Investigating the Role of Emotional Intelligence and Role Conflict on Job Burnout among Special Education Teachers

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Abstract: The need to take appropriate care of children with disabilities by the relevant stakeholders as the world moves into the post-COVID era has become imperative. Hence, this work investigated how family-to-work, work-to-family conflicts, and emotional intelligence influenced the four dimensions of job burnout (enthusiasm towards the job, psychological exhaustion, indolence, and guilt) among teachers administering children with disabilities. This was assessed using a cross-sectional online survey design of 276 special education teachers (female = 159; mean age = 32.5, SD = 10.1) from the Nigerian population of teachers. Data were collected using structured psychological tests, including the Work and Family Conflict Scale (WFCS), Emotional Intelligence Scale, and Job Burnout Scale. Results indicated that emotional intelligence predicted all the dimensions of job burnout in teachers except psychological exhaustion. The independent variables failed to predict psychological exhaustion; however, family-to-work conflict independently predicted indolence. Furthermore, the results revealed no gender difference in all four dimensions of job burnout. Based on these findings, it was recommended that an intervention strategy targeting the promotion of emotional intelligence and adequate provision of modern facilities to be used to assist teachers in their special skills delivery.

Keywords: Role conflicts, emotional intelligence, job burnout, special support teachers, children with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization [1], over a billion people (15% of the world's population) live with one form of disability or the other. 150 million of these are children with disabilities. However, 80% of these children with disabilities are from developing countries. In Nigeria, the total number of people with disabilities is estimated to be 19 million, which is 9.6% of the country's total population [2]. There are many interventions that can be introduced to help pupils and students with learning disabilities so that they can adapt more effectively to their environment and as well improve their reading and learning abilities. The effectiveness of these interventions requires not only the cooperation and efforts of the parents of these children but also that of their schools and health care professionals [3, 4]. The academic intervention involves the effort and skill impartation of school personnel involving special educators, school psychologists, teachers, and administrators. The teaching profession in Nigeria is an onerous task because several work-related stressors are associated with the job. Such stressors usually emanate from the working conditions around the profession; more noteworthy are special education teachers' working conditions, that is, those teaching pupils and students with disabilities. Teachers' working conditions have a strong impact on both their physical and psychological well-being; likewise, their social and educational efficiency [5]. Because good working conditions are lacking in the training and education of special need teachers, many of them have higher risk of job burnout and job dissatisfaction. This invariably leads to professional dropouts, poor performances, and absenteeism in their workplace. However, the students bear the negative outcomes that reflect in their personal and academic performances [6].

Several studies confirmed the negative correlation of emotional intelligence (EI) with burnout. EI is found to be an important predictor of individuals' adaptation to their environment. EI refers to a set of cognitive abilities that allow people to perceive, understand, express, and manage emotional information [7]. EI can also be seen as a set of emotional and cognitive abilities that can adequately motivate students to use educational strategies. Thus, emotionally intelligent teachers create an educational environment that facilitates the development of self-awareness, self-motivation, and self-actualization in the students, thereby increasing their socio-emotional and interpersonal abilities [8].

Role conflicts entail Work-Family Conflict (WFC) and Family-Work Conflict (FWC). This usually happens when the demands of time and strain created by any one of the two roles (at work or home) interfere with the performance of the other role. The roles in both domains become incompatible [9]. While family roles may create conflict with work, work roles may create

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conflict with family. These conflicts might be in the area of time spent on one role which makes it difficult to fulfill the requirement in another or specific behaviors required by one role may not be suitable to fill, which makes it unsuitable to fulfill the requirement of the other role [10]. Younger parents, being female, family size, and uncooperative partners are positively associated with higher work-family conflict levels. As established by several studies, the higher the role conflict, the higher the job burnout level [11, 12].

Special education teachers are those trained to deliver special educational skills, services, and programs that are targeted to adequately serve the various needs of these students/pupils. These categories of teachers are equipped with different forms of skills and competencies and are expected to constantly review the curriculum in order to absorb new trends in all aspects of special need education [13]. The ideal special need or special support education teacher uses specialized techniques and strategies coupled with specialized instructional materials and devices in teaching special needs children. This is necessary so as to achieve a balance of physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive learning needs in them [14]. These teachers are sensitive to the needs of their pupils and students; they are also empathetic, flexible, honest, consistent, firm, and creative [15]. The National Policy on Education in Nigeria advocates free education for people with special needs, training of special education teachers, and regular monitoring of students with special needs. There is a shortcoming on the government's part in the provision of the various parts of the National Policy on Education spelled out above, thereby leading to the influx of private institutions taking over education in Nigeria.

Special education teachers in Nigeria over the years have reported job burnout in the course of their teaching and gathering experiences in handling children with disabilities [16, 17]. Some of the risk factors of job burnout include physical support such as inadequate infrastructures and devices to support teaching, lack of training support, insufficient funding, lack of clear educational policy, and inadequate parental involvement. These problems are largely psycho-social or socio-emotional involving role conflicts in the work and family domains, role ambiguity, lack of motivation, low emotional intelligence, low job satisfaction, negative attitudes, and several others [18, 19].

According to Pedro *et al*. [20], job burnout can be viewed from four dimensions, namely, enthusiasm towards the job, psychological exhaustion, indolence, and guilt. Enthusiasm towards a job entails a form of strong commitment towards the job; psychological exhaustion is a form of loss of energy for the job, feelings of fatigue, or a form of cognitive deterioration, which breeds low personal accomplishment. Indolence, on the other hand, is a form of being indifferent towards the people that one is committed to serving, showing laziness and loss of interest in a job. Guilt is a form of disagreeable feeling associated with remorse after recognizing that a moral norm has been violated.

Job burnout occurs due to long-term exposure to organizational stressors, which deplete the psycho-social well-being of professionals. High EI can help in the coping ability of the stress in special need teachers, especially with the type of stress that is often being triggered by work-family conflicts. Thus, creating a balance among work, family, and emotional intelligence is a crucial matter for the special teachers in order for them to be able to discharge their duties more effectively. Burnout can be traceable to several factors in the special education teachers, especially the strain arising from their working conditions and uncooperative family factors.

Thus, this study aims to investigate the extent to which role conflict and emotional intelligence act as predictors of the four dimensions of job burnout, namely, enthusiasm towards the job, psychological exhaustion, indolence, and guilt. This study also aims at testing the gender differences that exist in job burnout across its four dimensions. It is hoped that the findings of this study will reveal the state of the psycho-social well-being of teachers handling children with disabilities in Nigeria, the direction and effect of the role conflicts they are experiencing, and the level of their emotional intelligence on the job. Having known this from the findings of this study, the appropriate intervention strategies can then be suggested for the aftermath of the post-COVID pandemic.

METHOD

Research Design

This study is a cross-sectional online survey of teachers of special need education at all levels of education in Nigeria, using the snowball technique to get appropriate participants for the purpose of the study. The independent variables are role conflicts (Family-Work Conflict and Work-Family Conflict) and Emotional Intelligence, while the dependent variables

are the four dimensions of Job Burnout as identified in this study which are enthusiasm towards the job, psychological exhaustion, indolence, and guilt.

Participants

The participants comprised trained teachers in special education who administer special needs to pupils and students at all levels of education. The participants were drawn from Nigerian settings. Out of 276 participants, 117 were males and 159 were females (mean age = 32.5, SD = 10.1).

Measures

A Self-report questionnaire was used to collect relevant information for the purpose of this research. The first part measured the demographic variables of the participants, which include age, gender, religion, marital status, employment status, type of school (public or private), and ethnic group. The other scales are presented as follows:

Work and Family Conflict Scale [21]

Role conflicts were assessed using a 10-item Work-Family Scale (WFC) and Family-Work Scale (FWC). WFC and FWC are two separate scales having 5-items each. The scale was measured on a 7–point Likert scale ranging from Strong agreement (7) to Strong disagreement (1). Samples of scale items include *"how the demands of my work interfere with my home and family life"* (WFC) and *"Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties"* (FWC). Each scale was calculated by summing all the responses for the 5-items to give a scale ranging from 7 to 35. A higher score on each of the scales indicates higher levels of conflict. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the sub-scales were 0.91 and 0.91 for WFC and FWC, respectively, as reported by the authors indicating very good internal consistency. For the current study, the scale was re-validated, and a Cronbach alpha of 0.80 was obtained.

Emotional Intelligence Scale [22]

Emotional intelligence was assessed using an adapted form of a 20-item scale as developed by [22]. The scale was measured on a 5–point Likert scale ranging from *"Strongly Disagree"(1)* to "*Strongly Agree" (5)*. Samples of scale items include *"Other people find it easy to confide in me"* and *"I relax quickly under pressure in some situations"*. The scale was designed to help people label their feelings rather than labeling others and situations. The psychometric properties of the original scale were established through Cronbach alpha internal consistency ranging from 0.87 to 0.90 and a two-week test re-test reliability coefficient of 0.78 (Schuttle *et al*., 1998), while a Cronbach alpha of 0.82 was obtained for the current study.

Job Burnout Scale [20]

Job Burnout was measured using a 20-item scale developed by Gil-Monte *et al*. [20]. The scale was measured on a 4-Likert scale ranging from "*Never" (0)* to "*Frequently every day" (4).* Samples of scale items include *"I find that my work is a stimulating challenge"* and *"I feel bad about some of the things I have said at work"*. The psychometric properties were analyzed with data from a sample of 277 Chilean professionals working with physically disabled people. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was higher than 0.70 for the four scales of the instruments as reported by the authors.

Procedure

The research was conducted at the time when the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown was just lifted in Nigeria. The questionnaires were sent out to the participants online. At the initial stage, four participants who were personally known to the researchers were contacted first. Afterward, other participants were contacted through the first contacts. All the participants were special needs teachers. The introductory message on the questionnaire reflected the nature of the research, its objectives and aims, procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, declaration of anonymity, confidentiality, and the link to the online form.

Ethical Consideration

The study was approved by the ethics and research committee of the Department of Psychology of Federal University Oye Ekiti, Nigeria, with approval number PSY/EC/19/2025.

Statistical Analysis

Data gathered from the online survey were collated and analyzed with the aid of IBM SPSS statistics version 21.0 for Windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). Multiple regression analysis was used to test the predictive power of the independent variables on the dimensions of the dependent variables. An independent t-test was used to test the gender differences on all dimensions of the dependent variables.

Table 1: Distribution of Social-Demographics

N = 276	n	%		n	%
Gender			Perception of support		
Male	117	42.4	Yes	152	55.1
Female	159	57.6	No	67	24.3
Marital status			No indication	57	20.7
Single	98	35.5	Having children		
Married	134	48.6	Yes	177	64.1
Divorced	10	3.6	No	70	25.4
Separated	10	3.6	Age of children		
No indication	24	8.7	< 5	63	22.8
Religious Affiliation			6-10	29	10.5
Christianity	206	74.6	11-18	18	6.5
Islam	68	24.6	> 18	21	7.6
Traditional	2	.7	No indication	145	52.5
Ethnicity			Employment status		
Yoruba	221	80.1	Full time	198	71.7
Igbo	41	14.9	Part-time	39	14.1
Hausa	7	2.5	No indication	39	14.1
Others	7	2.5	Length of marriage		
School			0-5	59	21.4
Private	148	53.6	6-10	51	18.5
Public	102	37	11-15	30	10.9
No indication	26	9.4	16-20	37	13.4
Length of marriage (in years)			21-25	19	6.9
0-5	59	21.4	26-30	9	3.3
6-10	51	18.5	> 30	3	1.1
11-15	30	10.9	No indication	68	24.6
16-20	37	13.4	Income (in thousands)		
21-25	19	6.9	5-10	61	22.1
26-30	9	3.3	11-20	42	15.2
> 30	3	1.1	21-30	39	14.1
No indication	68	25	31-40	30	10.9
Education			41-50	32	11.6
SSCE	26	9.4	> 50	38	13.8
Grade II	16	5.8	No indication	34	12.3
NCE/OND	72	26.1	Number of children		
BSc/HND	97	35.1	1	33	12
MSc	21	7.6	2	64	23.2
PhD	16	5.8	3	32	11.6
No indication	28	10.1	4 5 No indication	17 5 125	6.2 1.8 45.3

RESULTS

The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants were presented in Table **1**. There were more females (57.6%) than males (42.4%). More participants were married (48.6%), practiced the Christian religion (74.6%), were from the Yoruba ethnic group (80.1%), worked for private schools (53.6), and were in full employment (71.7%). Also, more participants studied up to the BSc/HND level (35.1%) reported that they received social support (55.1) and had children (64.1%).

The result of correlation analyses among study variables were presented in Table **2**. Enthusiasm towards job was not significantly related with any of the independent variables WFC [*r* (274) = 0.05, p = 0.43]; FWC [*r* (274) = 0.02, p = 0.70] and emotional intelligence [*r* (274) = 0.06, p = 0.34]. Psychological exhaustion was positively related with FWC [*r* (274) = 0.12, p = 0.05] but not WFC [*r* (274) = 0.06, p = 0.33] and emotional intelligence [*r* (274) = -0.11, p = 0.07]. Indolence was positively related with FWC [*r* (274) = 0.19, p = 0.002] and emotional intelligence [*r* (274) = -0.24, p < 0.001] but not WFC [*r* (274) = 0.09, p = 0.10]. Similarly, guilt was related with FWC [*r* (274) = 0.15, p = 0.002] and emotional intelligence [*r* (274) = -0.21, p < 0.001] but not WFC [*r* (274) = 0.09, p = 0.12].

Table **3** showed that work family conflict and emotional intelligence jointly predicted enthusiasm towards job [F (3, 272) = 9.72, p < 0.01, R^2 = 0.10]. Independently, only emotional intelligence significantly predicted enthusiasm towards job [β = 0.31, p < 0.01] while work-to-family [β = 0.04, p = 0.55] and family-to-work conflict [β = 0.02, p = 0.19] did not. This showed that an increase in emotional intelligence significantly predicted an increase in enthusiasm towards job. Therefore, hypothesis one is supported.

Table **4** showed that work-family conflict and emotional intelligence did not independently and jointly predict psychological exhaustion [F (3, 272) = 9.72, p>0.01, R^2 = 0.02]. Therefore, hypothesis two is not supported.

Table 2: Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD)

Variable	A	M	SD
Age			10.12
work-to-family conflict	0.90	13.12	7.62
Family-to-work conflict	0.73	12.59	5.76
Emotional intelligence	0.89	75.59	12.34
Enthusiasm towards job	0.66	14.54	4.42
Psychological exhaustion	0.37	9.99	2.87
Indolence	0.59	14.10	4.21
Guilt	0.55	12.66	3.75

Table 3: Correlations among the Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	-						
2. Work-to-family conflict (WFC)	0.03	-					
3. Family-to-work conflict (FWC)	-0.01	0.68**	-				
4. Emotional intelligence	0.05	-0.18**	-0.20**	-			
5. Enthusiasm towards job	-0.06	0.05	0.02	0.06	-		
6. Psychological exhaustion	-0.10	0.06	0.12*	-0.11	0.39**	-	
7. Indolence	-0.11	0.10	0.19**	-0.24**	-0.08	0.43**	
8. Guilt	-0.18**	0.09	0.15*	-0.21**	0.16**	0.57**	0.41**

*p < 0.05 (1-tailed).
**p < 0.01 (2-tailed).

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis- Work-Family Conflict and EI on ETJ

Variable	β	T	R^2	F
work-to-family conflict	0.04	0.55	0.10	9.72**
Family-to-work conflict	0.02	0.19		
Emotional intelligence (EI)	.31**	5.33		

Dependent variable: Enthusiasm towards job (ETJ).
**p < 0.01.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis- Work-Family Conflict and EI on PE

Variable	β	T	R^2	F
Work-to-family	-0.04	-0.46	0.02	1.47
Family-to-work	0.14	1.71		
Emotional intelligence (EI)	-0.04	-0.59		

Dependent variable: Psychological exhaustion (PE).

Table **5** showed that work family conflict and emotional intelligence jointly predicted indolence [F (3, 272) = 7.10, p < 0.01, R^2 = 0.07]. Independently, only family-to-work conflict [β = 0.21, p = 0.011] and emotional intelligence [β = -0.19, p = 0.01] significantly predicted indolence while work-to-family conflict [β = -0.04, p = 0.58] did not. This showed that an increase in family-to-work conflict predicted increased indolence while emotional intelligence predicted a decrease in indolence. Therefore, hypothesis three is supported.

Table **6** showed that work family conflict and emotional intelligence jointly predicted guilt [F (3, 272) = 7.10, p < 0.01, R^2 = 0.05]. Independently, only emotional intelligence [β = -0.15, p = 0.011] significantly predicted guilt while work-to-family conflict [β = -0.01, p = 0.88] and family-to-work conflict [β = 0.15, p = 0.07] did not. This showed that an increase in emotional intelligence predicted a decrease in guilt. Therefore, hypothesis four is supported.

Table **7** showed that the difference in enthusiasm towards job scores between male (M = 14.6, SD = 4.32) and female participants (M = 14.81, SD = 4.48) was not statistically significant, t (274) = -1.21, *p* = 0.23. Also, the difference in psychological exhaustion scores between male (M = 9.87, SD = 3.32) and female participants (M = 10.08, SD = 2.48) was not statistically

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis- Work-Family Conflict and EI on Indolence

Variable	β	T	R^2	F
Work-to-family (WFC)	-0.04	-0.56	0.07	7.10**
Family-to-work (FWC)	0.21*	2.56		
Emotional intelligence (EI)	-0.19**	-3.25		

Dependent variable: guilt.
**p < 0.01.
*p < 0.05.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis- Work-Family Conflict and EI on Guilt

Variable	β	T	R^2	F
Work-to-family	-0.01	-0.15	0.05	7.10**
Family-to-work	0.15	1.85		
Emotional intelligence (EI)	-0.15*	-2.55		

Dependent variable: guilt.
**p < .01.
*p < .05.

Table 8: Independent Sample t-Test – Gender on the Dimensions of Burnout

Variable	Male		Female			
	M	SD	M	SD	$t_{(274)}$	95%CI
Enthusiasm towards job	14.16	4.32	14.81	4.48	-1.21	[-1.71, 0.41]
Psychological exhaustion	9.87	3.32	10.08	2.48	-0.60	[-0.90, 0.48]
Indolence	13.76	4.33	14.35	4.11	-1.14	[-1.59, 0.42]
Guilt	12.24	4.09	12.97	3.45	-1.60	[-1.62, 0.17]

significant, t (274) = -0.60, p = 0.55. Moreover, the difference in indolence scores between male (M = 13.76, SD = 4.33) and female participants (M = 14.35, SD = 4.11) also was not statistically significant, [t (274) = -1.14, p = 0.25]. Lastly, the difference in guilt scores between male (M = 12.24, SD = 4.09) and female participants (M = 12.97, SD = 3.45) was not statistically significant, t (274) = -1.60, p = 0.11. Therefore, hypothesis five is not supported.

DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken to determine the possible association among the variables of interest as identified in the study. Specifically, the researchers were interested in the extent to which role conflicts (work and family) and the level of emotional intelligence of special need teachers of children with disabilities can actually predict burnout on their job. The findings of the first hypothesis revealed that role conflicts and emotional intelligence jointly predicted enthusiasm towards the job, while emotional intelligence independently predicted enthusiasm towards the job. Hasanuddin *et al*. [23], in their study, found that emotional intelligence was positively significant with work enthusiasm among public auditors and accountants in Indonesia. Likewise, Sergio *et al*. [24] found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and work/family conflict. Akintayo [25] also revealed that emotional intelligence had a significant influence on work/family role conflict management on workers in a private organization. The findings of a recent study conducted by Giao *et al*. [26] indicated that perceived organizational support could decrease work-family conflict and job burnout. The findings of the study further revealed that organizational support could also moderate the relationship between emotional intelligence and work-family conflict. The various results have shown evidence that role conflict and emotional intelligence were positive predictors of work enthusiasm. This means that the special needs teachers who have a balance in their work and family domains and who are emotionally intelligent have high positive enthusiasm towards their job. These are the category of professionals who are convincingly courageous, positively motivated, and highly committed to their job. However, from the findings, we discovered that role conflict could not independently predict work enthusiasm; only emotional intelligence did. This points to the fact that extrinsic factors outside the teachers (such as family/organizational factors) are not strong predictors of work enthusiasm but rather intrinsic factors such as personal motivation.

The second hypothesis showed that role conflict, and emotional intelligence were not predictors of psychological exhaustion among special education teachers. This result points to the fact that both role conflict and emotional intelligence were positive predictors of positive factors in job burnout. D'Amico *et al*. [27] suggested in their studies that emotional intelligence may have a protective role in preventing negative working experiences in teachers after they found that emotional intelligence positively correlates with job satisfaction and negatively correlates with job burnout.

The third hypothesis revealed that role conflict and emotional intelligence jointly predicted indolence. Independently, family-to-work conflict and emotional intelligence significantly predicted indolence, while work-to-family conflict did not. FWC is a positive predictor of indolence, while emotional intelligence is a negative predictor. This means that an increase in family-to-work conflict predicted an increase in indolence, while high emotional intelligence predicted a decrease in indolence. To corroborate this, Olivarez-Faundez *et al*. [28] opined that indolence acted as a form of coping strategy in a dysfunctional aspect after a re-evaluation stage by the individual at work. The authors further explained that the attitudes and behavior depicting indolence could be a coping mechanism to treat cognitive (low enthusiasm towards job) and emotional (psychological exhaustion) deterioration. Indolence is a coping strategy is used by

some people, which allowed them to control their stress levels. However, some other professionals feel uncomfortable with it as a coping strategy.

Hypothesis four revealed that role conflict and emotional intelligence jointly predicted guilt. Independently, only emotional intelligence significantly predicted guilt. This showed that high emotional intelligence predicted a decrease in guilt. Emotional intelligence invariably has a negative prediction on guilt. Guilt is usually a negative assessment of a specific behavior [29] and a social emotion that is usually linked to the social, communal relationship. The fact that emotional intelligence independently acted as a predictor of guilt points to the fact that individual factors were likely to drive guilt before becoming social factors that can be observed in the organization. According to Olivarez-Faundez, *et al*. [28], one of the frequent causes of guilt among professionals is the feelings of negative thoughts about others, work, and the work conditions.

Lastly, hypothesis five showed that there was no gender difference in all the dimensions of job burnout. Fernet *et al*. [30] found in their studies that women present a higher burnout risk at work. We expected women to have higher levels of burnout in the current study since women dominate the teaching profession, especially at the lower levels of education than men. Although male to female differences in job burnout in the literature have produced so many inconsistencies, research in other studies indicated that burnout is extensively experienced among professionals providing social and human services.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study's main conclusion is that emotional intelligence is a strong driving positive force to reducing all levels and dimensions of job burnout in special education teachers, most especially as we progress to the post-COVID era in Nigeria. While it is good to draw attention to the scope of FWC and WFC in individual teachers, it is equally appropriate to give utmost priority to the working conditions as well as the environment of these special education schools by the government. The intervention strategy proposed from the result of this study would promote the level of emotional intelligence in teachers who are administering children with disabilities. This strategy will target their perceptual, motivational, and emotional abilities that will be useful for their pupils and students; this will help foster a positive appraisal of their working environment.

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