WAYS OF OVERCOMING AND PREVENTING EMOTIONAL BURNOUT OF LITERATURE DISCIPLINE TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE ERA OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Olena KARPINA

Department of World Literature, SHEE "Donbas State Pedagogical University"
e-mail: olena.karpina@gmail.com

Abstract

The rapid transition to distance and blended learning in higher education, exacerbated by social crises and wartime realities in Ukraine, has significantly heightened the risk of emotional burnout among university educators. This study aimed to substantiate the theoretical foundations, identify specific professional stressors, and outline systemic strategies for overcoming and preventing emotional burnout among teachers of literature disciplines in philological faculties. A qualitative narrative and thematic analysis of pedagogical literature, theoretical sources and empirical observations from higher education institutions was conducted. Literature instructors face unique socio-emotional challenges due to the necessity of deep emotional immersion in literary texts, organizing empathetic dialogue, and managing screen-mediated communication (such as the "black screen" phenomenon). The findings revealed that burnout manifests through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment, further complicated by blurred work-life boundaries and digital fatigue. To address these issues, a multi-tiered prevention system was developed, integrating individual psychological coping techniques (empathy reflection, emotional logging, micro-pauses and digital hygiene), organizational-pedagogical approaches (workload rationalization, peer supervision and supportive institutional policies) and innovative digital technologies (structured asynchronous learning modules, centralized communication channels and digital self-care tools). Implementing these integrated strategies can foster resilience and sustain professional health among literature disciplines teachers in higher education institutions.

Keywords: emotional burnout, literature discipline teachers, distance learning, higher education, prevention strategies, resilience.

1. Introduction

The modern stage of higher education development in Ukraine is characterized by total digitalization, a forced transition to blended and distance learning formats and a significant intensification of information loads on all participants of the educational process. Under these circumstances the professional activity of teachers of literature disciplines in higher education institutions (HEIs) of a philological profile becomes increasingly complex. The intensity of online communication increases dramatically, the forms of interaction with students undergo structural transformations, and the spectrum of roles that a teacher is forced to combine during distance classes expands substantially. This escalates emotional tension and creates fertile ground for the development of emotional burnout syndrome.

Emotional burnout is conceptualized as a specific state of psychological and emotional exhaustion manifested in a sustained decline in emotional involvement, chronic fatigue, cynical attitudes towards professional duties and a pervasive sense of reduced personal accomplishment (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach and Jackson, 1981). For teachers of literature disciplines such symptomatology poses an acute threat. Their professional activity inherently relies on the deep interpretation of artistic literary texts, empathetic immersion into complex aesthetic and moral worlds and the facilitation of authentic intercultural and interpersonal dialogue. The gradual fading of emotional sensitivity and professional enthusiasm inevitably leads to formalistic execution of duties, deterioration of teaching quality, and deformation of interpersonal attitudes towards both students and the academic profession itself (Tkachenko and Beztsinna, 2025).

The era of distance learning – conditioned globally by technological shifts and locally intensified by the prolonged martial law and security crises in Ukraine – imposes extraordinary demands on university faculty. The imperative to rapidly master digital platforms, maintain continuous online communication and reconcile academic instruction with personal safety concerns generates chronic psycho-emotional overload (Vorotnykova and Chaikovska, 2020; Pavelkin, 2023). For philological faculty, who traditionally depend on live classroom discourse, vocal nuances and immediate emotional resonance within the lecture hall, distance formats are frequently perceived as a loss of primary professional support resources. Consequently, investigating the specific features, risk factors and mitigation strategies of emotional burnout among literature instructors represents an urgent scientific problem in contemporary higher education pedagogy.

The object of this study is the emotional burnout of literature discipline teachers in higher education institutions of a philological profile in the distance learning context. The subject of the study encompasses the psychological features of manifestation, risk factors of formation and systemic organizational and individual strategies for overcoming and preventing emotional burnout among literature disciplines teachers in a digital educational environment. The primary objective is to theoretically substantiate, identify and systemically structure effective ways of overcoming and preventing emotional burnout among literature instructors, considering both individual psychological techniques and organizational-pedagogical solutions.

2. Body of Manuscript

2.1 Theoretical foundations and structural components of emotional burnout

The phenomenon of teachers' emotional burnout in modern educational research is increasingly recognized as a critical challenge for educators' wellbeing and institutional educational quality. Tkachenko and Beztsinna (2025) emphasize that chronic occupational stress, escalating academic demands and inadequate administrative and societal support, combined with emotional overexertion, trigger severe motivational decline, apathy and professional exhaustion among teachers. For literature discipline instructors these systemic stressors interact with the intrinsic professional requirement for high emotional resonance during literary analysis, thereby compounding overall psychological strain.

Historically introduced by Freudenberger (1974), the concept of burnout characterizes a psychological state observed in healthy individuals engaged in intensive interpersonal interaction within emotionally demanding occupational environments. In university literature instruction this involves prolonged, evaluative communication with students, balancing mentor, scholar, and administrative roles. Sydorchuk (2023) generalizes that professional burnout functions as a systemic psychological response to long-term occupational stressors of moderate intensity, uniting emotional depletion with depersonalization and reduced professional efficacy. Furthermore, Ihumnova and Shlinchak (2023) highlight that emotional burnout is formally recognized in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) by the World Health Organization as an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

Conceptually, this study aligns with the classic three-dimensional framework established by Maslach and Jackson (1981), comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (cynicism) and reduced personal accomplishment (Ihumnova and Shlinchak, 2023). In literature pedagogy emotional exhaustion manifests as perpetual cognitive and emotional fatigue, leaving instructors without psychological reserves to engage with complex narrative texts. Depersonalization surfaces as a detached, cold or cynical stance towards students and literature itself, transforming aesthetic discussion into mechanical information transmission. Reduced

personal accomplishment is reflected in a growing conviction that one's pedagogical efforts to foster literary appreciation and critical thinking are futile (Tkachenko and Beztsinna, 2025).
Empirical evidence across Ukrainian educational institutions underscores the pervasive nature of this condition. Vodianka, Sukhovetska and Zaniuk (2022) observe that approximately 64% of surveyed working professionals report distinct manifestations of burnout with higher education faculty identified as a high-risk group. The structural progression typically follows sequential stages: initial hyper-involvement and enthusiasm, followed by stagnation, frustration, chronic fatigue and eventual professional deformation (Vodianka, Sukhovetska and Zaniuk, 2022; Freudenberger, 1974).

2.2 Professional stressors and specific risk factors in philological education

The occupational environment of contemporary higher education exposes literature faculty to a multi-factored matrix of chronic stressors. Vilkhova and Manzhelii (2021) point out that ongoing educational reforms, rising quality assurance standards, rapid technological updates, and substantial information overloads drastically elevate teaching anxiety. For literature scholars, information overload is specifically intensified by the imperative to continuously digest, review and evaluate vast volumes of complex fictional and theoretical texts while maintaining active research outputs.
Meshko (2015) categorizes key determinants of teacher professional health into physical workplace conditions, information load, interpersonal climate, social insecurity and multi-functionality. In literature faculties high emotional expenditure is intrinsically linked to public performance, managing sensitive moral themes in classical and contemporary texts and evaluating subjective creative student work. Furthermore, inter-generational shifts in communication preferences and cultural values between faculty and digital-native students can induce subtle interpersonal friction, heightening internal strain (Vodianka, Sukhovetska and Zaniuk, 2022).
The crisis context of wartime in Ukraine has radically compounded these occupational stressors. Pavelkin (2023), Ponomarenko and Lialko (2024) document that university faculty are forced to conduct distance classes amidst air raid sirens, blackouts, displacement and persistent safety threats. Literature instructors face an added emotional layer: reading and discussing literary works dealing with war, existential trauma, loss and national identity directly intersects with their immediate personal war trauma. This double exposure to aesthetic trauma in texts and real trauma in life dramatically accelerates emotional depletion.

2.3 Specific impact of distance learning on literature discipline teachers' burnout

The widespread transition to online and blended learning formats has reconstructed the traditional university environment into a screen-mediated digital system. Vorotnykova and Chaikovska (2020) observe that while digital platforms expand instructional possibilities, they simultaneously demand intensive cognitive re-adaptation, multi-tasking and constant technical vigilance from instructors.
For literature disciplines, where dynamic dialogue, spontaneous debate and non-verbal feedback (gaze, gesture, emotional reaction) constitute core pedagogical tools, distance learning introduces acute communication barriers. Literature instructors frequently encounter the widespread "black screen" phenomenon – when students turn off webcams and mute microphones – creating a sensation of speaking into a psychological vacuum (Vorotnykova and Chaikovska, 2020). Radchenko (2023) notes that screen-mediated teaching weakens empathetic connection, fostering alienation and frusration among faculty.

Moreover, distance instruction severely blurs the boundaries between professional work and personal life. As Radchenko and Prozhoha (2024) demonstrate, online learning extends the working day into evenings and weekends through continuous messaging, virtual grading and asynchronous student consultations. This loss of temporal boundaries prevents psychological recovery and drives chronic fatigue.

2.4. Comparative analysis and synthesis of burnout dimensions

To effectively structure intervention strategies it is necessary to contrast traditional face-to-face teaching stressors with distance-specific stressors as observed across literature disciplines. Table 1 summarizes the primary manifestation domains (burnout dimensions), specific stressors in distance learning and their emotional and pedagogical consequences for literature instructors.

Table 1. Manifestation matrix of emotional burnout among literature faculty in distance learning

Burnout dimension	**Specific stressors in distance literature teaching**	**Pedagogical and emotional consequences**
Emotional exhaustion	Black screens during discussions; technical instability; continuous multi-tasking; loss of live audience resonance.	Depleted psychological reserves; loss of enthusiasm for literary interpretation; chronic cognitive fatigue.
Depersonalization	Screen-mediated communication barriers; formalization of feedback in virtual spaces; impersonal text grading.	Cynical or detached stance towards students; reduction of interactive literary debate to mechanical lecturing.
Reduced personal accomplishment	Uncertainty regarding student comprehension; difficulties in evaluating creative text reflection online.	Pervasive feeling of instructional uselessness; loss of professional identity as a philologist and mentor.

2.5. Multi-tiered strategies for overcoming and preventing teachers' burnout

2.5.1 Individual psychological techniques and personal coping strategies

Mitigating emotional burnout begins with conscious self-observation and the reframing of perfectionistic professional attitudes. In distance literature teaching instructors must learn to recognize early warning signs – such as irritation during text discussions or loss of interest in narrative analysis – as diagnostic signals requiring immediate behavioural adjustment rather than personal weakness (Vydra, 2021).

A foundational individual technique is systematic emotional logging ("emotional journal"). Spending 5 minutes at the end of a teaching day recording energy-draining triggers (e.g., late-night essay grading, back-to-back online lectures) versus energy-restoring moments enables instructors to objectively restructure their weekly schedule (Vydra, 2021). Furthermore, somatic micro-pauses between virtual sessions – brief 2-3 minute breathing exercises, physical stretching and diverting gaze from monitors – effectively break continuous physiological tension (Meshko, 2015).

Digital hygiene represents another critical coping domain. Literature faculty should establish explicit time windows for digital communication (e.g., processing student emails twice daily during working hours), explicitly disabling notification alerts in evenings and weekends to restore personal temporal boundaries (Pakhomov, 2024). Additionally, cognitive restructuring aimed at replacing perfectionistic beliefs ("I must inspire every single student in every lecture") with realistic self-affirmations ("I am providing quality guidance within available resources") significantly alleviates inner guilt and self-imposed pressure (Pakhomov, 2024). Maintaining a professional "joy folder" containing positive student feedback, thoughtful essays and academic achievements serves as a tangible psychological anchor during periods of exhaustion.

2.5.2 Organizational-pedagogical approaches to reducing occupational stress

While individual coping strategies are essential, individual effort alone cannot overcome systemic institutional flaws. Academic departments must implement structural organizational-pedagogical measures to safeguard teacher health (Meshko, 2015; Sydorchuk, 2023).

First, workload rationalization requires optimizing the ratio of synchronous to asynchronous tasks. In literature courses departments should encourage replacing numerous minor written assignments with larger structured creative projects, partially automating knowledge checks and establishing transparent criteria for non-teaching administrative duties (Vilkhova and Manzhelii, 2021).

Second, fostering a supportive psychological climate in literature departments – where peer encouragement is normative and faculty feel safe voicing fatigue – significantly lowers anxiety (Tkachenko and Beztsinna, 2025).

Third, institutionalizing peer supervision and intervision groups ("peer-led reflective circles") provides a structured, non-judgmental space for faculty to analyse challenging online teaching cases, share technological solutions and process shared emotional distress (Vilkhova and Manzhelii, 2021).

Fourth, integrating stress resilience and digital pedagogical training into mandatory professional development programmes equips faculty with practical tools rather than abstract theory (Korolchuk, Korolchuk and Berezovska, 2017).

Finally, HEIs must establish comprehensive institutional occupational health policies that integrate physical recreation, psychological counseling and structured workload boundaries (Meshko, 2015).

2.5.3 Innovative digital technologies as resources for educator's wellbeing

Far from being merely a source of strain, digital tools can be transformed into powerful instruments for protecting teacher's wellbeing when applied intentionally (Bazilenko, Kushchenko and Marchuk, 2025).

A key technological approach involves constructing modular asynchronous learning spaces within university Learning Management Systems (LMS like Moodle or Canvas). Structuring literature courses into self-contained online modules with clear guidelines, automated quiz checks and curated reading lists shifts repetitive organisational explanations to the digital platform, freeing instructor energy for high-value interactive discussions (Vorotnykova and Chaikovska, 2020). Implementing a "flipped classroom" model – where students study pre-recorded mini-lectures asynchronously and use synchronous Zoom/Teams sessions exclusively for literary debate – reduces teaching strain while increasing students' engagement.

Centralizing communication into a single official platform channel with strict interaction rules eliminates chaotic multi-channel messaging (Fedyshyn, 2025). Furthermore, digital task management calendars (e.g., Trello, Notion) assist faculty in pacing essay evaluations across

weeks rather than accumulating massive backlogs. Finally, participating in international digital academic communities and utilizing online self-assessment tools enhances resilience, converting digital space into a network of professional support (Bazilenko, Kushchenko and Marchuk, 2025; Radchenko and Prozhoha, 2024).

3. Conclusions

This study theoretically substantiated and systemically structured the ways of overcoming and preventing emotional burnout among literature discipline teachers in higher education institutions under distance and blended learning conditions. Emotional burnout among philology faculty represents a multi-stage psycho-emotional process driven by chronic occupational stress, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.

It was established that literature instructors encounter a unique configuration of occupational stressors: the necessity for intense emotional resonance during text analysis, high public exposure and the communicative barriers of screen-mediated instruction (such as "black screens"). In wartime Ukraine these factors are amplified by security risks, technological interruptions and the emotional weight of discussing traumatic literary themes alongside personal war experiences.

To counter these challenges a comprehensive, multi-tiered prevention model was developed, uniting three interdependent pillars:

1) individual psychological techniques (emotional self-monitoring, somatic micro-pauses, strict digital hygiene, reframing perfectionistic attitudes and maintaining professional achievement archives);
2) organizational-pedagogical solutions (workload rationalization, peer supervision/intervision, supportive department climate and institutional health policies);
3) innovative digital practices (modular LMS design, flipped classroom models, centralised communication channels and digital workload planning).

Practical recommendations for university administrations include embedding peer support supervision groups, establishing realistic digital communication boundaries and integrating health pedagogy into faculty development programmes. Future research perspectives involve conducting large-scale empirical measurements of burnout levels among literature faculty across different regional universities, evaluating the longitudinal efficacy of department-level peer intervision and designing specialised psychological recovery frameworks tailored for post-war academic revitalization.

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