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Relational Leadership in Mitigating Teaching Loss Early Childhood Education Teachers with More Than Five Years of Experience: A Phenomenological Study.

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ABSTRAK
Long teaching experience can demonstrate professional maturity in teachers; however, it can also make teachers vulnerable to burnout, potentially leading to the phenomenon of teaching loss, which appears with signs of decreased enthusiasm, creativity, and teaching engagement. Researchers in this study explored how relational leadership plays a role and contributes to reducing mental exhaustion or burnout and preventing the emergence of teaching loss among experienced early childhood teachers. A qualitative study using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was conducted with four participants consisting of three early childhood teachers and one principal from a kindergarten under the Yayasan Kartika Jaya Cabang VI/Cenderawasih, Jayapura. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on more than five years of teaching experience. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 15–30 minutes, and the credibility of the findings was strengthened through member checking and participant consent procedures. The analysis yielded five interrelated themes: burnout, burnout mitigation, relational leadership, teacher tenure, and teacher loss. Findings suggest that prolonged job burnout can gradually diminish teachers' professional identity and teaching motivation, while relational leadership characterized by empathy, open communication, emotional validation, and collaborative problem-solving helps restore teachers' psychological well-being and professional commitment. This study contributes to the growing literature on teacher well-being by conceptualizing teaching loss among experienced early childhood education teachers and highlighting relational leadership as a critical strategy for supporting teachers' ongoing professional development.

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1. Introduction

Teachers are the foundation of education because they directly influence children's development through daily classroom interactions. In early childhood education (ECE), this role becomes even more crucial because learning is fundamentally relationship-based, requiring teachers to build emotionally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and caring interactions with young children. Consequently, the quality of early childhood education is inseparable from teacher's psychological well-being, professional commitment, and teaching engagement. Recent international evidence consistently shows that teacher well-being has been one of the strongest predictors of teaching quality, child development outcomes, and sustained educational improvement (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Kim & Lee, 2025; Jeon et al., 2024).

The professional responsibilities of early childhood teachers have become increasingly complex over the past decade. In addition to designing meaningful learning experiences, teachers are expected to integrate digital technology into their lessons, implement curriculum reforms, complete various administrative tasks, collaborate with parents, and accommodate the increasingly diverse developmental needs of children. These multiple responsibilities substantially increase teacher's psychological workload and put them at greater risk for job stress and burnout. Recent studies have shown that excessive job demands combined with inadequate organizational support diminish teachers' professional well-being and negatively impact teaching performance (Heilala et al., 2022; Kang & Jang, 2021; Sufiyati et al., 2021, Osei, C. 2021, Fenn, C. J. 2020).

Burnout is one of the most significant challenges facing education systems worldwide. Maslach and Leiter conceptualize burnout as a multidimensional psychological syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment resulting from prolonged work stress. Rather than representing individual weakness, burnout reflects a mismatch between professional demands and available

organizational resources. In early childhood education, burnout is particularly concerning because emotionally exhausted teachers often experience decreased enthusiasm for teaching, reduced sensitivity to children's developmental needs, and reduced professional effectiveness. These conditions ultimately impact children's learning experiences and the quality of education (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Herman et al., 2018; Jeon et al., 2024).

Recent empirical evidence suggests that burnout among early childhood teachers has consequences beyond individual psychological well-being. Burnout significantly decreases teacher commitment, teaching quality, creativity, and classroom engagement. Kim and Lee (2025) reported that teacher commitment mediated the relationship between burnout and teacher teaching performance, suggesting that psychological well-being directly contributes to educational quality. Similarly, Madigan and Kim (2021) concluded through a systematic review that teacher burnout negatively impacts student academic achievement, motivation, and classroom experiences (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Kim & Lee, 2025).

Meanwhile, in the context of private schools, rigid leadership structures, bureaucracy, and hierarchy can accelerate the emergence of mental fatigue in teachers. Transformational leadership styles that focus on equal working relationships and eliminate barriers between superiors and subordinates can build a sense of family and reduce teacher burnout (Irawan, 2025). Meanwhile, the concept of modern leadership is currently shifting towards a more humanistic approach. Mindful leadership practices that prioritize empathy and the quality of social or relational interactions have been found to be highly effective in improving teacher psychological well-being while developing a healthy work culture (Herman, KC, Hickmon-Rosa, J., & Reinke, WM., 2018; Syadidunniam, A., Hasanah, et. al., 2026).

One crucial strategy for strengthening relational leadership is consistently involving teachers in strategic decision-making (participatory leadership). Having a voice and feeling included in important school-related matters makes teachers feel valued. Strengthening professional autonomy through this equal-relationship approach has been proven effective in reducing daily work stress and preventing teachers from experiencing extreme mental exhaustion (Azzahra, S.M., 2025).

Similarly, studies examining teachers' work environments consistently report that high job demands, limited organizational support, and prolonged job stress increase emotional exhaustion while reducing teachers' motivation to remain professionally engaged. A recent meta-analysis further identified resilience, collegial relationships, organizational support, and leadership as key protective factors against burnout among early childhood educators. Conversely, excessive workload and a poor organizational climate substantially increase teachers' intention to leave the profession (Lee & Choi, 2025; Heilala et al., 2022; Kang & Jang, 2021; Kwon, K.A., Malek, A., Horm, D., & Kassel, S., 2020).

Beyond the international context, similar concerns have emerged in Indonesia. Educational reforms emphasizing digital transformation, curriculum adaptation, and accountability have substantially increased teachers' administrative responsibilities. While these reforms are intended to improve the quality of education, they often create additional pressure for teachers, especially those with years of service. Studies in Indonesia also show that organizational climate, principal support, and workload significantly impact teacher job satisfaction, professional commitment, and psychological well-being (Staten, L. B. 2023; Sufiyati et al., 2021; James Lani, 2010).

Although burnout has been extensively researched, recent research suggests that the consequences of burnout extend beyond emotional exhaustion. Burnout gradually undermines teachers' professional identity, teaching engagement, creativity, and commitment to continuous improvement. Rather than appearing suddenly, burnout develops through prolonged exposure to excessive workloads, organizational pressures, and a lack of emotional support (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2025; Jeon et al., 2024; Llorens-Gumbau, S., & Salanova-Soria, M., 2014).

One consequence of prolonged burnout is the phenomenon of teaching loss. Unlike learning loss, which primarily refers to a decline in student achievement, teaching loss describes a gradual decline in teachers' teaching engagement, professional enthusiasm, pedagogical creativity, and emotional connection with students. Teachers experiencing teaching loss continue to perform their formal teaching duties; however, the quality of classroom interactions and meaningful learning gradually declines. Consequently, teaching loss represents a hidden educational challenge that remains underexplored in contemporary educational research (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Thahir & Natsir, 2025; Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. 2007; Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. 2021).

Meanwhile, based on the theoretical perspective of Job Demands-Resources (JD-R), social support from management plays a crucial role in balancing teachers' workload. The implementation of relationship-based supervisory support from the principal can significantly reduce depression levels and maintain high teacher teaching motivation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2001; Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Sanz-Vergel, A. I. 2023; Dishari, S., & AlAfnan, M. A., 2024).

Therefore, school leadership is a crucial organizational resource for maintaining teacher professional well-being. Contemporary leadership theory increasingly emphasizes that principals must move beyond administrative oversight to relationship-oriented leadership practices characterized by empathy, trust, collaboration, and open communication. These leadership practices strengthen teacher resilience, organizational commitment, and professional engagement while reducing emotional exhaustion (Yukl, 2006; Demirci-Unal, Z., et al., 2025, Nemani,

S. 2025).

Facing today's complex dynamics, principals as leaders are no longer merely required to be proficient in administrative aspects, but must also possess a high level of social sensitivity. The presence of emotionally intelligent leadership in educational institutions is very urgent because empathetic relationship management has been proven effective in stemming the escalation of burnout in teachers (Karaferye, F., & Bellibaş, M. Ş. (2025).

Among contemporary leadership perspectives, relational leadership provides a relevant framework for understanding how principals support teachers experiencing burnout. Rather than emphasizing hierarchical authority, relational leadership prioritizes authentic interpersonal relationships, mutual trust, emotional validation, and collaborative problem-solving. Recent studies have shown that strong principal-teacher relationships reduce symptoms of burnout while enhancing teachers' psychological well-being, organizational commitment, and professional performance (Farber, B., et al., 1991; Cultivating Collaborative Practices..., 2025; Hellriegel, D., et al., 2008). Relational leadership is also manifested through the values of service and transparency advocated by school management. Optimizing the role of servant leadership and authentic leadership has proven crucial in enhancing teachers' psychological resilience and mitigating the risk of burnout (Kharlie, A. T., 2025).

However, this relational leadership style also depends heavily on the intelligence of the principal-leader. This emotional intelligence is needed to be more sensitive to seeing and feeling the symptoms of emotional exhaustion displayed by teachers before it triggers burnout. The principal's emotional intelligence is also needed to be able to open emotional space for teachers to express their feelings without judgment of integrity. When the social environment is strengthened by mutually respectful interactions, interventions to reduce teacher burnout scores will show more significant and sustainable results (Puspita, R., & Santoso, B. 2024).

Despite growing international attention to burnout and educational leadership, several significant gaps remain. Most previous studies have examined burnout using quantitative approaches and primarily focused on job stress, organizational climate, intention to quit, or teacher self-efficacy. Comparatively, fewer studies have explored how experienced early childhood teachers interpret burnout as a lived experience that gradually develops into a loss of teaching. Furthermore, studies examining relational leadership generally emphasize leadership effectiveness rather than examining how interpersonal leadership practices facilitate teachers' psychological recovery from prolonged burnout (Lee & Choi, 2025; Kwon, K. A., et al., 2020; Herman, K. C., et al., 2018, Brooks, B. A. 2023).

Therefore, this study uses an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to explore the lived experiences of teachers with more than five years of teaching experience regarding burnout, relational leadership, and teaching loss. By focusing on informants' subjective experiences, this study seeks to explain how relational leadership contributes to teachers' psychological recovery and sustained professional commitment. The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing teaching loss as a consequence of accumulated burnout among experienced early childhood teachers, while simultaneously positioning relational leadership as a person-centered leadership strategy that mitigates burnout through empathy, trust, emotional validation, and collaborative professional support (Smith et al., 2009; Yukl, 2006; Maslach & Leiter, 2016, Batzoglou, A. 2024).

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This research uses a qualitative phenomenological approach with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach developed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). IPA was chosen because it allowed researchers to explore and interpret informants' lived experiences related to burnout, teacher attrition, and relational leadership within their natural educational contexts. This study focused on understanding how experienced teachers interpret prolonged teaching experiences, psychological exhaustion, and the relational support provided by school leaders, the goal of this study is to achieve values from the life experiences and journeys of these teachers (Cresswell, J. W., et al., 2017)

2.2 Research Partisipant

This study involved four informants: three early childhood education teachers and one principal from a kindergarten under the auspices of the Yayasan Kartika Jaya Cabang VI/Cenderawasih Koordinator Korem/172 Jayapura, Papua. All teacher informants had more than five years of teaching experience and brought extensive professional experience and provided rich descriptions of their lived experiences related to teacher burnout and loss. Informants were selected through purposive sampling because they met specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives: extensive teaching experience and direct involvement in school leadership interactions.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted individually with each informant. Each interview lasted approximately 15–30 minutes and explored informants' experiences with emotional exhaustion, professional challenges, school leadership, and strategies for maintaining teaching motivation. Interviews were audio-recorded with informants' permission and then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the six stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) proposed by Smith et al. (2009):

1. First Stage: Reading and Re-reading
   Read repeatedly to get a deeper experience from the source
2. Second Stage: Making Initial Notes (Initial Nothing)
   Making descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments from the margins of the interview transcript
3. Stage Three: Developing Emergent Themes
   Transforming initial notes into more focused and conceptual statements
4. Stage Four: Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes
   Mapping and connecting the small themes that emerge to form one big theme
5. Step Five: Moving to the Next Case
   Repeat steps one to four for other sources' transcripts.
6. Stage Six: Looking for Patterns Across Cases
   Analyze all clusters that emerge from all sources to find common essences.

The coding process was carried out iteratively, repeatedly comparing interview transcripts, initial notes, and emerging themes until thematic consistency was achieved. Themes were generated inductively from informant narratives, not from predetermined theoretical categories.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries to informants for confirmation and revalidation. Informants were given the opportunity to clarify or revise their statements to ensure that their interpretations accurately reflected their experiences.

Ethical principles were maintained throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, all informants voluntarily agreed to participate and provided informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of informant codes (PS1–PS4) throughout the analysis and reporting of the findings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Findings The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis identified five interrelated themes to describe the informants' lived experiences of burnout and their perceptions of relational leadership in mitigating teacher attrition among experienced early childhood teachers. These themes are: (1) experiencing chronic burnout after prolonged teaching services, (2) declining professional confidence and educational change, (3) relational leadership as emotional validation, (4) rebuilding professional engagement through collaborative support, and (5) preventing teaching loss through renewed professional commitment. These themes illustrate the psychological journeys experienced by teachers and the critical role of school leadership in maintaining teaching quality.

Theme 1. Experiencing Chronic Burnout After Prolonged Teaching Service

Informants consistently described feelings of emotional exhaustion accumulated over years of teaching. Burnout was not caused by a single stressful event, but rather by ongoing administrative responsibilities, increasing workloads, and repeated educational changes.

One teacher expressed:

"Saya tidak menyadari bahwa saya sudah berada pada fase itu-burnout, tapi yang saya rasa saya seperti ingin meledak setiap kali mengingat deadline yang saya kejar." (PS1)

This statement illustrates how burnout was innitially experienced as persistent emotional fatigue without being consciusly recognized as a psychological condition. Informan described responsibility that had gradually reduced their enthusiasm for teaching.

Another informan similarly explained that continuous policy changes and increasing technological demands intensified psychological pressure over time.

"Kami jadi guru disini sudah lumayan lama mbak.. (menarik nafas dan tertawa kecil), kami sudah melewati beberapa kali pergantian ketua Yayasan dan banyak kebijakan. Setiap pergantian ada kebijakan baru yang memang tujuannya buat sekolah jadi lebih baik, buat guru lebih maju. Tapi kadang ya kami juga jujurnya kadang keteteran mengejar yang baru-baru muncul ini, makin lama jadi guru kalau satu aja ketinggalan ya sudah gak lengkap to info yang diterima jadinya ya bagian-bagian yang didapat juga gak utuh gitu loh." (PS4)

These narratives indicate that burnout developed progressively through prolonged occupational demands rather than isolated incidents.

Theme 2. Declining Professional Confidence dan Educational Change

In addition to emotional exhaustion, informants reported a decline in confidence in their professional abilities when faced with rapid technological developments and frequent institutional changes.

One informant reflected:

"Semakin kesini kan pembelajaran semakin canggih ya... apa-apa itu kan perlu pakai laptop ya.. awalnya saya mikir ya sudah yang muda-muda saja maju. . ." (PS2)

Although the informants remained committed to teaching, they felt they were gradually losing confidence in adapting to new methods. This situation created feelings of self-doubt, lack of confidence, and fear of falling behind their younger colleagues. The informants emphasized that the challenge wasn't a lack of willingness to learn, but rather the need for additional time and supportive guidance during the adaptation process.

Theme 3. Relational Leadership as Emotional Validation

Informants consistently identified the principal's relational leadership as a crucial source of emotional support during periods of professional burnout.

The principal explained:

"Sebelum jadi kepala sekolah kan saya sudah jadi guru disini cukup lama, jadi saya juga pernah merasakan hal-hal itu. Saya bilang ke guru-guru tidak apa-apa jangan malu cerita ada masalah apa kesulitan apa kita cari solusinya sama-sama". (PS3)

Teachers interpreted this leadership approach as an effort to create a psychologically safe environment where they could openly express their difficulties without fear of professional judgment.

One informant further explained:

"…kepala sekolahnya sama-sama bisa buat kami duduk dan ngobrol untuk ngulang bagian-bagian yang kami ketinggalan tadi, namanya guru lawas jadi ya harus pelan-pelan (sambil tertawa kecil)." (PS4)

The informants viewed these informal conversations as a good opportunity to regain their fading self-confidence, receive emotional support, and gradually adapt to educational changes.

Theme 4. Rebuilding Professional Engagement through Collaborative Support

Relational leadership not only reduces emotional stress for teachers but also encourages them to re-engage actively in professional learning, fostering self-confidence and courage.

As one teacher explained:

"...tapi lihat teman-teman semangat, dan pas juga kepseknya ya suport untuk belajar sama-sama ya saya jadi malu kalau gak semangat sendirian (tertawa kecil)." (PS2)

Informants explained that encouragement from colleagues and the principal fostered renewed motivation to learn new technologies and teaching approaches. Rather than feeling isolated, teachers experienced a sense of collective responsibility that strengthened their desire to continue developing professionally. These findings suggest that a collaborative school environment can facilitate teachers' psychological recovery after experiencing prolonged work burnout.

Theme 5. Preventing Teaching Loss through Renewed Professional Commitment

In all interviews, informants described relational leadership as a contributing factor to the restoration of professional commitment. Emotional support, open communication, and collaborative problem-solving enabled teachers to reconnect with the meaning of their professional roles. Informants emphasized that being listened to and supported by the principal encouraged them to continue improving rather than withdrawing from teaching responsibilities.

Overall, the findings suggest that relational leadership can serve as an important protective factor against teacher attrition by restoring teacher confidence, strengthening professional identity, and encouraging continued teaching engagement.

Table 3.1.1 Summary of Themes

Theme	Central of Mean
Theme 1	Burnout develops gradually through prolonged workload and continuous institutional demands
Theme 2	Too rapid changes in education can reduce teachers' self-confidence and professionalism, even those with long teaching experience, but not their commitment to teaching.
Theme 3	Relational leadership has provided emotional validation and psychological security for teachers experiencing burnout
Theme 4	Collaborative support encourages teachers to re-engage in learning
Theme 5	Relational leadership strengthens professional commitment and helps prevent teaching loss.

Inter-Case Patterns

1. Cause and effect (PS1 ←→PS4)

- **PS1** felt *"seperti ingin meledak"* due to the deadline of his workload and he didn't realize he was at the point of *burnout* because what he was suffering from was *emotional exhaustion* .
- **PS4** (representing "old teachers," or teachers with a long tenure) provides another explanation for **PS1's impending sense of implosion**. As teachers who have experienced several policy changes and technological advancements, these "old teachers" are *"overwhelmed"* or overwhelmed by the process.
  Relationship Pattern: Emotional exhaustion can also be interpreted as psychological pressure due to workload and lagging behind which will affect professionalism.

2. Correlation (PS4 ←→PS2)

Quotes PS4 and PS2 show the psychological transition phase experienced by the group of teachers with long tenure.

- **PS4** acknowledges that there is a saturation point where if the work environment or colleagues are not supportive (*"ketemu rekanan yang gak pas"*), they will fall into apathy or desensitization (*"jadinya kami malas mau ngulang belajar"*). This is the first gateway to *teaching loss* .
- **PS2** complements this pattern by showing how the apathetic self-defense cycle breaks down (*"awalnya saya mikir ya sudah yang muda-muda saja maju"*). Initial resistance to technological advancement softens not because of coercive instructions, but because of social modeling , seeing the surrounding ecosystem and its leaders move together.

Pattern of Relatedness: Senior teachers on the verge *of burnout* do not need new instructional dictates, but rather need social *re-engagement* that triggers positive guilt (*"jadi malu kalau gak semangat sendirian"*).

3. Intervention: (PS3 ←→PS1, PS2, PS4)

The PS3 acts as a *variable mediator* that resolves all the psychological barriers complained about by the PS1, PS2, and PS4.

- PS3's background as a former teacher at the school (*"sebelum jadi kepala sekolah kan saya sudah jadi guru disini cukup lama"*) builds authentic empathy credibility.
- PS3 consciously lowers the structural hierarchy barrier into an equal interpersonal relationship (*"tidak apa-apa jangan malu cerita... kita cari solusinya sama-sama"*).
- PS3's statement is directly confirmed in **PS4's quote** , which praises how the principal managed to mitigate their backlog with informal dialogue methods (*"membuat kami duduk dan ngobrol untuk ngulang bagian-bagian yang kami ketinggalan"*).

Pattern of Connectedness: The principal's relational leadership in this data is interpreted as an act of "presenting an emotional womb." Because the principal has been in their shoes, teachers feel their vulnerability is acknowledged on a human level, allowing fears of administrative failure to gradually dissolve into a space of collaboration.

4. Discussion

This research explores the lived experiences of early childhood education teachers as experienced informants regarding burnout and examines how relational leadership contributes to reducing teacher attrition. Findings indicate that burnout among teachers with more than five years of teaching experience goes beyond emotional exhaustion. Rather, burnout represents the gradual erosion of professional identity, self-confidence, and teaching engagement that develops through prolonged exposure to administrative demands, educational reform, and technological change. These findings suggest that teacher attrition should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon involving psychological, relational, and organizational factors, not simply a decline in teaching performance.

The first major finding suggests that experienced teachers gradually internalize emotional exhaustion as part of their professional responsibilities and often fail to recognize burnout until it significantly impacts their motivation. Informants described emotional exhaustion as a normal consequence of long-term teaching, rather than a condition requiring organizational attention. This finding supports the conceptualization proposed by Maslach and Leiter (2016), who argue that burnout is not simply an individual's inability to cope with job demands, but reflects a chronic mismatch between employees and their work environment. In early childhood education, prolonged emotional exhaustion can undermine teachers' ability to maintain warm, responsive, and developmentally appropriate interactions with young children, thereby reducing the quality of instruction.

A second important finding concerns the relationship between professional experience and teacher confidence in responding to educational change. Contrary to the common assumption that experienced teachers naturally adapt to institutional developments, informants reported feeling increasingly challenged by technological innovations, changes in administrative systems, and new organizational policies. Importantly, these difficulties did not reflect resistance to learning, but rather the need for sufficient time, supportive communication, and collaborative guidance during transition periods. These findings extend previous research on teacher burnout by demonstrating that long teaching experience can simultaneously serve as both a professional strength and a source of vulnerability when organizational change occurs rapidly.

Another significant contribution of this study is the identification of relational leadership as a crucial psychological resource supporting teacher well-being. Informants consistently described the principal's willingness to listen, acknowledge emotional difficulties, and solve problems collaboratively as creating a psychologically safe environment where teachers felt respected rather than professionally judged. Rather than exercising leadership primarily through supervision and administrative control, the principal fostered trust through empathy, open

communication, and interpersonal support. These findings are consistent with Yukl's perspective that effective leadership depends on the quality of interpersonal relationships between leaders and followers. These findings also reinforce previous studies showing that supportive leadership positively contributes to teacher's psychological well-being and professional commitment.

An important theoretical contribution emerging from this research is the conceptualization of teaching loss as a consequence of accumulated burnout among experienced teachers. Previous discussions of teacher attrition have largely focused on administrative burden, technological competency, or instructional practices. In contrast, the current findings suggest that teacher attrition stems from a gradual decline in teachers' psychological energy and professional identity. Consequently, interventions designed to prevent teaching loss should not focus solely on technical competency or administrative simplification but should also prioritize teacher well-being, emotional support, and healthy organizational relationships.

These findings also offer practical implications for school leadership in early childhood education. Principals should recognize that experienced teachers require ongoing psychological support in addition to professional development opportunities. Leadership practices characterized by empathy, active listening, collaborative decision-making, and emotional validation can strengthen teacher resilience while maintaining instructional quality. Creating opportunities for open dialogue and collaboration among colleagues can also reduce feelings of professional isolation experienced by experienced teachers during periods of organizational change.

While this research contributes to the understanding of burnout and teaching loss among experienced early childhood teachers, several limitations should be acknowledged. This study involved only four informants from one kindergarten under one educational foundation, limiting the applicability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Furthermore, the study focused exclusively on teachers with more than five years of teaching experience; therefore, future research should compare teachers across career stages and educational settings to better understand how relational leadership influences burnout throughout a teacher's professional career.

Overall, the findings suggest that preventing teaching loss requires a shift from an administratively dominated approach to human-centered leadership that prioritizes teachers' psychological well-being. By fostering trusting interpersonal relationships and creating a supportive school environment, relational leadership can help experienced teachers maintain professional commitment, instructional engagement, and sustained educational quality.

5. Conclusion

This research confirms that the phenomenon of teaching loss in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is not solely driven by technical workload issues such as administration. A phenomenological study explores how experienced early childhood teachers interpret burnout and the role of relational leadership in mitigating the occurrence of teacher attrition. Findings indicate that prolonged burnout extends beyond emotional exhaustion and gradually impacts teachers' professional identity, motivation, and teaching engagement. Relational leadership, characterized by empathy, active listening, emotional support, and collaborative communication, is considered a crucial factor in helping teachers restore psychological well-being and maintain professional commitment.

This research contributes to the literature by introducing teacher attrition as a phenomenon experienced by long-tenured teachers and by highlighting the importance of relational leadership in supporting teacher well-being in early childhood education settings.

Practically, principals are encouraged to strengthen relational leadership practices by encouraging open communication, providing emotional support, and creating collaborative school environments that enhance teacher resilience. This study has several limitations. It involved a small number of informants from a single kindergarten under a single educational foundation, thus limiting the applicability of the findings to other educational contexts. Future research is recommended to involve informants from different schools and educational levels, and to employ a broader qualitative or mixed-methods approach to further examine the relationship between relational leadership, burnout, and attrition

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