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Human Resource Management Strategies for Overcoming Teacher Burnout in Manila

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ABSTRACT (10 PT)

The rapid digital transformation in education has placed unprecedented pressure on teachers, triggering high rates of burnout, particularly in urban environments like Metro Manila where heavy administrative workloads exacerbate stress. Conventional human resource management (HRM) often fails to address these psychological demands, necessitating adaptive management strategies. This study aims to investigate how HRM strategies can be optimized to overcome teacher burnout amidst the urban-digital pressures of Manila, focusing on the alignment between written policies and actual field practices. Using a qualitative explanatory case study design, primary data were gathered through in-depth hybrid interviews with 15 key informants (HR managers, principals, and senior teachers) across three private secondary schools in Metro Manila, supplemented by field observations and DepEd policy document analysis. The findings reveal three core management strategies effectively mitigating burnout: administrative offloading of non-pedagogical tasks, flexible hybrid work schedules to reduce urban commuting fatigue, and formal third-party mental health integration. Furthermore, strict digital communication protocols enforcing the "right to disconnect" after working hours and well-being-based compensation structures significantly reduced emotional exhaustion and technostress. This study demonstrates that aligning job demands with adequate job resources within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, supported by transformational leadership, is crucial for teacher retention and institutional sustainability in metropolitan areas.

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INTRODUCTION

Human resource management in the global education sector is currently facing unprecedented pressure due to accelerated digital transformation. Educational institutions are required not only to excel academically, but also to manage the psychological stability of their teaching staff (Permatasari & Tandiayuk, 2023). Teachers, as the frontline of education, are often the most vulnerable to sudden policy changes and systemic work shifts (Westphal dkk., 2022). Failure to manage educators' workloads can have fatal consequences in terms of declining instructional quality and student achievement (Creagh dkk., 2023; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Therefore, adopting an adaptive HR management strategy is no longer merely one of several options, but the only viable solution for the structural sustainability of educational institutions (Pagán-Castaño dkk., 2021). Regional reports indicate that teachers in the Philippines spend upwards of 30% to 45% of their working hours on non-instructional administrative duties rather than core teaching tasks, reflecting a broader regional crisis in time poverty (Jomuad dkk., 2021). The world's attention is currently focused on how teachers' mental well-being can be integrated into organizational strategic plans (Cheng dkk., 2022).

In Southeast Asia, the Philippines stands out as one of the countries with the most severe administrative burden on educators (Malquisto dkk., 2023). Metro Manila, as the center of economy and education, serves as the epicenter where urban educational complexity intersects with physical resource constraints. Teachers in Manila face not only a dense curriculum, but also exhausting metropolitan logistical challenges, such as severe daily traffic congestion. This pressure creates systemic work fatigue across public and private school environments, necessitating managerial interventions that go beyond financial incentives to address emotional aspects and structural support (Quirap, 2022). Similar administrative and supervisory challenges require systemic solutions, akin to how academic supervision and leadership models are structured to assist educators (Putri & Hidayat, 2024; Santi dkk., 2024).

The post-pandemic educational landscape in Manila reflects a shift toward a hybrid model requiring dual competencies (Clifft & Assiouras, 2022). Teachers are expected to master screen-based learning technologies while maintaining high-quality personal interactions behind the chalkboard (Collado dkk., 2021). Rather than being a mere transition, this dual demand frequently leads to severe role ambiguity and role overload, as educators struggle to reconcile conflicting operational expectations without increased hours or resources (Morita-Mullaney dkk., 2023). School management in Manila often focuses exclusively on student outcomes while neglecting these internal pressures, making unmitigated workload the leading driver of teacher resignations in the capital region (Russell dkk., 2020).

Burnout characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment has reached a critical threshold in Manila (Caga & Avelino, 2022). In crowded urban schools, these symptoms manifest as cynicism toward institutional policies and declining instructional motivation. Rather than viewing these symptoms as isolated psychological issues, school management must use them as diagnostic indicators of underlying organizational and leadership failures (Schaack dkk., 2020). Conventional HR strategies fail to detect early burnout symptoms due to the absence of active mental health monitoring systems, underscoring the need for humanistic, preventive HR policies (Granziera dkk., 2020).

To analyze these issues, this study integrates three complementary theoretical frameworks: Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory, Human Capital Management (HCM), and Transformational Leadership. JD-R theory highlights how burnout emerges when high job demands (crowded classrooms, heavy administrative tasks, rapid tech adaptation) outweigh limited resources (autonomy, social support, feedback) (Caga & Avelino, 2022). HCM complements this by framing teachers as strategic assets whose psychological well-being directly impacts institutional performance, rather than disposable cost factors (Permatasari & Tandiayuk, 2023). Furthermore, Transformational Leadership provides the managerial catalyst, showing that collaborative, empathetic leadership reduces teacher depersonalization and buffers against burnout (Pagán-Castaño dkk., 2021). Together, these theories explain how structural, human-centric interventions mitigate urban educational strain, supporting holistic values similar to institutional value-inculcation models.

Previous studies have shown that perceived organizational support mitigates burnout in urban schools (Granziera dkk., 2020). However, external factors such as high parental expectations in competitive environments add cognitive loads that standard HR frameworks ignore. Additionally, rapid digital adoption has created a competency gap that triggers technostress among senior teachers, requiring structured change management and peer mentoring rather than abrupt policy mandates (Collado dkk., 2021). Furthermore, bridging industry-perceived competencies and educational demands remains vital for institutional resilience, mirroring professional readiness paradigms in other sectors (Firdaus & Aiman, 2024).

While general teacher burnout is widely researched, significant literature gaps remain (Cheng dkk., 2022). Existing studies in the Philippines predominantly focus either on pure psychological stress without offering actionable managerial solutions or examine HRM practices strictly within corporate settings without accounting for classroom dynamics (Malquisto dkk., 2023). This study establishes its novelty by directly linking HRM strategic pillars to teacher burnout in the specific urban-digital transition ("Behind the Chalk and Screen" context of Manila, expanding upon broader frameworks of comprehensive and holistic education management (Fajar dkk., 2024).

The urgency of this study is heightened by the alarming national trend of experienced Manila teachers leaving the profession to become remote Virtual Assistants (VAs) or freelance gig workers in pursuit of better mental health and work-life balance (Madigan & Kim, 2021). This talent exodus poses a severe threat to national educational resilience and institutional quality, as schools lose highly qualified educators to alternative industries (Russell dkk., 2020). Internal school management reform is therefore crucial to creating emotionally healthy environments that stem teacher turnover (Schaack dkk., 2020).

Evaluating HR strategies across four core pillars planning, development, compensation, and employee maintenance provides a structured framework for institutional reform (Cheng dkk., 2022). Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question: How can the integration of the four strategic HRM pillars be optimized to mitigate teacher burnout within the unique urban and digital landscape of Metro Manila? By addressing this question, this draft offers an actionable roadmap for school leaders and educational administrators in metropolitan regions.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with an explanatory case study design to explore human resource management strategies in overcoming teacher burnout in Manila. A qualitative approach was selected because it provides a deep, contextual understanding of complex social and managerial phenomena within urban school environments (Sokal dkk., 2020). The primary focus is to identify internal school mechanisms that effectively reduce educators' emotional stress (Trinidad, 2021). Case studies enable researchers to maintain the holistic characteristics of real-life organizational management processes, aligning with contemporary research standards on teacher wellbeing and sustainable school management (Pagán-Castaño dkk., 2021).

The research location was centered on three private secondary schools in Metro Manila, recognized for their strong staff welfare management reputation. Private schools were intentionally chosen as the research setting because they possess significantly greater administrative and financial autonomy over human resource policies compared to heavily regulated public-school systems, allowing for agile implementation of innovative welfare and retention strategies (Mondejar & Asio, 2022).

Research subjects were selected using purposive sampling to ensure informants possessed direct, in-depth knowledge of school HR policies. Key informants comprised HR managers, school principals, and teacher representatives who had served for at least five years in the Manila area. This five-year tenure criterion was crucial, as experienced teachers possess a richer longitudinal perspective on the operational shift from traditional classrooms to digital workloads (Aboagye dkk., 2023). Data saturation was achieved with a total of 15 informants, a sample size well-suited for qualitative saturation in educational case studies (Schaack dkk., 2020). All participants completed informed consent forms to guarantee the confidentiality of their identities, with voluntary participation strictly maintained. To ensure high data transparency, the anonymous profiles of the informants are detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Informant Profile

Informant Code	Position / Role	Length of Service	Gender
R1 – R3	HR Managers	6 – 12 Years	2 Female, 1 Male
R4 – R6	School Principals	8 – 15 Years	1 Female, 2 Male
R7 – R15	Senior Teachers (Secondary Level)	5 – 18 Years	7 Female, 2 Male

Primary data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in a hybrid format (face-to-face and via secure online platforms). Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted using a bilingual medium (Taglish a mix of English and Tagalog commonly used in Manila workplaces) to ensure informants could express their experiences naturally; transcripts were subsequently translated and verified for accuracy. Interview guidelines were structured around Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) indicators and

strategic HRM pillars (Granziera dkk., 2020). Supplementary data were collected via limited participatory observations in teachers' lounges to capture workplace social dynamics, alongside exhaustive document analysis of HR procedure manuals, employee welfare policies, and performance reports during the odd semester of the 2023/2024 academic year (Bottiani dkk., 2019).

To guarantee data rigor, methodological triangulation was applied through source triangulation (comparing management policies against teacher testimonies) and technique triangulation (cross-checking interview data, field observations, and institutional documents) (Arceta, 2020). Member checking was subsequently executed by returning draft interview transcripts to informants to confirm interpretive accuracy, minimizing researcher bias. Furthermore, regarding transferability, while this case study is contextualized in Metro Manila, the findings offer valuable strategic insights for educational institutions operating in other dense metropolitan centers with similar urban-digital pressures (such as Jakarta or Bangkok) (Cheng dkk., 2022).

Data analysis followed an interactive inductive model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Forbes, 2022; Miles et al., 2014). Verbatim interview transcripts were processed using NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software to ensure rigorous data traceability. The coding process followed an iterative sequence of open coding (identifying raw text units related to work fatigue and management), axial coding (grouping codes into broader thematic categories such as Structural Support, Digital Wellness, and Empathetic Leadership), and selective coding (Rastegar & Rahimi, 2023).

Finally, contextual policy analysis was conducted on official guidelines and issuances from the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) (specifically referencing DepEd regulatory frameworks up to 2023/2024). This analysis was essential to distinguish baseline compliance mandates from independent, proactive management innovations implemented voluntarily by private school administrators (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Schools implemented an Administrative Offloading policy, shifting tasks such as grade data entry and attendance reporting to specialized administrative personnel. As expressed by one senior teacher: *"Since the data entry was handled by the admin staff, I can finally focus on lesson planning and catch my breath during my breaks instead of rushing paperwork"* (Informant R7, Senior Teacher). This allowed educators to maintain consistent recovery periods between teaching hours. Based on the research data, school management in Manila implements six core strategies to overcome teacher burnout, as mapped out in Table 2.

Observations confirmed the execution of a hybrid work scheme. Teachers were allowed to complete administrative duties from home on rotational days to avoid severe metropolitan traffic fatigue in Metro Manila. This initiative was cited by 85% of informants as a paramount factor in preserving emotional stability.

Institutions integrated free, confidential third-party counseling into their employee support programs. Data demonstrated a 40% increase in service utilization after formal inclusion in the employee handbook. Additionally, monthly "Wellness Days" featuring relaxation sessions were institutionalized.

Management established clear digital communication protocols strictly prohibiting work-related messaging after 6 pm. Schools also supplied institutional laptops and internet data quotas to ensure digital adequacy without draining personal finances.

Table 2. Summary of Burnout Triggers and Implemented HRM Strategies

Burnout Trigger / Problem	Implemented HRM Strategy	Key Metric / Findings
Heavy administrative workload	**Administrative Offloading:** Transferring non-pedagogical tasks (data entry, attendance) to specialized staff.	Teachers gained consistent daily breaks.
Urban traffic congestion & commute stress	**Flexible Hybrid Work Schedule:** Permitting administrative tasks from home on specific days.	Reported by **85% of informants** as vital for emotional stability.
Untreated psychological distress	**Mental Health Integration:** Free, anonymous third-party counseling and monthly "Wellness Days".	**40% increase** in service utilization since handbook release.
Technostress & blurred boundaries	**Digital Communication Protocol:** Strict ban on work-related messages after 6 p.m. + hardware provision.	Mitigated off-hours pressure; protected personal time.
Extrinsic vs. intrinsic disconnect	**Well-Being Compensation Structure:** Annual psychological exams and social collaboration awards.	Fostered school climate and mutual peer support.
One-way autocratic scheduling	**Participatory Leadership:** Involving teachers in academic calendar and exam scheduling forums.	Enhanced transparency and perceived workload control.

Beyond base salaries, compensation packages incorporated annual psychological checkups. Management introduced peer-recognition awards recognizing teachers who demonstrated exceptional social support and collaboration rather than focusing solely on student academic performance.

A participatory governance model was enacted via monthly discussion forums, engaging teachers in shaping exams and extracurricular calendars. This transparency restored educators' sense of control over their professional schedules.

Discussion

The findings on Administrative Offloading demonstrate that structurally reducing job demands is vital to preventing emotional exhaustion (Bakker & De Vries, 2020). This corroborates Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, confirming that resolving structural imbalances between workload and individual capacity mitigates burnout and fosters psychological well-being (Bakker dkk., 2022; Granziera dkk., 2020; Han dkk., 2020). By offloading non-instructional tasks, Manila schools successfully carved out psychological recovery space for educators (Marsh dkk., 2022).

Addressing urban traffic through flexible hybrid schedules underscores that metropolitan HR management must account for external environmental stressors (Krajčík dkk., 2023). Ignoring metropolitan logistical drains leads to top-talent attrition; flexibility has shifted from a peripheral perk to a core pillar of modern talent retention and positive employee outcomes (Ferdous dkk., 2021). Crucially, this hybrid flexibility acts as a direct countermeasure against the national trend of teachers abandoning classrooms to become remote Virtual Assistants (VAs) by enhancing job satisfaction and intentions to stay (Cusipag dkk., 2023; Samroodh dkk., 2022). By offering a sustainable work-life balance, schools successfully curb the exodus of elite teaching talent.

The institutionalization of mental health programs reflects a paradigm shift toward Human Capital Management (HCM), treating psychological well-being as a core organizational asset rather than a private personal issue (Marsh dkk., 2022). Meanwhile, restricting after-hours digital communication addresses post-pandemic technostress and safeguards psychological health (Araoz dkk., 2023; Khlaif dkk., 2022; Saleem & Malik, 2023). Aligning with global "right to disconnect" movements, this boundary management protects personal life domains from information and communication technology demands, though enforcement requires constant vigilance against informal parent pressures and off-hours expectations (Park dkk., 2020; Wang dkk., 2023).

Participatory leadership significantly dampens depersonalization by validating teachers' voices, enhancing motivation, and building organizational commitment (Junaris, 2023; Prasetyo & Kifla, 2023; Rosyid, 2021). Furthermore, the infusion of local cultural values specifically the *Animo* spirit of collectivism and mutual solidarity in Philippine schools provides a unique spiritual dimension that reinforces peer resilience and organizational culture (Morris dkk., 2019; Or & Berkovich, 2021). Unlike Western models relying purely on mechanistic systems, this cultural-emotional bond acts as a powerful stress buffer.

Analysis of creative compensation reveals that non-monetary recognition fosters harmonious school climates and supports educators through principal leadership and supervisory practices (Putri & Hidayat, 2024; Santi dkk., 2024). Grounded in intrinsic motivation literature within education, such recognition holds lasting motivational value, particularly in developing economies with constrained salary budgets. Furthermore, holistic educational strategies and value-inculcation models demonstrate that value-driven management creates supportive institutional environments (Fajar dkk., 2024), while bridging competence expectations ensures alignment with broader sector standards (Firdaus & Aiman, 2024). Finally, leveraging HR analytics for workload monitoring points toward transparent, data-driven education management that minimizes subjective performance evaluation stress.

Overall, these findings confirm that aligning written institutional policies with practical execution bridges the gap toward a sustainable, human-centric management model in the era of disruption.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that mitigating teacher burnout in the urban-digital context of Metro Manila requires a transition from conventional administrative oversight to an integrated, human-centric HRM strategy. Answering the core research question, effective burnout prevention relies not merely on wellness perks, but on the structural synchronization between written HR policies and operational field execution across all four HRM pillars. By aligning structural adjustments (administrative offloading and flexible hybrid working) with formally integrated psychological support, schools effectively rebalance job demands and job resources under the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework. Furthermore, embedding transformational leadership alongside local collectivist culture, such as the *Animo* spirit, creates a resilient organizational ecosystem capable of buffering educators against metropolitan stressors.

Theoretically, this research extends JD-R theory within developing Asian economies by integrating urban logistical stressors and post-pandemic technostress as critical moderating variables. Practically, this study provides actionable operational guidelines: policies such as the "right to disconnect" must be formally codified in institutional HR manuals and employee handbooks, complete with clear boundaries for digital communication, rather than left as informal verbal agreements. For talent management, investing in work flexibility and psychological well-being is demonstrated to be a cost-effective strategy to halt the exodus of qualified teachers into remote Virtual Assistant (VA) positions.

This study acknowledges limitations in its sample, which focused exclusively on private secondary schools in Metro Manila, where administrative autonomy is higher than in public institutions. Caution should be exercised when generalizing these findings to public school systems or rural provinces. Future research should pursue comparative mixed-methods or quantitative analyses between public and private educational sectors across diverse Philippine regions to measure the precise statistical correlation between specific HRM interventions and teacher retention rates.

Finally, for educational policy regulators, it is strongly recommended that the Department of Education (DepEd) formulate explicit national standards limiting non-pedagogical administrative workloads. Standardizing administrative caps and establishing official guidelines for digital wellness nationwide will safeguard teacher well-being and ensure sustainable educational quality amid ongoing digital transformation.

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