



## INTRODUCTION

Teaching is generally known with its stressful and demanding nature which results in negative feelings and attitudes among teachers (e.g., GÜndÜz, 2012; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Lieter, 2001). Consequently, teachers may experience burnout which may lead them to leave the profession. This possibility of burnout development increases when teachers work in more challenging contexts such as special education context or preschool context. However, some factors can help to reduce the effects of burnout. The purpose of this study was to examine the role of pre-school teachers' efficacy beliefs in predicting their burnout levels in the Sultanate of Oman.

### Definitions and Dimensions of Burnout:

Although there is no exact definition agreed-upon between researchers for burnout, it is mostly known as a psychological syndrome that results from heavy demands and workload. Shukla and Trivedi (2008) defined burnout as a "specific dysfunction" among workers which is believed to be the result of too much demanding tasks that take up the workers' energy, resources and strengths. Burnout is characterized by the insufficient ability to involve with job recipients. In addition, it is described as "a chronic state of exhaustion" caused by interpersonal stress, usually lasts for a long time, in professions providing human services. It is feelings experienced by employees whose jobs demand frequent exposure to social situations that are emotionally charged (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008).

Researchers defined burnout as including three main dimensions. Bataineh and Alsagheer (2012) explained that burnout is "a psychological syndrome" of depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and lack of personal accomplishment that may happen among individuals whose job require frequent working with other people. Emotional exhaustion refers to the state of being "emotionally over extended and depleted." Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion as people who constantly work with other people may experience long term stress that lead to drained emotions and, then, to burnout. Workers, teachers or professionals are required to carefully deal with their clients psychological, social and physical problems which put huge stress on them (Maslach & Jackson, 1984).

Maslach and Jackson (1984) showed that depersonalization is the process of developing a "negative, cynical and dehumanized" feeling or response towards one's clients and treating them accordingly. Because of stress, workers may develop a huge distance from their colleagues or clients of their jobs. The third dimension of burnout is the lack of personal accomplishment in which people who suffer from burnout feel unhappy and dissatisfied about themselves and their accomplishment.

Burnout results on many negative consequences among workers. Maslach and Jackson (1984) summarized results from their previous studies that show the negative effects of burnout, which include feeling upset, anxious, angry and deliberately trying to escape people. In addition, it causes high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization related to job turnover intentions and low level of job commitment (Lin, 2013). Surprisingly, burnout can lead to even more dangerous psychological and physical symptoms. Fralick and Flegal (2014) stated that burnout may result on "anxiety, depression, substance abuse, addiction and, in rare cases, suicide" (p. 731). According to the same researchers, Canadian physicians participated in their study reported that burnout negative impacts were reflected on their families and daily lives. Burnout negatively influenced the care they provided to their patients and the decisions they had to make.

These negative effects are observed among teachers. Tang, Au, Schwarzer & Schmitz (2001) reported burnout to cause negative mental health status among Chinese teachers. Furthermore, in a sample of highly experienced school teachers, stress was found to have direct effects on depressive symptoms among teachers and burnout was found to mediate the relationship between work stress and depressive symptoms (Steinhardt, Jaggars, Faulk & Gloria, 2011). Similar findings indicated that teachers' burnout was significantly correlated with psychological, physical and psychosomatic symptoms (Bauer et al., 2006; Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). There are several factors that contribute to the development of burnout among workers generally and teachers specifically; the most significant factor is the nature of the job and its demands (e.g., Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Lieter, 2001).

Although the role of teachers in the recent time has changed to make the teacher as a guide, a facilitator and a counselor, teachers are still responsible of students' learning and they ought to give much effort to do different tasks (Al-diyar & Salem, 2013). The nature of their job, made teachers feel tired, stressed, frustrated and burned out. In addition, time pressure was found positively and strongly related to emotional exhaustion while job satisfaction was negatively related to two dimensions of teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Pedagogical barriers and stressors (such as lack of shared decision making, workload, student misbehavior, demotivation, diversity, discipline problems, and crowded classroom) also make teachers' feel burned out (e.g., Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vlachakis, 2006; Bauer et al., 2006; Betoret & Artiga, 2010).

Colleagues' burnout may contribute to the development of other teachers' burnout. Bakker and Schaufeli (2000) reported that burnout is 'visible' and people who suffer from burnout can easily communicate their symptoms. Their findings showed that perceived burnout among the participants' colleagues was strongly related to individual teachers' burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). Specifically, teachers experienced high burnout levels when they frequently communicated with each other about problems in work and when the teachers were highly exposed to the emotions of others.

Within the context of early childhood education, Kelly and Berthelsen (1995) indicated that time pressures, children's needs, non-teaching tasks, maintaining early childhood philosophy and practice, personal needs, issues with parents of the children, interpersonal relationships, and attitudes and perceptions about early childhood programs were the most stressors that preschool teachers had to deal with. Grammatikopoulos, Tsigilis, and Zachopoulou (2006) found that Greek preschool educators seemed to experience emotional exhaustion levels above the average. Al-Frehat and Al-Rabadi (2010) reported high burnout levels for Jordanian pre-school teachers across the three dimensions of Maslach's scale. Similar findings were reported for Turkish (Buyukbayraktar & Temiz, 2015) and Iraqi pre-school teachers (Jawad, 2015). Boghean, and Clipa (2014) investigated Romanian pre-school teachers and found that 54.7% of the participants found their profession very stressful, while 41.3% reported moderate level of stress and 4% perceived it as slightly stressful. Regardless, 51.3% of their study sample stated that they hardly consider quitting their job while 16.7% reported a higher frequency in considering giving up the profession. As for stress sources, over 60% is reported to be caused by the administrative tasks and workload (related mainly to the very large number of children), followed by 50-60% resulting from the financial matters (the wage and the insufficiency or lack of teaching materials). Political instability (very often changes within the educational

system), or to the parental education given to the children in their first years of life (their inappropriate behavior towards the teacher) or even by the specific of the activity (assuming multiple roles) are also reported to be significant stress source for preschool teachers. Consequently, pre-school teachers may face higher levels of challenges than other teachers in upper grades. Emam and Mohamed (2011) found that primary school teachers showed a higher sense of self-efficacy than did preschool teachers regarding the management and teaching of special education needs' students.

#### Factors Buffering Burnout:

Several factors may buffer the effects of burnout. For example, social support either inside or outside the school affects the level of burnout. Bataineh and Alsagheer (2012) found that special education teachers who received more social support were less suffering from burnout. Among different sources of social support (supervisors, colleagues, friends, spouse, or family), the researchers showed that family and colleagues support positively predicted personal accomplishment among teachers. As noted earlier, positive feedback and praise given to teachers help to reduce the level of burnout. Positive teachers' involvement in the work and their interaction with students should be enhanced by school administrators' and parents' praise of the teachers' work inside the classroom and of their achievement (Al-diyar & Salem, 2013). Parents' relationships and feedback are also asserted by other researchers (e.g., GÜndÜz, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). In addition, teachers' attitude and feelings towards their job may positively or negatively affect their feeling of burnout (e.g., GÜndÜz, 2012; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Lieter, 2001).

Focusing on early childhood environment, Buyukbayraktar and Temiz (2015) found a reversed significant relationship between the preschool teachers' perfectionism and burnout total score. Similarly, perfectionism associated negatively and strongly with the sub-dimension of depersonalization. In light of these results, the researchers suggest paying more effort to study factors leading to preschool teachers' burnout in order to help prevent it.

#### Teachers' Efficacy Beliefs and their Effects:

One important factor widely investigated in relation to burnout by researchers is self-efficacy. Teachers' beliefs in their abilities to achieve the required tasks are the key to the burnout entrance which either lead teachers to experience burnout or to avoid it. General self-efficacy was defined by Bandura (1997) as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). More specifically, teachers' self-efficacy was defined as "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 233).

Teacher self-efficacy was found to be associated with different psychological or pedagogical outcomes. Schwarzer and Hallum (2008) indicated that self-efficacy provides a protective source when dealing with hard situations. When people have an optimistic view about their ability to deal with new challenges and demands, they become more motivated to create productive ways of coping. Some researchers showed that when teachers' encounter challenging students, their sense of efficacy helps them to maintain their level of job maintenance, persistence and motivation (e.g., Allinder, 1994; Lee & Houseal, 2003).

Likewise, different effects of self-efficacy on teachers' burnout were documented in the literature. For example, Aloe and Amo (2014) indicated that when teachers had a

higher sense of classroom management self-efficacy (CMSE), they also had a greater sense of accomplishment. In contrast, their findings indicated a negative relationship between CMSE and depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. The researchers pointed that teachers with low self-efficacy may decrease their sense of accomplishment and increase their disengagement levels, which may eventually lead them to leave their profession. The same relationships between self-efficacy and burnout dimensions were also reported by some researchers (e.g., BÜmen, 2010; Friedman, 2003; GÜndÜz, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). At the overall level of burnout, regardless of its dimensions, a negative relationship between self-efficacy and burnout was documented in many studies (e.g., BÜmen, 2010; Friedman, 2003).

Very few available studies focused on pre-school teachers' efficacy beliefs and their connections to burnout levels. Bosacki, Bullock, and Coplan (2015) found that personality traits, the preschool educators' emotional stability, extraversion, and openness to experience were significantly and positively related to their classroom management efficacy. Moreover, both extraversion and openness to experience predicted the educators' classroom management self-efficacy to a considerable extent. The researchers encourage conducting a longitudinal study that sheds more light on the development and stability of early childhood teachers' self-efficacy at different career stages and how these beliefs influence pre-school teachers' well-being. Jennings (2015) found that personal efficacy and positive affect were significantly correlated with emotional support. On the other hand, depression was significantly and negatively correlated with emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. The two burnout dimensions, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, were significantly and negatively correlated with emotional support. Results also demonstrated that personal and teaching efficacy were both significantly correlated with sensitivity of discipline. In contrary, depersonalization was significantly and negatively correlated with sensitivity of discipline. Another related study examined the relationships of pre-school teachers' burnout with their locus of control (Akca & Yemen, 2010). Using regression analysis, the researchers concluded that increased emotional exhaustion lead teachers to be externally controlled. In addition, teachers who scored high in the dimension of personal accomplishment tended to be internally driven. Finally, no significant relationship was detected between locus of control and the dimension of depersonalization.

Building on early research, the current study aims to examine the predictive role of pre-school teachers' efficacy belief dimensions in predicting their burnout levels. This study expands previous research by collecting data in Oman, where little pre-school related research, if any, is available. The use of the new measure of the efficacy belief should validate this new measure and encourage future research to investigate pre-school teachers' efficacy belief across different school contexts in the Arab world as well as worldwide.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adapted a descriptive research design to examine the connections among the investigated variables. In the next section, descriptions are given about the study participants and the measures used to examine teachers' efficacy belief dimensions and their burnout levels.

### The Participants:

The sample of the current study included (319) female pre-school teachers teaching in three school districts (i.e., Muscat, Dakhliya, & Batinah) in the Sultanate of Oman. Most

of the teachers (299) were Omani and the rest were from different countries employed in the Omani preschools. The participants teaching experiences ranged from one year to (25) years ( $M = 5.09$ ,  $SD = 4.37$ ). Most of the teachers have intermediate diploma (85.5%) and almost half of them were single. The participants were assured confidentiality of the data and no identification information was required from them. Participation was voluntary and all invited schools agreed to participate. The researcher, along with a research assistant, administered the questionnaires in all participating schools.

### Measures:

Two measures were used in the current study. These were the Pre-School Teachers' Efficacy Belief Scale (PS-TEBS, Aldhafri, 2014) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The participants also answered some demographic questions.

The PS-TSBS. The PS-TSBS is a new efficacy scale that was constructed particularly to examine efficacy beliefs for pre-school teachers. Aldhafri (2014) surveyed existing efficacy measures (e.g., Aldhafri & Ambusaidi, 2012; Goddard, 2002; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) across different levels and subjects and wrote new items that fit the context of pre-school teachers. A pilot study was run to examine the psychometric properties of the PS-TSBS which consisted of (90) items (with 9-point Likert type response) representing 11 dimensions. Item-total correlations were used to examine the validity of the new measure. In a recent study, Aldhafri (2015) used factor structure technique to shorten the measure to include 49 items representing five subscales. The short version was used in the current study. These included efficacy for instruction (13 items,  $\alpha = 0.91$ ), management efficacy (8 items,  $\alpha = 0.87$ ), engagement efficacy (10 items,  $\alpha = 0.91$ ), assessment efficacy (7 items,  $\alpha = 0.85$ ), and efficacy for emotional interaction (11 items,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

The Maslach Burnout Inventory. The participants also responded to the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The MBI has been widely used and approved to be a valid measure in the Arabic context including the Omani schools (Aldhafri & Al-Qryouti, 2010; Aljamali & Hasan, 2003; Batainah & Aljwarinah, 2004). In the current study, this 5-point Likert scale gained good reliability coefficients across the three subscales (depersonalization, 5 items,  $\alpha = 0.62$ ; emotional exhaustion, 9 items,  $\alpha = 0.82$ ; and feelings of low personal accomplishment, 8 items,  $\alpha = 0.73$ ).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Data Analyses:

Before main data analysis, the data were checked for outliers and skewness and no threat was found. Pearson correlation coefficients were reported first to examine the relationships between the pre-teachers' efficacy beliefs dimensions and their burnout dimensions. The five efficacy belief dimensions correlated with all three dimensions of burnout as displayed in Table 1. In relation to depersonalization, the five efficacy belief dimensions correlations ranged from (-0.11,  $p = 0.05$ ) with efficacy for management to (-0.21,  $p < 0.001$ ) with efficacy for child interaction. For the emotional exhaustion, the correlations ranged from (-0.20,  $p < 0.001$ ) with efficacy for management to (-0.26,  $p < 0.001$ ) with efficacy for instruction. Finally, the correlations between the five efficacy dimensions and low personal accomplishment ranged from (-0.28,  $p < 0.001$ ) with efficacy for engagement to (-0.36,  $p < 0.001$ ) with efficacy for child interaction.

### Regression Results:

To examine the predictive role of the pre-school teachers' efficacy beliefs in predicting their burnout levels, three separate regression models were calculated. The five efficacy belief dimensions were entered together as predictors to predict each burnout dimension separately. Table (2) gives details of the findings from the three regression models.

In the first model, depersonalization was predicted using the five efficacy belief dimensions. The model explained only 6.4% of variance in the teachers' levels of depersonalization. Only efficacy for child interaction was a significant predictor of depersonalization ( $\beta = -0.26$ ,  $t = -1.99$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In the second model, level of accomplishment was predicted by the five dimensions of efficacy beliefs; the model explained 15.5% of variance in levels of accomplishment. In particular, two dimensions of efficacy beliefs significantly predicted accomplishment; these included efficacy for child interaction ( $\beta = -0.42$ ,  $t = -3.37$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and efficacy for engagement ( $\beta = -0.27$ ,  $t = -2.07$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In the third model, teachers' emotional exhaustion was predicted by the five efficacy belief dimensions. The model explained 7.3% of variance in emotional exhaustion. However, only efficacy for instruction was marginally a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = -0.23$ ,  $t = -1.77$ ,  $p = 0.07$ ).

### Discussion:

The results of the current study proved the connection between pre-school teachers' efficacy beliefs and their levels of burnout. The five dimensions of efficacy belief, however, showed different connections with the three dimensions of burnout. Overall, the most significant predictor of teachers' burnout was their levels of efficacy related to child interaction. Efficacy for child interaction was a significant predictor of two dimensions of teachers' burnout: depersonalization and low of accomplishment. Teachers' efficacy for engagement was also a significant predictor of accomplishment levels. The other dimensions of efficacy beliefs did not reach significance levels in predicting the three burnout dimensions when examined using regression models, although they had significant bivariate relationships with burnout levels through Pearson correlations.

The findings from correlation coefficients stand along with early research examining the relationship between teachers' efficacy beliefs and the development of burnout symptoms. The results assure the important role teachers' efficacy beliefs have in protecting teachers from burnout symptoms and sustaining healthy school environment. Teaching, as a profession, requires strong psychological health that helps teachers deal effectively with different sources of stress and protect them from developing burnout symptoms.

In addition, teachers' beliefs about their ability to teach and manage instruction seem to be an important factor in decreasing teachers' feelings of emotional exhaustion. Teaching requires extensive efforts and hard work from teachers, especially in the context of early childhood education where individualized instructions are favored over all other types of instructions. If teachers are equipped with the skills needed to prepare effective individualized plans and having high beliefs about the use of these skills, then these teachers are more likely to adopt effective teaching practices that meet each child's needs and abilities. Success in executing these teaching requirements should prevent teachers from developing symptoms of emotional exhaustion.

Among the different dimensions of teachers' efficacy beliefs, the regression model findings indicate the importance of teachers' beliefs about their ability to emotionally

interact with children. Part of the importance of this efficacy dimension stems from the nature of the developmental stage that these teachers work with. Early childhood represents a sensitive stage that requires high teachers' ability of handling children's emotion and being able to interact effectively with young children. Meeting children's needs in this stage requires teachers to develop good strategies to provide suitable environment for the children, where they can express and feel safe to play, motivated to interact with others, and emotionally supported when there is a need. The results indicate that when teachers have high beliefs about their ability to emotionally interact with the children, their levels of depersonalization decrease and they sense a high level of personal accomplishment. Decreasing their levels of emotional exhaustion, however, requires high levels of efficacy beliefs about managing instructions that fit the needs of early childhood education.

The effects of teachers' efficacy beliefs on teachers' burnout accentuate the importance of studying each of the efficacy and burnout dimensions separately. The use of total scores may mislead the understanding of the relationships between efficacy beliefs and burnout levels. In addition, the fact that the efficacy dimensions vary in their effects on buffering burnout levels give direct implications that there are some dimensions of efficacy beliefs that educators need to focus on when preparing teachers in the teacher preparation program. What is found for these pre-school teachers may not be replicated with other teachers who work in upper grades; therefore, future research may check the relationship between the efficacy belief dimensions and burnout dimensions for teachers from different school stages.

While regression models propose directional relationship among the investigated variables, it is difficult to ignore the possibility of reciprocal effects among the dimensions of teachers' efficacy beliefs and their burnout symptoms (Sevindi, 2013; özer, 2013). Future experimental research design may contribute to the understanding of the relationships between efficacy belief and burnout dimensions.

Even though the connections between pre-school teachers' efficacy belief dimensions and their burnout levels were supported in the current study, the total variance accounted across all regression models was low. This indicates that there are other possible factors that may influence teachers' development of burnout. Using multiple regression analysis, Grammatikopoulos et al. (2006) found that "job itself" and "working conditions" accounted for 23% of public sector preschool educators' emotional exhaustion variance. It was found that "job itself" and "immediate supervisor" predicted 41% of emotional exhaustion variability for private sector preschool teachers. Personal, social, student-related, and administrative factors need to be examined when predicting pre-school teachers' burnout levels.

To conclude, the current study suggests that to build a healthy working environment for early childhood educators, attention should be given to their efficacy beliefs. Teacher education programs need to construct courses and teaching practicum in a way that supports the development of strong efficacy beliefs that cover different aspects of the teaching context in early childhood education.

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**Table 1**

*Correlation Coefficients of Efficacy Belief Dimensions and Burnout Dimensions*

Study variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Eff. Teaching	1	0.87**	0.83**	0.87	0.79**	-0.26**	-0.20**	-0.30**
2. Eff. Interaction		1	0.79**	0.87**	0.80**	-0.24**	-0.21**	-0.36**
3. Eff. Assessment			1	0.83**	0.78**	-0.22**	-0.12*	-0.31**
4. Eff. Engagement				1	0.82**	-0.24**	-0.17**	-0.28**
5. Eff. Management					1	-0.20**	-0.11	-0.33**
6. Emotional Exhaustion						1	0.53**	.090
7. Depersonalization							1	0.18**
8. Low accomplishment								1

**Table 2**

*Results of the Multiple Regression Models to Predict Burnout Dimensions Using Efficacy Beliefs Dimensions*

Model	B	S.E	$\beta$	t	sig	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>						
Constant	4.33	0.60		7.11	0.00	
Eff. Teaching	-0.30	0.17	-0.23	-1.77	0.07	
Eff. Interaction	-0.02	0.17	-0.01	-0.12	0.90	0.073
Eff. Assessment	0.00	0.12	0.00	0.04	0.96	
Eff. Engagement	-0.09	0.17	-0.07	-0.51	0.60	
Eff. Management	0.07	0.14	0.05	0.52	0.60	
<b>Depersonalization</b>						
Constant	2.22	0.50		4.42	0.00	
Eff. Teaching	-0.19	0.14	-0.18	-1.39	0.16	
Eff. Interaction	-0.28	0.14	-0.26	-1.99	0.04	0.064
Eff. Assessment	0.12	0.10	0.12	1.13	0.25	
Eff. Engagement	-0.04	0.14	-0.03	-0.27	0.78	
Eff. Management	0.20	0.11	0.18	1.74	0.08	
<b>Low Accomplishment</b>						
Constant	4.19	0.48		8.71	0.00	
Eff. Teaching	0.60	0.13	0.06	0.46	0.64	
Eff. Interaction	-0.45	0.13	-0.42	-3.37	0.00	0.155
Eff. Assessment	-0.12	0.10	-0.12	-1.21	0.22	
Eff. Engagement	-0.29	0.14	-0.27	-2.07	0.03	
Eff. Management	-0.18	0.11	-0.16	-1.65	0.09	