

## **The Effect of Stressful Factors, Locus of Control and Age on Emotional Labour and Burnout among Further and Adult Education Teachers in the U.K.**

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**Abstract**—The literature reveals that there are associations between a large number of factors occurring in the classroom and at schools and colleges, and that these impinge on the wellbeing of teachers in terms of emotional labour and burnout. However, most studies are cross-cultural and there has yet to be reliable and valid research conducted into the major occurrences of stressful elements that impinge on teachers in Further Education (FE) and adult education. Furthermore, the extent to which stressors found in FE and adult education are associated with emotional labour and burnout has yet to be elucidated. The literature shows that age is a mediator of both burnout and stress among the older and more experienced teaching staff. Furthermore, locus of control (LOC) is discussed as an important individual difference in moderating stress levels of teachers. This paper investigates the extent to which teachers in FE experience emotional labour and burnout with respect to age and LOC, and how this moderates stress levels. From a survey and focus group interview, the results show that gender and ethnicity, as well as age, had an effect on what teachers found stressful, the frequency and kind of emotional labour they experience, and their particular experiences of burnout. It is suggested that results could be implemented when considering the design of working conditions for individual teachers.

**Keywords**—Age; LOC; U.K FE/adult teachers; wellbeing

### **1 Stress, Emotional Labour and Burnout**

Some studies have examined the association between stress and wellbeing among teachers. They found many elements of the workplace to be associated with stress. However, the impact of workplace stressors coupled with age on emotional labour and burnout has yet to be fully elucidated among FE and adult education teachers in the U.K. Studies are mainly cross-cultural and research findings are examined in the light of these.

A study conducted by Naring, Briët and Brouwers [22] highlighted the link between job demands, stress and emotional labour. In line with other studies, job characteristics were found to be specifically related to emotional exhaustion. Surface

acting was significantly related to depersonalisation, and emotional consonance (the absence of emotional labour) was related to personal accomplishment. The researchers concluded that emotional labour provides an additional perspective for understanding work stress.

In another study, Yong and Rod [31] reported the results of a research project designed to measure the stress and the burnout levels of secondary school teachers in the Changchun region of Jilin Province, People's Republic of China, and to investigate whether particular demographic variables were related to stress and burnout. Teacher stress was measured using the Teacher Stress Inventory [11] and burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) [18]. The findings of this study indicated that a majority of the teachers experienced moderate levels of stress and a moderate level of emotional exhaustion. The study also found age and years of experience to be significantly related to stress and burnout. The findings reported that teachers in middle-age and mid-career suffered the highest levels of stress and burnout. This study also found that urban teachers and unmarried teachers were more vulnerable to both stress and burnout.

Others such as Skaalvik and Skaalvik [28] analysed how four potential stressors in the school environment (discipline problems, time pressure, low student motivation, and value dissonance) were related to teacher burnout. Although all the potential stressors were significantly related to emotional exhaustion, time pressure was the strongest predictor. In comparison, depersonalisation and personal accomplishment were not significantly related to time pressure but were significantly predicted by discipline problems and low student motivation. Teachers at the lowest grade levels reported more discipline problems and higher time pressure than teachers at higher grade levels, whereas teachers at the highest-grade levels experienced low student motivation as a greater problem than teachers at lower grade levels.

These studies show that most of the stress and burnout arising from factors such as emotional labour which teachers experience can be understood in terms of: job demands; location in which teachers are working; the extent to which they can manage their time effectively; whether they are married or not; student behaviour and age of teachers. This paper suggests that age is an important factor to consider in the analysis of stress and emotional labour among teachers in further and adult education institutions in the U.K. This is because most teachers in further education are above thirty years old.

## **2 Age, Emotional Labour and Burnout**

The Education and Training Foundation (2017) in the U.K pointed out that teaching staff are older than staff working in other educational roles, with approximately 40% of teaching staff aged fifty years or older. Over half of the staff in the further education sector is over the age of 45 and this could be because further education is a second career for many, with the average age of trainee teachers in further education being 37. That is, new entrants to the profession are older than other teachers elsewhere. Research conducted in the service sector examining the

relationship between age and emotional experiences of employees may have implications for the teaching profession as both areas of work deal with social interactions with other people.

Differences in experiencing stress related symptoms between different age categories may be partially explained by the socio-emotional selectivity theory (SST). That is, older people will recognise goals according to their remaining life-span, while younger people have a more open view of future goals [5]. Older people focus on wellbeing [6]. Inevitably, older adults may be more motivated than younger adults to avoid negative emotions or will tend to get rid of them quickly [24] and to report more pro-hedonic motivation (maintaining motivation in gaining positive affect) than younger adults in everyday life [25]. In addition, older adults' long-term experience with emotional situations may make them more effective and efficient in regulating their emotional experience [21]. Older adults reported that they can control emotions more easily than younger adults ([12]; [15]). Some researchers believe that older employees could limit the negative effects of emotional labour. For example, in the service sector Tang, Seal, Naumann and Miguel [30] reported that customers were more likely to make a decision to buy items from older employees because they have more sales experience and it is expected they are better able to practice deep acting skills. In field studies, older service workers, compared to younger workers, reported using emotional labour strategies associated with less emotional dissonance; specifically, they experienced using more naturally felt emotions, more deep acting, and less surface acting [8] and [10]. There is further evidence from laboratory studies that older adults are as effective, but not more so, as young adults in implementing strategies aimed at modifying emotional displays when instructed to do so ([17]; [27]).

Service employees' age and emotional labour was explored by Dahling and Perez [10]. The authors examined how the age of employees influences the emotional labour process. Results indicate that age is positively related to deep acting and to expressing naturally felt emotions (NFE), and negatively related to surface acting. That is, older adults seek to maximise positive and minimise negative emotional experiences. Further, they found that some of the effects of age on surface acting and expressing NFE were mediated by personality characteristics that confer positive emotions. Support for this suggests that a reason that older adults are more likely to express NFEs and less likely to surface act is that they are more disposed to experiencing positive emotions when conducting service interactions. These findings suggest that many adults remain in the workforce well into their 60s and 70s and that older adults may fit jobs that require emotional labour and interpersonal interactions [1]. However, Dahling and Perez [10] cannot determine whether older adults will provide better service based on their results although it can be concluded that emotion regulation motives and abilities predispose them to regulate their emotional displays in effective ways (i.e. deep acting and expressing NFE versus. surface acting). As a consequence of their investigation, Dahling and Perez [10] assert that organisations may benefit from the emotional labour tendencies of older service employees. That is, research shows that employees who engage in more deep acting and less surface acting tend to experience better personal outcomes, such as less burnout, less work-

family interference, and greater affective well-being, for example, Johnson and Spector [14] and Montgomery, Panagopolou, De Wildt, and Meenks, E [20]. Research also demonstrates that deep acting indirectly reduces turnover among service employees, whereas surface acting indirectly increases it [7]. Others identified social support as important in reducing stress, hence emotional labour and burnout.

For instance, Kinman, Wray and Strange [16] asserted that social support mitigates the negative impact of emotional demands on emotional exhaustion, feelings of personal accomplishment and job satisfaction. Their research highlights the need for teacher-training programmes to raise awareness of the emotional demands of teaching and consider ways to enhance emotion regulation skills in experienced as well as recently qualified staff.

However, there may be early retirement due to negative consequences of stress. For example, Baurer et al. [2] reported that premature retirement of school teachers was due to burnout, psychological and psychosomatic symptoms. They evaluated the relationship between occupational burden and psychological strain of teachers who were still in work. According to the MECCA (measure of coping capacity) questionnaire, 32.5% of the sample suffered from burnout. This was significantly higher among women, divorced teachers and teachers working part-time. As part of the MECCA, teachers were also asked to rate what they regarded as the strongest factor resulting in occupational burden. Teachers indicated that, besides high numbers of pupils in one class, they regarded destructive and aggressive behaviour of pupils as the primary stress factor.

Teachers often find it difficult to cope emotionally after leaving classroom teaching for another post in the education sector. A study reported by Mawhinney and Rinke [19] suggested that teachers feel their professional status extends beyond the classroom and it is suggested that this may be age related. Mawhinney and Rinke [19] explored the use of emotions by former urban teachers. Specifically, their research captured the emotional aftermath of leaving teaching around two themes:

- a) Recognition of guilt
- b) Continued support for their students

They found that teachers who left their work continue to struggle emotionally with their choice to leave the classroom while remaining committed to affecting change in the educational system. Reasons for their struggle with emotions could be related to their age, the types of stressors they experienced and individual differences such as LOC.

### **3 Wellbeing, Age and LOC**

The aim of Sünbül's [29] study was to gather how teacher burnout is related to LOC, job satisfaction and the demographic characteristics: - age and gender. A total of 290 Turkish school teachers responded to a survey. The "Job Satisfaction Scale" was used as one of the research instruments as well as the "Maslach Burnout Inventory" [18] which measures dimensions of teachers' burnout consisting of three

sub scales: emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment and depersonalisation. External LOC and age were positively related to the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout. Age was revealed to be significantly predictive of personal accomplishment.

In another study, Pavalache-Ilie and Ursu [23] identified the relation between burnout syndrome, LOC, job satisfaction and age. To establish the relationships, 113 Romanian high school teachers completed a three-part questionnaire which comprised: Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, Job Satisfaction Survey and Work LOC Scale. Results suggest that internal LOC employees are more likely to be satisfied at work than those who were external LOC. No link was reported between burnout and age. Other research considered the possibility of helping teachers to adopt LOC which buffers burnout.

For example, Bitsadze and Japaridze [3] discussed that intensive reforms taking place in the general education field in Georgia impose substantial stress to teachers. Bitsadze and Japaridze [3] proposed that this would lead to burnout of teachers. Their research showed that some teachers experienced burnout while others did not. Another purpose of the research discussed by Bitsadze and Japaridze [3] was to identify how LOC may have influenced the level of burnout in Georgian teachers. Two self-assessment instruments; Rotter Scale and Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), were used to measure LOC and level of burnout among Georgian teachers. Two questionnaires were distributed among 407 teachers at public schools in Georgia. After disregarding inaccurately filled out questionnaires, analysis was conducted using data received from 373 questionnaires. The research findings revealed that Georgian teachers with an internal LOC are less likely to suffer burnout. Bitsadze and Japaridze [3] further discussed the opportunities to change LOC from external to internal as a part of teacher professional development activities. It is proposed this would be overseen by school principals with the aim of redesigning teacher preparation programs so as to make teachers more resistant to professional burnout.

To further examine the relationship between stress, LOC and age on wellbeing, research was conducted with further and adult education teachers in the U.K.

## **4 Methodology**

A qualtrics template survey was designed to capture:

- Factors which teachers find stressful
- Emotional labour measured by the Emotional Labour Scale [4]
- Teacher's Emotional Labour Scale [9]
- Locus of Control of teachers [26]
- Burnout of teachers [18]
- Age bracket (n=22) 41% 50-60, 18% 40-50 and 14% 21-40
- Gender (n=17) 71% female and 29% male
- Ethnicity (n=21) 89% white English/Welsh/Scottish/ N.Irish/British; (9% other white background and 6% other ethnic groups.

Teachers also took part in focus group interviews. All participants used pseudonyms and completed an ethical consent form. Interviews were conducted in three different departments.

## **5 Results**

### **Focus group quotes**

Researcher: ‘To what extent does age affect how emotions are managed, in your view?’

Helen: ‘I think with age comes experience and you get used to it – so we support lots and lots of learners every year but every year one or two parents will say “My child hasn’t achieved because of the support” and that would get me very upset years ago. But now I’m thinking right, which two parents is it going to be this year? Because you get, I wouldn’t say blasé but you become able to deal with stressful situations like that, because you’ve done it before.’

Dave: ‘I don’t know. I’m 50-odd so – I mean the laptop has just gone off! And I couldn’t get all the way down to the bottom to put any more of these scores on. So, has that affected me? Sometimes things can affect you. You know you have to just keep it inside if you’re in front of a class and what I think is, sometimes things at home, you’ve got to keep at home. And because they expect you not to bring it in, but they expect you to keep taking stuff home with you from college basically so it’s not a fair, it’s not a fair work/life balance currently. And then when you look at say this emotional thing, we do deal with students who are in difficult circumstances, sofa-surfing, estranged from parents, they’re homeless, hungry, frankly smelling if they haven’t had a bath for a few days, not had a wash. So, all these things roll into it and you know you’re supposed to keep this front on that you know, that you know have this professional air. Sometimes you know it can just creep in and think sometimes it masks some of it but not all the time’.

Stephanie: ‘You know I think, we’re all between 30 and 40’.

Sarah: ‘Some 50, 60.’

Sarah: ‘I haven’t seen any difference in age categories in terms of showing emotions’.

Stephanie: ‘Yeah, we’ve got, yeah, very few under 20, not under 20, under 30. Very few under 30. I don’t see there is a correlation’.

### **5.1 Locus of control**

Participants completed the Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966). The LOC for fifteen respondents were borderline internal locus of control.

## 5.2 Stressful factors

**Survey data:** Using thematic coding techniques, the following items were identified as stressful factors recorded by respondents to the survey and focus group interview.

**Table 1.** Stressful Factors Reported by Teachers

Main Themes	Examples
Duties outside school hours	Union duties
Time management	Set timescales for meeting targets and deadlines;
Resources	Not enough resources to meet students and teachers' needs such as working space for teachers.
Administration	Excessive administration such as marking
Students' behaviour	Challenging student behaviour (e.g. lack of punctuality, and respect for other learners and teachers); bad behaviour of students not sufficiently and consistently addressed by the college and lack of communication between teachers and students.
Management	Dealing with management especially when they are not well informed; lack of clarity of classes to be taught in the academic year; meeting budget requirements by the end of the academic year; expectation placed on learners; preparing for government changes- preparing for compulsory GCSE for learners; more junior staff than managers leads to stress
Work demands	Excessive workloads; lack of quiet working spaces; personal expectations and feelings of not meeting demands at work. Staff shortages put demands on teachers to deliver modules and conduct marking.
Ambiguity in work practice	Conflict of responsibility and expectations; insufficient/vague instructions from supervisors/management.

**Other sources of stress:** Another teacher noted that she becomes anxious in one-to-one learning situations as learners may not attend and so teachers may lose hours. A teacher also reported that she found things impossible to do when she lacks subject knowledge. Anxiety may also arise when trying to impart information to students and motivate them. Lack of student progress in examinations is also a source of stress for a teacher. The table indicates that the major sources of stress are student behaviour, management practices and work demand. Other evidence of the kinds of stressors found in the workplace is from focus group quotations.

### Focus group quotes

Researcher: 'What are the sources of stress for you at work?'

Helen: 'The stress for me comes, not when I've got too much to do, but when I've got something impossible to do'.

Dave: 'My stress is how to motivate students. And a further one is exams when they're not able to do the exam and I get frustrated.'

Stephanie: 'Abusive language from students is not taken to higher levels and this is dismissed. I don't feel safe to leave the college at 5.30, and management doesn't take it seriously when I receive language abuse and physical threats. The majority of women suffer from anxiety and sleeplessness.'

Sarah: 'I don't cater for all of the mixed ability groups and many need extra attention one to one. Trying to get students to pass exams is stressful.'

### 5.3 Use of emotions in the workplace

When asked, 24 teachers noted on a survey scale they somewhat agree that they will work to reach goals, will seek help from colleagues and also agree that they manage emotions when interacting with others at work as this helps them to do their job well. Further to this scale, the emotional labour scale was completed by fifteen teachers.

### 5.4 Emotional labour scale

On a scale of 0 (never) to 5 (always) teachers were asked to rate how frequently they use emotions on an average day. A score between 3-4 indicates ‘most of the time’. Teachers agree they use emotions required and needed for their job frequently, and will use a variety of emotions with other people. They tend to display surface acting most of the time and will not show or express strong emotions.

**Table 2.** Emotional Labour Scale Statements, Mean Occurrences and Frequency

	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Type</b>
1	Express particular emotions needed for my job	3.20	Frequency
2	Use a variety of emotions in dealing with people	3.40	Variety
3	Display many different emotions when interacting with others	3.07	Variety
4	Display specific emotions required by your job	3.00	Frequency
5	Adopt certain emotions as part of my job	3.00	Frequency
6	Resist expressing true feelings	3.14	surface acting
7	Express intense emotions	1.47	Intensity
8	Show strong emotions	1.60	Intensity

#### **Teacher’s emotional labour scale**

On a scale of 0 (never) to 5 (always) teachers were asked to rate how frequently they engage in behaviours with students, co-workers, supervisors/line managers and heads of departments on an average day at work. Between 3 and 4 indicates ‘most of the time’. In terms of emotional display rules, participants were asked to respond to statements on a scale of 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The teachers engaged in naturally felt emotions, surface acting and deep acting. They tended not to hide or fake emotions.

**Table 3.** Teachers’ Emotional Labour Scale Statements with Means of Frequency and Type of Behaviours shown by Teachers

	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Type</b>
1	The emotions I show to my students match the emotions I feel	3.27	naturally felt emotions
2	The emotions I express to students are genuine	3.93	naturally felt emotions
3	Even when I’m upset or angry, I make others think that I’m in a good mood	3.20	surface acting
4	Really try to feel the emotions I have to show as part of my job	3.07	deep acting
5	The emotions I show my students come naturally	3.33	naturally felt emotions
6	Part of my job is to make students feel satisfied with the work I do	3.67	
7	My place of work expect me to act enthusiastic in my interactions with students	3.73	surface acting
8	I know the emotional display rules I am expected to display to students	3.53	surface acting
9	Show emotions I don’t feel	1.64	Faking
10	Hide emotions I feel to perform my job	1.53	Hiding
11	Pretend to have emotions that I don’t really have	1.46	Faking
12	To do my job, I pretend to have emotions that I think I should display	1.69	Faking

**Focus group quotes**

Researcher: ‘Do you feel teachers generally experience the emotions they show?’

Helen: ‘Yes, I think as a profession, we’re very open’

Claire: ‘Yes I think to a degree. I think some people are more open. Some people don’t always want to express how they’re feeling and prefer to just deal with it by themselves.’

Sarah: ‘I don’t show my emotions.’

Stephanie: ‘We have to suppress our emotions as we are being told we have to be extremely professional. We don’t feel supported by management but we support each other in the classroom. Staff can vent their frustration or anger in the staffroom and then put on their happy face when going back to the classroom.’

**5.5 Burnout scale**

On a scale of 0 (never) to 6 (always) teachers were asked to rate the extent to which they experienced particular emotions, including frustration and exhilaration. They were also asked to rate the extent to which they agree with statements about their working experiences. Teachers tended to report personal achievements, the ability to deal with emotional issues calmly and effectively and positively influencing students. This infers that the exhaustion which they feel is from the intensity of the job rather than people interaction.

**Table 4.** Statements of Burnout Types and How Frequently these are Experienced by Teachers.

	Statement	Mean	Type
1	I can easily understand how my students feel about things	3.75	Personal Achievements (PA)
2	I deal very effectively with the problems of my students	4.13	PA
3	I feel I'm positively influencing other peoples' lives through my work	4.56	PA
4	I feel I'm working too hard on my job	3.60	Exhaustion
5	I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my students	3.43	PA
6	I feel exhilarated after working closely with my students	3.93	PA
7	I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job	4.21	PA
8	In my work, I deal with emotional problems calmly	4.53	PA
9	Working with people all day is really a strain for me	1.92	Exhaustion
10	I've become more callous towards people since I took the job	1.42	Depersonalisation
11	I don't really care what happens to some students	0.62	Depersonalisation
12	Working with people directly puts too much stress on me	1.31	Exhaustion
13	I feel I'm at the end of the rope	1.69	Exhaustion
14	I feel students blame me for some of their problems	1.58	Depersonalisation

## 6 Conclusion

Students' behaviour and issues related to management were most frequently noted as stressful to teachers who engaged in surface and deep acting and NFEs. Personal achievements are important to teachers and they report not faking emotions but hide them in the classroom or when interacting with students. This is supported by quotes from teachers who said that they would show emotions in the staff room where there is support from other staff members. Older teachers are more adaptable in dealing with stressful encounters and may be able to manage their emotions as a result. Furthermore, older teachers tended to experience personal achievements in their job role more often and this may be because of older teachers' skills in interacting with students resulting in positive outcomes.

Of note, is that teachers score marginally on internal LOC. This suggests that older teachers on occasions will tend to externalise stressful situations out of their control. That is, the causes of stress are uncontrollable. However, teachers will in most instances take responsibility for occurrences which may be stressful and this may engender either surface or deep acting. Younger teachers who are unable to recognise how to use emotions effectively may leave their job.

Findings of this research suggest there are implications for the design of new working patterns for individuals who find their working conditions and interactions with students stressful due to the demands of the work place and individual differences in LOC, gender, ethnicity, age and use of emotional labour.

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