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# Indicators, Causes and Strategies of Curbing Burnouts among Lecturers of Some Universities in Cameroon

Lilian F. Wiysahnyuy<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Higher Teacher Training College, The University of Bamenda, Cameroon. E-mail: fai\_lilian@yahoo.com

## Abstract

In most university settings, lecturers have diverse activities which require an enabling environment for optimum and sustainable performance. The absence of this working climate could lead to an emotional outburst known as burnout, a critical health concern that manifests in different ways. Burnout as a psychological impediment is most often overlooked when discussing the range of factors that usually affect the quality of lecturers' professional output. This is because most academics hardly notice they are emotionally unhealthy until this burnout starts manifesting in other aspects of their lives like physical health, social interactions, work and family. It is on this premise that this paper focuses on the indicators, causes of and strategies that can be put in place to curb burnout among university lecturers. The research design used in this study was a cross-sectional survey where an online questionnaire was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from 89 lecturers (47.1% Males, 52.9 Females), age range 30-65 years, of the Universities of Bamenda, Buea and Dschang. Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire was coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 while qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that some of the indicators of burnout often exhibited by lecturers are feeling emotionally and physically drained, irritation at minor issues, feeling misunderstood by colleagues and administrators, being frustrated with part of the job and unpleasant level of pressure. The majority of respondents reported that burnout is often caused by constant criticism, overwork, inadequate compensation and poor working social climate. To reduce this emotional/mental challenge, the respondents suggested that there is a need to set up stress management, self-care and work-life balance programmes, and to promote a positive social climate and adequate motivation at the workplace.

**Keywords:** Burnouts, Causes, Health, Indicators, Lecturers, Strategies

## 1. Introduction

The context of universities in Cameroon like elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa presents certain peculiarities that somehow play on the professional input, psychological and physical health of one of the key actors, the lecturers. It is a system charged with bureaucratic orderings and overburdened workload for some lecturers due to limited manpower in certain fields of study and also due to complementary roles in administrative positions. These inadequacies often perturb the smooth functioning of pedagogic activities. It is also a setting with limited facilities and other professional opportunities that could keep lecturers continually enthusiastic to carry on their professional responsibilities. While these constraints might suggest various viewpoints, it could be a pointer to

an important but less articulated psychological syndrome that lecturers routinely experience while discharging their duties.

Most often, the key concern in higher institutions of learning is to see lecturers dispensing knowledge to attain the expected goal. Little or no attention is paid to the lecturers' emotions and psychological well-being. Lecturers have diverse activities which if not well handled can lead to various health issues. One of the most common health issues that they grapple with is burnout which is often overlooked by scholars. Maslach (2003) indicates that burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by chronic stress. It occurs when people feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands. According to Shimony et al. (2022), numerous studies have confirmed a two-factor structure of the burnout syndrome, which are emotional exhaustion and lack of personal fulfilment. Burnout among lecturers can also be considered as employee burnout which the World Health Organisation (WHO) describes as a 'workplace phenomenon resulting from chronic unmanageable workplace stress that has not been successfully managed' (Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2023). Maslach et al. (2016) state that burnout reduces productivity, drains energy, increases feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, cynicism, and resentment. This shows that burnout is one of the challenges that could lead to low input and output in the university setting especially in relation to teaching and learning activities. Since most lecturers get into this stage of prolonged stress which generates to depression and other health problems, it is necessary to find out the indicators (manifestations) and causes of burnout, and strategies that could be put in place to reduce the phenomenon.

## 2. Background and Literature

From the perspectives of some researchers like Pines & Aronson, (1988); Kristensen et al., (2005); Shirom & Melamed (2005), burnout is unidimensional in nature, pertaining only to exhaustion and thus there are measures of burnout that examine this dimension only. This means burnout is limited to one aspect which is mental exhaustion. Maslach (2003) counters this view as he indicates that burnout is the end state of long-term chronic stress which can be represented in three dimensions; 'mental fatigue or emotional exhaustion, negative feelings and perceptions about the people one works with or depersonalisation, and a decrease in feelings of personal accomplishment.' Morse et al., (2012) on their part indicate that many persons consider burnout as a work-related mental-health impairment, which is often correlated with anxiety and depression. From these two authors there is an indication that burnout is a health-related issue that can manifest in diverse forms. The work of Smith & Reid (2024) indicate that burnout could be manifested physically through frequent tiredness, recurrent headaches, change in appetite or sleep patterns and low immunity; then emotionally through feelings like a sense of failure, self-doubt, helplessness, defeat, decrease satisfaction, negative outlook and detachments; and behaviorally like isolation from others, absenteeism from work, withdrawal from responsibility and resorting to alcoholism or drug use as a coping strategy. This shows that burnout symptoms vary with individuals. According to Marenco-Escuderos, & Ávila-Toscano (2016) some manifestations of burnout syndrome in teachers induce mental health problems that can vary depending on individual and/or work characteristics.

From the studies of Hellman & Morrison (1987), Maslach & Leiter (2005), Hardiman & Simmonds, (2013), some of the causes of burnout are: excessive workload, inadequate rewards, discrimination, favouritism, meaningless tasks, conflicts and disrespect. They also state that burnout is triggered by emotional labour which involves controlling or hiding negative emotions such as anger, irritation or discomfort to comply with the rules or requirements of the organisation and objectives of the job, as well as the display of emotions not felt. Huebner (1994) indicates that inappropriate work supervision like excessive directives, and primary focus on the negative aspects without valuing achievements and efforts, increases the risk of burnout among workers. According to Demerouti et al. (2001), burnout could emerge from a mismatch between the individual and the work environment especially when the job requires sustained physical, emotional, or cognitive efforts. Bakker et al., (2000) show that when the work expectations and demands are too high, an individual may begin experiencing chronic fatigue, which may eventually lead to burnout. This can cause some individuals to start distancing themselves psychologically from their work. Hannigan, et al, (2004) state that a combination of factors like the nature of tasks, and the relationships between colleagues and bosses, are possible triggers of burnout (Huebner, 1994). From the standpoint of most of the researchers cited here, burnout is mostly triggered by the nature of

work and the social relationships within the work environment. According to Smith & Reid, (2024), poor work-life balance which consists of poor time management, unsustainable workload or the inability to switch off after work hours increase the level of stress among employees which eventually leads to burnout. Some researchers indicate that teachers' self-efficacy could also be a contributing factor to burnouts (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Self-efficacy entails teachers' beliefs about their capabilities to carry out their tasks effectively with positive output. As a result of these beliefs some over exert themselves, thus leading to tiredness and frequent headaches. If these tasks are not achieved as previewed, the individual feels frustrated and this leads to burnout. According to Agyapong et al. (2022), some of the causes and manifestations of burnout increase the likelihood of teachers leaving the profession since they feel less productive and frustrated. This justifies the need to understand, prevent and manage this health issue.

The research of Smith & Reid (2024) summaries how people could deal with burnout using the three Rs which are Recognition of the warning signs, that is manifestations; Reverse which focuses on seeking support and management of stress; and Resilience which is taking care of physical and emotional health. After recognising the symptoms of burnout, it can be reversed by using different therapies. The Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can be used to improve employees' perception of work, reduce complaints and reframe how they think about their work (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Santoft, et al., 2019). Some of these CBT strategies involve cognitive restructuring, practicing new skills, didactic stress management, and relaxation which includes both physical and mental techniques. According to Tetrick and Winslow, (2015) another aspect of CBT which helps individuals suffering from burnout to adapt to stressful events and reduce tension at the workplace is mindfulness meditation which involves sitting comfortably, focusing on breathing, and bringing the mind's attention to the present moment without drifting into concerns about the past or the future. According to Smith et al. (2014) and Grensman, et al. (2018), other preventive methods of burnout include adopting healthy eating and sleeping habits; setting boundaries; taking breaks from technology and learning how to manage stress. Some individuals are addicted to technology to the extent that it leads to mental health issues. Woolston (2022) indicates that one of the interventions that can address and improve conditions on the work side is a healthy work-life balance, which checks the ways in which people spend their non-work time. This can greatly help to prevent burnout and improve health and well-being of workers generally. Thomas (2024) reiterates the need to foster a greater work-life balance and implement stress-reducing initiatives like guided meditations and sleeps cape sounds to help employee prioritize rest as fundamental in preventing burnout. Since one of the triggers of burnout among employees is on poor leadership and relationship, Maslach et al., 2016 emphasize that supportive leadership and positive relationships with colleagues are also helpful in preventing and reducing burnout among workers.

### *2.1. Research Questions*

1. What are the indicators of burnout among lecturers in some state universities in Cameroon?
2. What are the prevailing causes of burnout among lecturers in some state universities in Cameroon?
3. Which strategies can be put in place to curb burnout among lecturers?

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1. Design*

The research design used in this study was a cross sectional survey where data was collected using an online questionnaire from both female and male lecturers of different age groups across three state universities in Cameroon at the same time.

### *3.2. Participants*

A convenience sampling technique was used to select three state universities because the researcher could easily have access to some of the lecturers in these universities to facilitate the posting of the online questionnaire in their different academic WhatSapp forums. The universities were; the University of Bamenda (UBa), the

University of Buea (UB) and the University of Dschang (UDS). The sample consisted of 89 lecturers (47.1% Males, 52.9 Females) of various grades, age range 30-65 years who voluntarily completed the online questionnaire on 'Indicators, Causes and Strategies of Curbing Burnouts among Lecturers of Some Universities in Cameroon'.

### 3.3. Instrument and procedure

An online semi-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of four sections which were: demographic information, indicators of burnout, causes of burnouts and strategies to prevent and manage burnout. Section A focused on the demographic data, Section B consisted of 10 closed-ended items on a scale of 5 (Not at all, Rarely, Sometimes, Often and Very often) which was intended to collect quantitative data on the frequency of each indicator of burnout among lecturers. Section C focused on the 9 causes of burnout which were measured on a scale of 4 (Not at all, Low, Moderate and High) to see the levels of each cause. The last section was an open-ended item which centered on the strategies to prevent and manage burnout among lecturers. This was purposely to elicit detailed opinions on how to curb this phenomenon. Concerning the administration of the instruments, since the researcher only had access to the WhatsApp group of the University of Bamenda, the instrument was shared with some colleagues of the Universities of Buea and Dschang who then disseminated on the WhatsApp groups of the teaching staff in the selected Universities. This was done over a period of three weeks.

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire was coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. The coding was on a scale of 0-4 as follows: not at all=0, rarely= 1, sometimes =2, often=3 and very often=4. The researcher made sure that all the attributes in the variable view of the SPSS were properly filled and their corresponding codes properly filled in the data view. To avoid errors, the data was reviewed to ensure that any mistake was corrected. Attention was given to the column containing missing values to ensure that no entries were omitted. The responses were then attributed serial numbers that could help match them to the database in case there was to be need for cross-verification. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics while thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data on the proposed strategies to curb burnout. Still on the qualitative data, a word cloud was created (figure) using the Word Cloud library where the size of each word reflects its frequency within the provided text responses.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Indicators of burnout

To get the indicators of burnout, items 1 to 10 of the questionnaire were analysed and presented in the form of frequencies and percentages as seen in table 1.

Table 1: Indicators of burnout

S/N	Items	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
1	Feeling drained of physical or emotional energy in relation to your job	3 (3.3%)	12(13.5%)	50(56.2%)	13(14.6%)	11(12.4%)
2	Prone to negative thinking about your job	17(19.1%)	28(31.5%)	37(41.6%)	4(4.5%)	3(3.4%)
3	Harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserve	20(22.5%)	41(46.5%)	22(24.7%)	4(4.5%)	2(2.2%)
4	Easily gets irritated by minor problems, or by your colleagues	12(13.5%)	29(32.6%)	40(44.9%)	7(7.9%)	1(1.1%)
5	Feel misunderstood or unappreciated by your colleagues and administrators	9(10.1%)	22(24.7%)	39(43.8%)	14(15.7%)	5(5.6%)
6	Feel like you have no one to talk to	40(44.9%)	23(25.8%)	20(22.5%)	6(6.7%)	0
7	Feeling unpleasant level of pressure to succeed	17(19.1%)	19(21.3%)	32(36%)	15(16.95)	6(6.7%)
8	Feel that you are not getting what you want out of your job	15(16.95)	14(15.7%)	35(39.3%)	17(19.1%)	8(9%)

<b>9</b>	Feeling like in the wrong profession	64(71.9%)	14(15.7%)	10(11.2%)	1(1.1%)	0
<b>10</b>	Becoming frustrated with part of your job	26(29.2%)	19(21.3%)	33(37.1%)	9(10.1%)	2(2.2%)

Table 1 indicates that a slight majority 50 (56.2%) of the respondents claimed they sometimes felt drained of physical or emotional energy in relation to their job, 13(14.6%) said they often felt that way, 11(12.4%) said they had such feelings very often, 12(13.5%) indicated they rarely had such feelings while 3 (3.3%) of them indicated that they did not have such feelings. Looking at the percentages associated with the responses; it is clear that at one point in time most of the respondents felt drained of emotional and physical energy in relation to their work. When asked if they were prone to negative thinking about their job, 17 (19.1%) of the respondents claimed not at all, 28 (31.5%) said rarely, majority 37 (41.6%) indicated sometimes, 4(4.5%) showed they often did, while 3 (3.4%) said they were very often thinking negatively about their job.

Respondents were also questioned whether they had been harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserved. In response to that, some of them 20 (22.5%) claimed that they had never been harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserved, the majority 41 (46.5%) claimed they did that rarely, others 22 (24.7%) indicated they did that sometimes, 4 (4.5%) said they often did that, while 2 (2.2%) revealed that they did that very often.

When the respondents were asked whether they easily got irritated by minor problems, or by colleagues, 12 (13.5%) said not all, 29 (32.6%) said they rarely did, the majority 40 (44.9%) claimed they sometimes did, a few of them 7 (7.9%) indicated they often did that while only 1 (1.1%) of them claimed to have done that very often. Also, when respondents were questioned whether they felt misunderstood or unappreciated by colleagues and administrators, a few 9 (10.1%) disclosed they had never felt that way, 22 (24.7%) claimed they rarely felt that way, the majority 39 (43.8%) said they sometimes did, 14 (15.7%) indicated they often did that, while 5 (5.6%) claimed they very often felt misunderstood or unappreciated. This shows that at one point in time most of the respondents have had a feeling of being misunderstood or unappreciated by colleagues or the administration.

The respondents were also requested to indicate whether they had never felt like they had no one to talk to. A good number of them 40 (44.9%) indicated they had never felt that way, 23 (25.8%) said they rarely had such feelings, 20 (22.5%) disclosed they sometimes did, 6 (6.7%) indicated they often felt like they had no one to talk to. When inquired if they felt unpleasant level of pressure to succeed, 17 (19.1%) of the respondents denied, 19 (21.3%) claimed they rarely did, 32 (36%) said they sometimes did, 15 (16.95) said they often did, while 6 (6.7%) said they did that very often. The responses show that most of the respondents have had the feelings of unpleasant pressure to succeed.

When asked, whether they felt like they were not getting what they wanted out of their job, 15(16.95) said they had never felt that way, 14 (15.7%) claimed they rarely felt so, the majority 35 (39.3%) said they sometimes felt so, 17 (19.1%) indicated they often felt that way, while a few 8 (9%) said they very often felt like they were not getting what they wanted out of their job. The respondents were also asked whether they felt they were in the wrong profession. A wide majority, 64 (71.9%) said they had never had such feelings, some 14 (15.7%) said they rarely had such feelings, 10 (11.2%) said they sometimes had such feelings and only 1(1.1%) person claimed to have often had such feelings. This shows that most of the respondents do not regret being in the profession. When they were questioned on whether they were becoming frustrated with part of their job, some of the respondents 26 (29.2%) indicated that they were not, 19 (21.3%) said they rarely did, many of them 33(37.1%) said they sometimes did, a few of them 9 (10.1%) said they often did, while 2 (2.2%) said they very often become frustrated with parts of their job.

Generally, the statistics show that most of the respondents have experienced burnout in one way or the other. The results show that item 1 which is on feeling drained of physical or emotional energy in relation to job had the highest value while the feeling of being in the wrong profession had the least value. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between burnout indicators with feeling drained of physical or emotional energy in relation to job having the highest value of 1.0 while the feeling of being in the wrong profession has the least statistical value of

0.0. Therefore, one of the prominent indicators of burnout among lecturers is feeling of emotional and physical exhaustion.

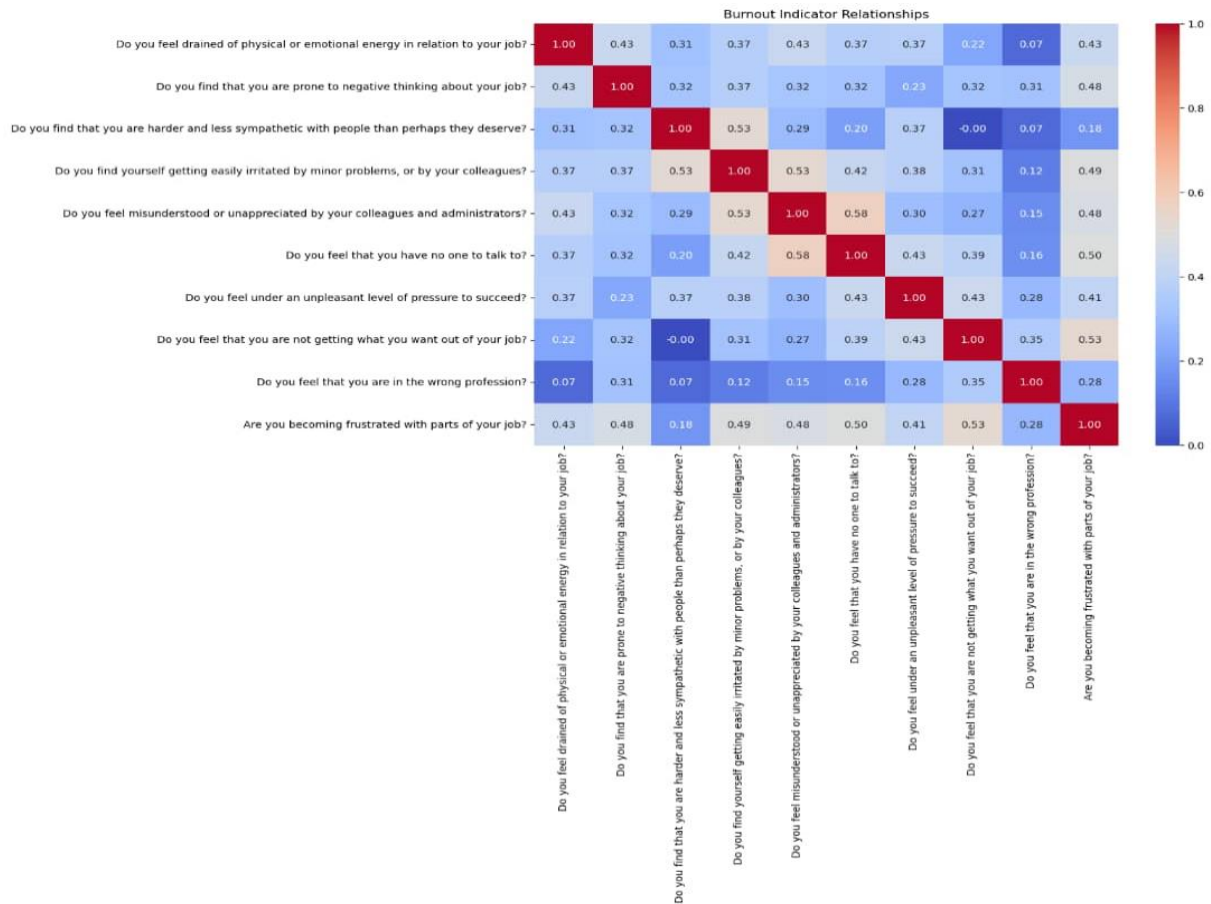


Figure 1: Relationship between the indicators of burnouts

4.2. Causes of burnout

In an attempt to identify the causes of burnout, items 11 to 19 of the questionnaire were analysed and presented in form of percentages and frequencies in table 2.

Table 2: Causes of burnout

Items	Not at all	Low	Moderate	High
Low Autonomy	11(12.4%)	28(35.5%)	41(46%)	9(10.1%)
Constant criticism	13(14.6%)	37(41.6%)	22(24.7%)	17(19.1%)
Inadequate Preparation	23(25.8%)	37(41.6%)	23(25.85)	6(6.7%)
Challenging Teaching Situations	13(14.6%)	37(39.3%)	30(33.7%)	11(12.4%)
Lack of Resources	5(5.65)	18(20.2%)	31(34.8%)	35(39.3%)
Feeling Overworked /overstretched	6(6.7%)	13(14.6%)	36(40.1%)	34(38.2%)
Lack of Appropriate Compensation	3(3.4%)	15(16.9%)	34(38.2%)	37(41.6%)
Encountering Classroom management Difficulties	17(19.1%)	37(41.6%)	29(32.6%)	6(6.75)
Poor Workplace Relationships	12(13.5%)	33(37.1%)	30(33.1%)	14(15.75)

The statistics in table 2 indicate the various levels of each cause of burnout. Concerning low autonomy as a cause of burnout, 11 (12.4%) respondents indicated they had not experienced it, 28 (35.5%) stated to have experienced it at a low level, majority 41 (46%) claimed at moderate levels, while 9 (10.1%) said they had experienced it at a high level. In relation to constant criticism, 13 (14.6%) of the respondents indicated not to

have experienced it, 37 (41.6%) of them had experienced it at a low level, 22 (24.7%) had experienced it at moderate levels, while 17 (19.1%) had experienced at high levels. Looking at inadequate preparation, 23 (25.8%) of the respondents claimed that they were always adequately prepared, 37 (41.6%) experienced low levels of inadequate preparation, 23 (25.85) showed moderate levels of inadequate preparations while 6(6.7%) indicated high levels of inadequate preparations. Concerning challenging teaching situations, some 13 (14.6%) of the respondents indicated not to have had challenging teaching situations, 37 (39.3%) claimed they had witnessed challenging teaching situations at low levels, 30 (33.7%) of them had experienced at moderate levels while 11 (12.4%) had experienced high levels of challenging teaching situation.

Looking at the issue of lack of resources, 5 (5.6%) indicated that they had not experienced lack of resources, 18 (20.2%) claimed they had experienced it at low levels, many, 31 (34.8%) indicated they had suffered moderately and a majority, 35 (39.3%) indicated that they had experienced high levels of lack of resources. In relation to feeling overworked /overstretched, 6 (6.7%) denied it, 13 (14.6%) of them disclosed to have had such feelings at low levels, 36 (40.1%) said they had experienced at moderate levels and many, 34 (38.2%) indicated they had experienced such feelings at high levels.

Concerning lack of appropriate compensation, only 3 (3.4%) denied, 15 (16.9%) indicated low levels, 34 (38.2%) claimed moderate levels and 37 (41.6%) indicated high levels. On the issue of classroom management difficulties, a few 17 (19.1%) claimed they had never encountered classroom management difficulties, the majority 37 (41.6%) indicated to have experienced it at low levels, some 29 (32.6%) at moderate levels and a few 6 (6.75) at high level. In a similar manner, 12 (13.5%) of the respondents stated that they had never experienced poor workplace relationships, the majority 33 (37.1%) had experienced at low levels, 30 (33.1%) of them said they experienced it at moderate level while 14 (15.75) of them mentioned they had experienced poor workplace relationships at high levels. Based on the above analysis, it is evident that many respondents have experienced lack of appropriate compensation, inadequate resources and had felt overworked or overstretched at high levels. These suggest these are the main causes of burnout among the respondents.

#### 4.3. Strategies to curb burnout

Table 3: Thematic analysis for proposed strategies to curb burnout

Question	Theme	Grounding	Sample Quotations
Propose some of the strategies that can be put in place to prevent and manage burnout among lecturers	Adequate Motivation	All	'Reasonable and timely compensations and payments of dues.' 'Teachers should be well compensated.' 'When people work, let them be recognised.' 'Lecturers should be motivated through appreciation and incentives.' 'Lectures should be well remunerated and their teaching should be valorised.' 'Acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of lecturers and that will enhance a positive work environment and improve their input.' 'One of the best ways to reduce burnout among lecturers is to recognize the work they do, there are some administrators that do not recognize the efforts people put into work and this is frustrating, the least they can do is to acknowledge the efforts of others.'
	Adequate infrastructure /resources	All	'Adequate workspaces (equipped offices with internet connectivity).' 'Good lecture halls should be provided for all courses.' 'Improve classroom working conditions for teaching like equipped classrooms for the use of projectors.' 'Lecture halls should be assigned taking into consideration the number of students, some lecturers get frustrated when teaching and some students are standing because of inadequate seating space.'
	Better working conditions	Majority	'Working conditions should be improved morally, socially and financially.' 'When the working conditions are good, lecturers will hardly feel frustrated and that will prevent burnout'
	Respecting holidays/leave	Majority	'Letting lecturers free off work activities during their holidays'. 'Avoid giving unnecessary tasks to lecturers during holidays or leave.' 'Sabbatical leave should be encouraged.'
	Workload management	Majority	'Assign fair and reasonable workloads, lecturers should ensure adequate preparation of the lessons and effectively plan their teaching, grading, and research.'
	Staff welfare services	Majority	'There is need for Staff welfare that promotes a convivial working atmosphere which enhances progress.'
	Flexible Schedules	Majority	'Allow flexibility in schedules where it could be possible to accommodate personal needs and promote a healthier work-life balance.'



Stress Management Programs	Majority	'Offer workshops or training on stress management techniques to help lecturers cope with job-related stress effectively.' 'Include topics on lecturers' wellbeing during pedagogic seminars.' 'Raise awareness on burnout because there are many persons who have very little knowledge on this health issue.' 'Encourage continuous learning and provide resources for lecturers to enhance their skills, keeping them engaged and motivated.'
Positive Social climate	Majority	'Good relationships between lecturers and hierarchy should be encouraged especially in terms of communication and mutual respect. Some colleagues get frustrated with their work based on the treatment they receive from their bosses.' 'Administrators should build a positive working environment for colleagues by respecting one another, avoiding constant criticism, discrimination and favouritism.' 'Avoid over stretching colleagues and respect job description'. 'Administrators should promote a convivial working atmosphere that encourages progress and not stress.' 'Establish transparent communication channels to address concerns and provide timely feedback.'
Leisure	some	'Organise recreational activities for Lecturers.' 'Provide relaxation activities for staff like sports and social.'
Self-care and effective work life balance	some	'Teachers should engage in self-care and effective work-life balance'. 'Include rest periods in the calendar of activities.' 'In order to prevent burnout, it is important to effectively plan activities which involves work time, time with family, time for relaxation with friends and personal time.' 'Lecturers should create time to hang out with trusted friends.'

Table 3 exposes themes on strategies to prevent and manage burnout. The identified themes include: adequate compensation, motivation, adequate infrastructure, better working conditions, holidays/leave void of academic work, self-care and effective work-life balance, leisure, workload management, staff welfare services, flexible schedules, stress management programmes and positive social climate. Some of the frequent suggestions are presented in the word cloud in figure 2. This shows how frequent words appear in the suggestions by the lecturers.

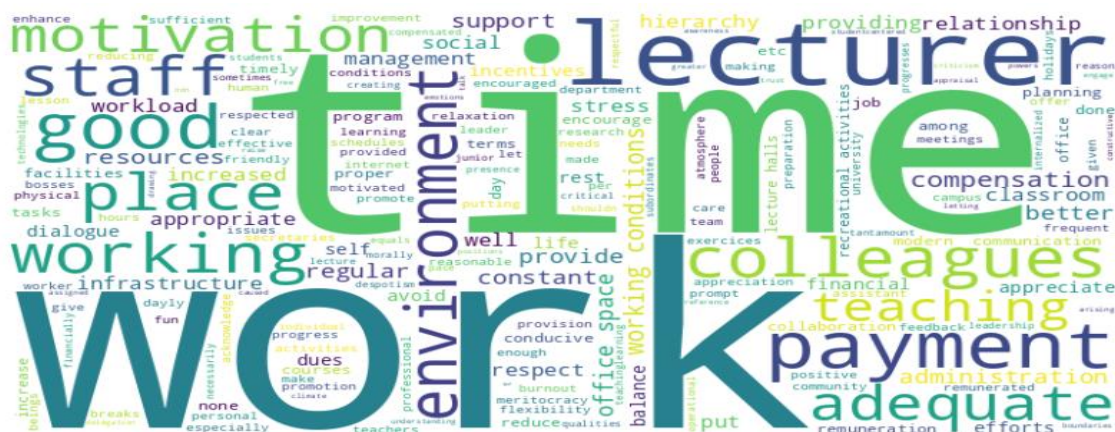


Figure 2: Word cloud on the strategies to reduce burnouts among teachers in the Universities

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the prominent indicators or manifestations of burnout among lecturers include feeling drained of emotional and physical energy, negative thinking about job, irritation by minor problems or colleagues and feeling of being misunderstood by colleagues and administrators. These show that burnout manifests in diverse ways which could be summarised as emotional, physical, behavioural and mental exhaustion. This is in congruence with Maslach, et al. (2016) who opine that burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion. They emphasise that burnout occurs when individuals feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands, thereby leading to negative thoughts which cause them to be irritated by the slightest issue. When individuals are not emotionally, mentally and physically healthy it is difficult for them to concentrate on their work and this will obviously affect productivity. This shows that when lecturers start manifesting signs of burnout they begin to lose interest and motivation in carrying out their tasks and this gradually reduces their productivity. Maslach (2003) justifies this by indicating that when workers

continue to exhibit chronic stress, mental fatigue or emotional exhaustion, negative feelings and perceptions about the people they are working with, there is bound to be a decrease in feelings of personal accomplishment and productivity.

The findings of this study also revealed that burnout among lecturers is often caused by inadequate motivation, lack of resources, feeling of being overworked or overstretched, constant criticism and poor work relationship. Concerning the issue of motivation, lecturers indicated that most often the efforts they put into work were less appreciated. This coupled with the constant criticism, made them frustrated and perceived their job negatively. Some indicated they felt emotionally and physically drained because they were overloaded with tasks, some of which were not part of their routine prescription. These aspects corroborate with the findings of Hellman & Morrison, (1987), Maslach & Leiter (2005) Hardiman & Simmonds (2013) who establish that lack of reward, negative criticism and excessive work tasking with high physical and psychological energy are leading factors of burnout among workers. With this kind of chronic job condition, there is little opportunity to rest, recover, and restore psychological and physical health balance. These could lead to various forms of negative reactions like job withdrawal, job dissatisfaction, low commitment, absenteeism, and negative self-esteem. The foregoing findings align with the position of Huebner (1994) who argues that insufficient recognition and reward (whether financial, institutional, or social) increases people's vulnerability to burnout, because it devalues both the work and the workers, and is closely associated with feelings of inefficacy. It was also noticed that burnout among lecturers in some state universities resulted from poor working relationship with colleagues and the administrators. For workers to effectively carry out their tasks there is need for a positive social climate but when the reverse is implemented there are bound to be problems that could gradually lead to chronic stress which will eventually affect input. At times pessimism, anger and hostility are likely to arise when people feel they are not being treated with the appropriate respect by their bosses. This is in consonance with the findings of Hannigan, et al., (2004) which disclose that a combination of factors like the nature of tasks, and poor relationships between colleagues and bosses stemming from discrimination, favoritism, ethical conflicts and meaningless tasks, are triggers of burnouts in most work places. The finding of this study also concurs with the works of Koocher and Keith-Spiegel (2008), who opine that when relationships at the work place are characterised by lack of support, distrust, and unresolved conflict, there is a greater risk of burnout.

From the qualitative data gleaned from lecturers, some of the measures that can be put in place to reduce burnouts are timely and adequate verbal, social and financial motivation of efforts and completion of tasks. Recognising and rewarding the efforts invested in assigned professional tasks in a timely manner will psychologically boost morale and enhance productivity. They also proposed that in addition to reward, promotion of a positive work environment void of constant criticism, disrespect, and discrimination can minimise the prevalence of burnout among lecturers. This is in accord with Koocher and Keith-Spiegel (2008) who indicate that if job-related relationships are good, and if there is adequate social support and effective means of working out disagreements, workers will more likely experience job engagement and avoid burnout. Another preventive measure proposed by some respondents of the study is for individuals to maintain a healthy work-life balance; that is the amount of time spent on work versus the amount of time spent with family, friends or personal interest/hobbies. In order to have a healthy work-life balance, individuals must prioritise their activities, and develop time management strategies like a 'to do list' which also includes rest periods and interaction with friends. This fits in with Woolston's (2022), assertion that work-life balance is one of the best ways to prevent burnout and improve health and well-being.

## **6. Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is evident that certain administrative, pedagogic and social conditions in some universities in Cameroon predispose lecturers to various expressions of psychological and health challenges identified as burnout. Generally, burnout among lecturers is a health issue which is manifested through emotional exhaustion, behavioral symptoms like withdrawal, mental issues like negative thoughts, overthinking and physical health issues like headaches. Most of these issues are caused by constant criticism, feeling of being overstretched, multiple tasks, lack of appropriate compensation and negative work relationship. When the burnout syndrome is not well handled, it can lead to absenteeism, poor teaching output, problems with classroom

interaction, students' motivation and performance in general. In as much as lecturers' content and pedagogic knowledge are central, there is need to follow up on their wellbeing because if they are physically and psychologically affected they cannot carry out their tasks effectively. This suggests a correlation between lecturers' wellbeing and job effectiveness. This investigation submits that burnout is a staring but undermined professional concern in state universities in Cameroon that requires careful diagnosis as well as mitigating strategies to reduce its incidences on the quality of lecturers' productivity. Therefore, it is important to socialise the different stakeholders on best practices to prevent and manage burnouts syndrome among lecturers.

## 7. Recommendations

### 7.1. University administrators

There is need for professional and self-care programmes to be carried out in universities especially looking at the suggestions made by the respondents. Programmes on self-care, mental-health and work-life balance are recommended. These programmes could be facilitated by psychologists and some social workers.

Professional development programmes like seminars and workshops should not only focus on pedagogic knowledge but should also consider teachers' well-being because there is a correlation between teachers' well-being and the quality of teaching expected from them. Such programmes will create awareness among lecturers on mental health resources.

It is also necessary for Annual leave to be implemented to the latter without other academic tasks being assigned to the individuals at the same period. One of the dominant causes of burnout among teachers/administrators is lack of rest and at times unnecessary tasks that do not provide opportunities for mental and physical recuperation.

There is need for a mental-health unit on campus for immediate care services, given that burnout and mental health challenges can arise at any moment. Health professionals and clinical psychologists should be available for confidential and practical support in these units.

### 7.2. Lecturers

Lecturers should incorporate keep fit and social enlivening programmes in their weekly schedules and develop time management strategies that can enhance their work-life balance.

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