

A qualitative study on graduate teachers' mental health and professional growth in Australian regional secondary schools: applied with GenAI chatbot interventions

Abstract

The ongoing teacher shortages in Australia and globally have been exacerbated by the post-pandemic period. This highlights the critical issues within the educational landscape, particularly in regional, rural, and remote (RRR) areas in Australia. This study examines the multifaceted challenges faced by graduate teachers in regional places, including high turnover rate, mental health struggles, and insufficient support systems. High levels of stress, burnout, and mental health issues have been linked to attrition, especially among early career teachers, as current research reveals that early career teachers are more prone to leave their teaching career within their first five years compared to their experienced counterparts. It thus implies an urgent need for effective solutions to enhance teacher retention. With the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, particularly Generative AI (GenAI), this research explores the potential of GenAI affordances in providing innovative opportunities for mental health support for graduate teachers in secondary school settings. Previous research indicates that these technological interventions can provide accessible, culturally sensitive, and stigma-free mental health resources, potentially alleviating stress and promoting the well-being of higher education students. To date, however, there is very limited research on the use of GenAI for the purpose of therapy method among graduate teachers in Australia secondary school settings, especially for those who work in regional places. This study thus aims to synthesize existing research on the impact of GenAI in addressing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout that graduate teachers face in Australian regional contexts, using qualitative research methods aligned with the grounded theory. Qualitative research involving interviewing secondary graduate teachers combined with their weekly logbook recording will take place in Darwin over the course of one year. By focusing on leveraging GenAI to improve teachers' personal competencies, reduce their work-related stressors, and facilitate cultural understanding, this research might contribute to policy development for fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment that enhances graduate teacher efficacy and retention especially in Australian regional places.