Responses to each item can be recorded on a scale of 5 points labelled "Always", "often", "Sometimes", "seldom", and "Never". Responses of the participants were awarded values 100, 75, 50, 25, and 0 respectively (Always =100). Having collected data from the sample of 30 teachers a reliability scale test was performed using SPSS version 21 to determine the reliability of the CBI for the present study. The Alpha values for the entire scale and the dimensions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability statistics for CBI

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	Cronbach's Alpha
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Personal burnout	.82
Work-related burnout	.83
Client-related burnout	.83
For the entire scale	.90

The Alpha values given in Table 1 shows that there is a higher correlation within the instrument and therefore, the use of CBI as a reliable data collection tool to assess burnout of pre-service ESL teachers is justifiable.

The next variable considered in this study was the pre-service ESL teachers' perception of their mentoring during the internship period. An adapted version of the tool developed by Hudson (2004) to measure pre-service science teachers' perception of their mentoring was used in this study with the sample. The 33 item instrument developed by Hudson (ibid) attempts to capture the construct of mentees' perception of mentoring under five dimensions that are theoretically established namely; a) mentor's attributes, b) addressing system requirements, c) mentors' pedagogical knowledge, d) mentors' modeling of practice, and e) providing feedback to mentees. Since the original instrument was developed targeting to capture the primary science teachers' perception of mentoring a few changes had been made to the items when using it for the present study. As a result, the term "science" was replaced with the term "English" and the phrase "teaching science" was replaced with "teaching the English language". Responses to the items were recorded on a 5 point scale ranging from 1 to 5 with labels strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), uncertain (U), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA).

To obtain a feel for the reliability of the instrument thus identified to measure pre-service ESL teachers' perception of mentoring was subjected to a reliability scale analysis using SPSS version 21. A comparison of the Alpha values obtained for the instrument in the original study with those of the present study is given in Table 2.

Table 2 Comparison of reliability scores for mentees' perception of mentors

Dimension	Peter Hudson, 2004	Samaraweera, 2017
	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha
Mentor's attributes	.93	.83
Addressing system requirements	.76	.68
Mentors' Pedagogical knowledge	.94	.87
Mentors' modelling of practice	.95	.88
Providing feedback to mentees	.92	.88

Reliability score for the entire scale also came to .96 in this study makes it very high. In the original study, it can be observed that the alpha values are very high bringing the internal reliability of the tool to a remarkably higher level except for the dimension addressing system requirements which are .76. Replicating the same pattern in the present study too it is observable the same dimension has got lower alpha value. However, it remains within the acceptable range and therefore is not questionable. Besides, Hudson (2004) argues very clearly that though this dimension has recorded a lower alpha value it needs to be retained considering its theoretical importance in perceiving the construct of mentoring effectiveness. Hence it is clear that the tool used in this study to measure pre-service ESL teachers' perception is reliable.

Data collection of the present study happened at the three NCOEs on a day the trainees gathered to their respective NCOE for the monthly meeting. Three academic vice presidents of the NCOEs assisted in administering the tools with the selected sample of students. Considered the ease of access, and high return rate and saving of time this face to face method of data collection was convenient and more advantageous over electronic data collection using email.

### **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

This section of the paper is dedicated to the presentation of analysis of data gathered using the two research instruments described in the previous section with a sample of pre-service ESL teachers from the 3 National Colleges of Education while they were engaged in their one-year internship.

### **Profile of the Respondents**

As mentioned in the previous section there were 109 respondents in the sample selected for this study. The profile and the distribution of the respondents are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Profile of the participants

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	5	4.6%
Female	104	95.4%
NCOE		
NCOE 1	39	35.8%
NCOE 2	40	36.7%
NCOE 3	30	27.5%

Data given in the table show a disproportionate distribution between male and female. Among the 110 pre-service ESL teachers from whom data were collected there were only 5 (4.6%) male. This situation has occurred because of the remarkably lesser number of males registering for the National Diploma in Teaching (NDT) programmes at NCOEs in general and particularly for the NDT programme in ESL. As a result, only five respondents could be found on the day the tools were administered. Out of these five 01, respondent was from the NCOE 1, and the other 4 were from the NCOE 2. All the respondents from the NCOE 3 were females. This disproportionate distribution though is not considered in this study, is a unique feature noticed related to the enrolment of individuals in the teaching profession in Sri Lanka.

### Burnout of Pre-service ESL Teachers

The first objective of the present study was to arrive at an understanding of the burnout status of the pre-service ESL teachers during their internship period. The data collection tool used for this purpose was the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) with its three dimensions: personal burnout (PB), work-related burnout (WB), and client-related burnout (CB). The data collected using the CBI were recorded and analysed using the version 21 of SPSS. Table 4 presents the mean burnout levels as a total (for the entire scale) and for the three dimensions mentioned above.

Table 4. Burnout statistics of the pre-service ESL teachers

	Mean	SD	Mode	Median
Total burnout	29.24	±13.39	16	28.17
PB	33.83	±14.54	29	33.33
WB	24.61	±15.71	18	21.43
CB	29.28	±17.64	46	33.33

In the analysis of data related to burn out the p-value of the test of normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test since the sample was more than 50) was 0.200 (more than .05) and therefore, the normality of data distribution could be assured. In that ground when the data given in Table 4 are observed a clear picture of the burnout status of the sample can be obtained. That is, the total burnout means is  $29.24 \pm 13.39$ , and the mean scores for PB, WB, and CB are  $33.83 \pm 15.54$ ,  $24.61 \pm 15.71$ , and  $29.28 \pm 17.64$  respectively. The median value and the mode for each dimension and the entire scale were also recorded here since it helps us obtaining a clearer picture, especially considered the type of data associated here (ordinal); when these data are considered with a critical since it is understood that the pre-service ESL teachers' burnout level is at a considerable level. What the mean burnout score expresses is that out of these 109 pre-service ESL teachers at least for 50% of them the burnout level is more than 29.24 which is considered a high level at this stage. Considering the lower levels, there was only one teacher whose burnout level was assessed as 0 and three others recorded burnout level was 1. All the others recorded burnout levels ranging from 7 to 64. Among those who recorded higher burnout levels, there was one respondent who recorded a burnout level as high as 64 and the total number of cases recorded burnout level above 50 were 6 making it 5.50% off the total sample. In total, it is understood that more than 82.5% of the sample can be identified as burnt out over 10 at different levels when the 4 cases that recorded either 0 or below 2 are excluded as considering not burnt out.

When the three dimensions of burnout (PB, WB, and CB) are considered it is easy to understand what contributes to the burnout level of the respondents the most. Out of the mean scores found in Table 4, it is observed that personal burnout has a more significant bearing than the other two dimensions. The mean personal burnout level of the sample is  $33.83 \pm 15.54$ . What this conveys to us is that for at least 50% of the sample the personal burnout level is 34.28 or more. Further, it was recorded that 20 respondents (mode) have been measured for a personal burnout value of 29 making it 18.3% of the entire sample. Considering the cases assessed for high levels of personal burnout it was recorded that 15 individuals (13.76%) have been assessed for PB level exceeding 50 while 3 cases out of this cohort have recorded burnout levels exceeding 75 and the

highest value coming to 79. Personal burnout indicates how much the individuals are fatigued and emotionally exhausted. However, when the mode values are considered, it was found that the mode value of client related burnout is 46. The number of cases detected for burnout level of 46 was 14 which came to 12.7% of the total sample. Further, it was revealed that 30 cases had been identified as assessed for burnout levels between 46 (mode) and 62.5 which is the highest value thus making it 30% of the sample. This is also a significant finding regarding the pre-service ESL teachers in Sri Lanka. What this shows is while being personally burnt out around 1/3 of the sample find it challenging to work with the students. When pre-service teachers develop such high levels of burnout, particularly client related burnout there is a possibility of such burnout levels affecting their service quality once they are appointed as teachers of English.

**Pre-service ESL Teachers’ Perception of Mentoring**

As mentioned earlier pre-service ESL teachers’ perception of mentoring was measured using an adapted version of Hudson’s (2004) tool where the following factors are measured.

- Mentor’s attributes
- Addressing system requirements
- Mentors’ Pedagogical knowledge
- Mentors’ modelling of practice
- Providing feedback to mentees

When the descriptive statistics related to the data collected in this regard were considered it was found that the mean value for the perception came to  $3.81 \pm .634$  while the median and mode values were 4.00 and 4 respectively. What this shows is that the pre-service ESL teachers overall perception regarding mentoring is considered positive.

**The relationship between Burnout and Perception of Mentoring**

The third objective of the present study was to determine whether there was any association between the variables considered in this study: burnout and perception of mentoring. A correlation analysis was performed using SPSS version 21 to determine this. The r value obtained from the Pearson correlation test was -.240 and the p-value was less than 0.05 (0.012). The values obtained by the Spearman’s correlation test were also comparable to this pattern. Hence, it can be argued that there is a negative relationship between the two variables. That is, increase in the perception of mentoring results in a decrease of the level of burnout of pre-service ESL teachers. However, it is essential to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the actual nature and the contribution of the perception of mentoring to the decrease of burnout. A linear regression analysis was seen as the measure to understand the nature and magnitude of this association. Since the assumption on residuals was not violated as assessed by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality ( $N \geq 50$ ), a regression analysis was conducted. Table 5 presents the data obtained from the regression analysis.

Table 5 Results from Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	48.533	7.637		6.355	.000
Perception	-5.071	1.980	-.240	-2.561	.012

a. Dependent Variable: BN

The r squared value obtained by this test was 0.058 (not given here) which means the perception of mentoring can explain only 5.8% in variation. With the statistics presented in the table, it is possible to draw up the regression equation as given below.

$$\text{Burnout} = 48.53 - 5.071 (\text{perception})$$

What is suggested here is that every one unit increase in perception, burnout is expected to go down in 5.071 units. While understanding the fact that the nature of mentoring has an association with the variation in burnout level of pre-service ESL teachers, it is essential to understand that only a 5.8% of the variation can be attributed to mentoring. In this context, it is essential to accept that many other variables affect the burnout level of pre-service ESL teachers including the mentoring practices that happen during the internship period or there is a problem with the mentoring process.

### **Discussion and Implications**

This study was conducted with three primary objectives, understanding of the burnout level of the pre-service ESL teachers, to investigate the pre-service ESL teachers' perception of their mentoring, and to examine if there is any significant relationship between the burnout of pre-service ESL teachers in Sri Lanka and the perception of their mentoring during the internship period. The discussion constructed based on the findings of data analysis presented in the previous section is provided in this section under each objective.

#### **Burnout of Pre-service ESL Teachers in Sri Lanka**

When trying to define burnout and to understand the rationale behind the CBI, according to Kristensen et al. (2005), it was found that "fatigue and exhaustion" that occur as a result of the emotional demand of the work (Schaufeli and Greenglass, 2001) as the foundation of CBI. Results of the burnout assessment conducted with the pre-service ESL teachers in Sri Lanka shows that the majority of them can be identified as showing some burnout level. When the mode (29.17 =20) burnout level is considered as a point of analysis, it is evident that only 32 cases were found below the mark of 29.17 which is only 29.1%. What these numbers indicate is that the majority of pre-service teachers considered here is exposed to work-related stressors of some kind. Zang and Sapp (2008) reporting Farber (1991) presents an array of stressors that could lead teachers to burnout such as "disturbing behaviour of the students, congested classrooms, laziness, pressure from the hierarchy, poor wages" etc. Though this situation is not new and has been identified and proven by many of the burnout researchers, the danger is that these teachers finish their internship period in one year and get the opportunity to step into a classroom on his or her own to teach. There is no guarantee that they would do so leaving their burnout behind or as a teacher not burnt out. They step into the new situation with the same burnout level, or their burnout level may sometimes increase if no proper measures are devised to manage their burnout status. It is in this light the issue of burnout has to be considered in the field of education, particularly in the field of pre-service teacher development.

#### **Burnout and Perception of Mentoring during the Internship Period**

One critical piece of information obtained from this study is how much variation in burnout of pre-service ESL teachers can be explained with the help of the perception of their mentors. As found in the previous section this value was only 5.8%. What this value means to those who are in the field of teacher education in Sri Lanka is that there is much to be explored. Primarily, when paying attention to the burnout levels of the pre-service ESL teachers identified during this study, it is understood that there is a great need for identifying what exactly contributes to their burnout. On the one hand, identifying such variables and taking corrective measures to manage the burnout of pre-service teachers will provide real meaning to pre-service teacher development. On the other hand, such a pragmatic approach will be beneficial to the students as well as to the system. When the trainees leave the NCOEs after internship and join the system as full-time teachers, it is their burnout that kills the spirit and energy to provide satisfactory service to the system. The result of this will be teachers leaving the system as early as possible in search of other professions leaving the system the burden of recruiting and training teachers over and over again. Further, in a much-secured system like in Sri Lanka where 90% of teachers come under the state sector, there is a possibility of many individuals remaining as teachers however much burnt out they are because of the uninterrupted benefits they get. Such a situation is more dangerous than teachers leaving the system early because of burnout. In such instances, a system suffers "turnover" (Maslach, 2014). That is even though the teachers are present physically they do not provide the full service expected of them, thus hindering the national development of a country and bringing down the quality of life, which directly depends on the education. As explained above, if mentoring as measured by the mentees' perception of mentors does not adequately explain the variation in burnout, it could either be because of the weaknesses in the mentoring programme or because there are other stronger reasons.

#### **Future research possibilities**

To investigate whether there are other reasons for burnout of pre-service EL teacher during the internship period could be one strong future research possibility that comes out as a result of the present study. Further to that, there is a need for a more in-depth investigation into the mentoring practices happening during the internship period to understand the actual nature of mentoring. Another essential idea for the future researchers is engaging in an in-depth study of the school mentors involved in this process so that a better idea of the reasons for pre-service ESL teachers' burnout could be obtained.

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