

Correlational Study on Burnout among University Teachers in Hunan, China

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Abstract: Education is a cornerstone of national development in China, essential for fostering scientific self-reliance and social progress. The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China aims to transform the country into a global education powerhouse by 2035, with higher education as its focal point. In this context, Hunan Province, home to various big university in the country, must look into reforms to enhance its educational infrastructure and teacher quality, however, numerous issues also exist including job burnout among teachers. This study investigates burnout among university teachers in Hunan, exploring its prevalence and the factors contributing to it. Utilizing a descriptive-comparative-correlational research design, the study surveyed 300 faculty members across different universities, gathering quantitative data on their demographic profiles, levels of burnout, and perceptions of its causes. This research underscores the urgency of addressing burnout to maintain educational quality and advance Hunan's educational objectives as findings reveal apparent levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal fulfillment among respondents, with burnout intensity influenced by years of working experience. While no substantial differences in burnout were noted based on profile, perceptions of burnout factors varied by job title and experience, suggesting that institutional roles significantly affect burnout experiences. The study highlights a critical need for targeted interventions to mitigate burnout and enhance faculty well-being, emphasizing the importance of supportive management systems, fair compensation, and robust interpersonal relationships. Recommendations include implementing tailored support programs, improving job satisfaction through clearer feedback and emotional support, and fostering a collaborative work environment to promote professional development.

Keywords: Burnout; Higher Education; Teacher Well-Being; Hunan Province; Educational Reform.

1. Introduction

Education has been one of the biggest priorities in China. The construction of a strong educational country is a strategic precursor to the comprehensive building of a strong socialist modernization country, an important support for the realization of a high level of scientific and technological self-reliance and self-reliance, an effective way to promote the common prosperity of the entire people, and a basic project for the comprehensive advancement of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation by means of Chinese-style modernization. Education is a matter of national development and the future of the nation. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) has clearly proposed to build China into a world education power by 2035. To build an education powerhouse, the leader is higher education. Looking around the world, any education powerhouse is a higher education powerhouse. Higher education teachers are the first resource of higher education, and are fundamental to the development of higher education. As an important part of higher education, college teachers bear the important responsibility of cultivating talents, imparting knowledge and guiding the development of students. The construction of a high-quality teaching force is the top priority of building a strong educational country.

In 2023, China's Hunan Province held a meeting on the province's education work, proposing to make every effort to build a strong education province. It strives to build a strong education province earlier in the country through a period of about 10 years, to achieve overall modernisation of education in the province, and to enter the advanced ranks of the country in terms of development indicators for all levels and types of

education. According to the requirements of China's State Council's document "Implementing Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teacher Construction in the New Era", Hunan Province endeavours to build a high-quality and innovative college and university teaching force. In addition to upgrading the professional skills of university teachers, it is necessary to improve the internal incentive mechanism adapted to the characteristics of teaching positions in institutions of higher learning, safeguard the professional dignity and legitimate rights and interests of teachers, care for the physical and mental health of teachers, overcome burnout, and stimulate enthusiasm for work.

The education reform certainly breaks the existing professional status of teachers, and the increase in teaching and scientific research tasks bring about an increase in pressure on teachers. Excessive pressure result to teachers' antipathy and reduce work efficiency. Ultimately, it affects the work motivation of college teachers, and burnout occurs. The imperfections of the current education management system to improve college teachers' burnout lacks not only material compensation, but also a sense of work achievement and psychological reward.

Hunan Province is a major education province in China, with close to 3 million university students. Teaching and research tasks of college teachers are heavy, and college teachers are facing unprecedented challenges in energy allocation. Burnout seriously erodes the physical and mental health of teachers in all disciplines. The physical and mental health problems brought by burnout not only have various potential hazards, but also directly affect the development of education and teaching work. Health problems such as fatigue, sensitivity, helplessness, lack of motivation, low mood, loss

of enthusiasm for work, negativity, and indifference and pessimism arise in the workplace. These reactions are specific manifestations of burnout. Health problems brought by burnout are likely to form a vicious circle, which, if not improved in time, eventually affect the quality of higher education in Hunan Province.

In such a context, the survey and analysis of teacher burnout in colleges and universities in Hunan Province is carried out to grasp the situation of teacher burnout in colleges and universities, investigate the influencing factors of burnout, and look for solutions, so as to stimulate the enthusiasm of teachers in colleges and universities and improve the quality of education. This problem has been an urgent issue in the management of colleges and universities that cannot be ignored and needs to be faced and dealt with urgently.

2. Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to assess the relationship between the burnout status of university teachers in Hunan Province and demographic variables, and to assess the level of burnout management among university teachers.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

(1) What is the profile of the respondents in the following areas:

- 1)Sex
- 2)Age
- 3)Academic qualifications
- 4)Job title
- 5)Years of working experience
- 6)Remuneration

(2) What is the teacher respondents' assessment of their level of burnout based on the following dimensions:

- 1)Emotional exhaustion
- 2)Depersonalization
- 3)Decreased sense of personal fulfilment

(3) Are there significant differences in the assessment of the level of burnout among university faculty when their profile is taken as test factors?

(4) What is the teacher respondents' assessment of the factors affecting burnout based on the following dimensions:

- 1)Management System
- 2)Compensation and Benefits
- 3)Work Tasks
- 4)Mitigation Resources
- 5)Interpersonal Relationships

(5) Are there significant differences in the assessment of the factors of burnout among university faculty when their profile is taken as test factors?

(6) Is there a significant relationship between the level and the factors of burnout among university faculty?

(7) What are the countermeasures may be proposed to solve the problem according to the results of the study?

3. Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study aims to assess the current situation of teacher burnout in Hunan University, analyse the factors affecting burnout, help university teachers better understand their own burnout situation, put forward corresponding countermeasures to solve the problem, and promote the construction of university teachers' team in Hunan Province.

This study focused on the three dimensions of burnout among university teachers in Hunan province, including

emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment. It analyzed the factors affecting the formation of burnout, and propose countermeasures to solve the problem. The study randomly select 300 university teachers from Hunan Province, collect data through survey instruments, and review and analyse them using means, percentages, Pearson's r product moment coefficients and ANOVA. The results were used as a reference for university teachers to adjust their own emotional conditions and provide guidance for teacher administrators to optimise their management system and strengthen their teaching staff.

4. Research Design

The study employed quantitative research methods. Specifically, it adopts a descriptive-comparative-correlational research design. Through descriptive research, the researcher can collect rich quantitative data to comprehensively analyze different aspects of burnout and provide adequate theoretical support and empirical basis for subsequent improvement and promotion. The design is suitable for the profile variables of university teachers. The purpose of this study is to assess the relationship between demographic variables and burnout among selected university teachers and to use the results of the assessment as a reference for intervening in burnout among university teachers.

The study utilized a questionnaire as an instrument to collect information. A descriptive design is considered the most appropriate for this study because it is the most comprehensive and inclusive instrument compared to other survey methods. This method enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current situation and problems of burnout among university teachers from different perspectives and increase the credibility and validity of the findings.

5. Results, Analysis and Discussion

(1) Profile of Respondents

The table shows the demographic profile of the respondents. In terms of sex, the distribution of male and female respondents is almost balanced, with a frequency of 145 or 48% are males while 155 or 52% are females with a slight majority of female respondents.

In terms of age, the majority of respondents fall within the 30-40-year-old category, making up 104 or 35% of the total. The second-largest group is those aged 41-50 years, constituting a frequency of 82 or 27%. Respondents below 30 years old make up of 73 or 24%, and those above 50 years old comprise the smallest group with a frequency of 41 at 14%. The age distribution, with a concentration in middle-aged groups, suggests findings will be particularly relevant to these respondents, while the significant presence of younger participants highlights trends related to career expectations and technology adoption. This implied that the majority of respondents are in their prime working years, which could impact the results related to professional experience and perspectives. Policies or recommendations derived from this data should primarily target the 30-50 years age group.

In terms of Education, the respondents are well-educated, with a substantial portion holding postgraduate degrees 32% and 36% for master's and doctorates with a total of 68%. The high level of education among respondents suggests that the findings will be relevant to a highly educated workforce. Any training or professional development programs recommended

should consider this advanced level of education.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Profile

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	145	48
	Female	155	52
	Total	300	100
Age	Below 30 years old	73	24
	30-40 years old	104	35
	41-50 years old	82	27
	Above 50 years old	41	14
	Total	300	100
Education	Undergraduate	95	32
	Master	96	32
	Doctorate	109	36
	Total	300	100
Job Title	Junior	67	22
	Intermediate	119	40
	Associate	64	21
	Senior	50	17
	Total	300	100
Years of working experience	less than 3 years	66	22
	3 years-10 years	88	29
	10 years-20 years	93	31
	More than 20 years	53	18
	Total	300	100
Remuneration	Less than 5000 RMB	86	29
	5000 RMB-8000 RMB	121	40
	8000 RMB-10000 RMB	60	20
	More than 10000 RMB	33	11
	Total	300	100

For Job title of the respondents, intermediate-level job titles are the most common among respondents of 119 or 40%, followed by junior with frequency of 67 or 22% and associate with a frequency of 64 or 21%. Senior positions are the least represented with the frequency of 50 or 17%. This implied that the distribution of job titles indicates a workforce that is largely mid-level. This could mean that many respondents are in transitional phases of their careers, seeking advancement. Strategies to support career growth and advancement opportunities may be beneficial.

In terms of years of working experience, the respondents have a varied range of working experience, with the highest percentage having 10-20 years of experience with a frequency of 93 or 31%. With a significant portion of respondents having substantial work experience, the insights gained are likely to reflect seasoned professional perspectives. Training and development programs should cater to both early-career and experienced professionals.

In terms of remuneration, the majority of respondents earn between 5000 RMB and 8000 RMB with a frequency of 121 or 40% of the total, with fewer earning above 8000 RMB. This implied that The salary distribution suggests that a significant portion of the workforce is within a mid-range salary bracket. Programs aimed at financial wellness, salary negotiations, or career advancement could be particularly impactful.

(2) Teacher respondents' Assessment of their Level of Burnout

1) Emotional exhaustion

Table 2. Teacher Respondents' Assessment of their Level of Burnout based on Emotional Exhaustion

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation	Adjectival Interpretation	Rank
I feel frustrated with my job and get discouraged at work.	1.98	0.99	Sometimes	Occasional	5
I don't feel understood.	2.00	0.94	Sometimes	Occasional	2.5
My job makes me emotionally exhausted.	1.96	0.92	Sometimes	Occasional	6
I think I'm highly hard working.	2.16	1.09	Sometimes	Occasional	1
I feel overwhelmed by my work.	2.00	0.95	Sometimes	Occasional	2.5
I don't think I've been pushing my work in the right way.	1.89	0.96	Sometimes	Occasional	7
I'd like to take a break or change jobs.	1.99	0.95	Sometimes	Occasional	4
Overall	2.00	0.81	Sometimes	Occasional	

Scale: 4.00-3.51=Always/Constant; 3.50-2.51=Often/Frequent; 2.50 1.51=Sometimes/Occasional; 1.50-1.00=Never/Infrequent

The teacher respondents' assessment of their level of burnout based on emotional exhaustion reveals an overall mean score of 2.00 (SD = 0.81), indicating that teachers generally experience burnout symptoms occasionally. The statement "I think I'm highly hard-working" ranks highest, with a mean of 2.16 (SD = 1.09), reflecting that while teachers often feel they are hard-working, there is notable variability

in their perceptions. This aligns with Capone (2019), who found that burnout is significantly related to the overall university climate, where teachers' self-perception and work ethic are influenced by their work environment.

The second-ranked item, "I don't feel understood," has a mean of 2.00 (SD = 0.94), suggesting that teachers sometimes feel misunderstood, with a relatively consistent experience

across respondents. This supports Shi Ke's (2022) findings, which emphasize role ambiguity and inadequate university management as contributing factors to burnout. Teachers occasionally feel overwhelmed by their work, as indicated by a mean of 2.00 (SD = 0.95), which correlates with Xie's (2018) study on demographic variables, showing that workload and experience levels influence burnout dimensions.

The desire to take a break or change jobs is reflected by a mean of 1.99 (SD = 0.95), underscoring the occasional sentiment of wanting to leave the profession, a concern echoed by Herman (2020), who highlighted motivation and job satisfaction as critical factors in reducing burnout. Teachers also occasionally experience frustration and discouragement at work (mean = 1.98, SD = 0.99), and emotional exhaustion (mean = 1.96, SD = 0.92), further emphasizing the occasional nature of burnout symptoms. This aligns with Demerouti's (2003) findings on the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, which focuses on emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

Finally, the lowest-ranked item, "I don't think I've been

pushing my work in the right way," with a mean of 1.89 (SD = 0.96), suggests that teachers occasionally feel ineffective in their work, reflecting a somewhat less intense burnout symptom. This variability in burnout experiences underscores the need for targeted interventions, such as those suggested by Wang Meng (2019), who emphasized the importance of improving teachers' economic conditions and resource management.

Hence, the occasional burnout symptoms reported by teachers highlight the importance of addressing both individual and systemic factors. To mitigate burnout and enhance job satisfaction, strategies such as improving communication, providing stress management resources, and recognizing teachers' hard work are essential. Regular check-ins and professional development opportunities can further support teachers, aligning with the comprehensive approaches recommended in the literature to address burnout in educational settings.

2) Depersonalization

Table 3. Teacher Respondents' Assessment of their Level of Burnout based on Depersonalization

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation	Adjectival Interpretation	Rank
I can't get good results for all the effort I put in.	1.95	0.98	Sometimes	Occasional	1
I don't know the value of a college teacher's job.	1.88	0.95	Sometimes	Occasional	6
I don't see the point of college teachers.	1.89	0.93	Sometimes	Occasional	5
I can't get mental satisfaction at work.	1.91	0.93	Sometimes	Occasional	4
I don't have my own work goals or aspirations.	1.94	0.97	Sometimes	Occasional	2
I don't like learning new things at work.	1.85	0.90	Sometimes	Occasional	7
I'm not able to deal with my emotions calmly.	1.93	0.94	Sometimes	Occasional	3
Overall	1.91	0.80	Sometimes	Occasional	

Scale: 4.00-3.51=Always/Constant; 3.50-2.51=Often/Frequent; 2.50 -1.51=Sometimes/Occasional; 1.50-1.00=Never/Infrequent

The assessment of teacher respondents' level of burnout based on depersonalization reveals an overall mean score of 1.91 (SD = 0.80), indicating that teachers generally experience depersonalization symptoms occasionally. This suggests a moderate level of detachment or dissatisfaction, with some variability in individual experiences. The item "I can't get good results for all the effort I put in" ranks highest, with a mean of 1.95 (SD = 0.98), reflecting occasional frustration with their perceived effectiveness. This aligns with research by Sun Wen and Tang Weiping (2018), who identified problems with assessment models that contribute to teachers' feelings of ineffectiveness and dissatisfaction.

The second-ranked item, "I don't have my own work goals or aspirations," with a mean of 1.94 (SD = 0.97), suggests that some teachers struggle with setting clear personal goals, a concern also noted by Guiyanfeng (2016), who highlighted

the impact of professional demands on burnout. Similarly, "I'm not able to deal with my emotions calmly," with a mean of 1.93 (SD = 0.94), indicates that emotional difficulty is an occasional challenge for teachers, consistent with Herman's (2020) findings on the need for emotional support to mitigate burnout.

Teachers also occasionally struggle with achieving mental satisfaction at work, as indicated by a mean score of 1.91 (SD = 0.93). The item "I don't see the point of college teaching," with a mean of 1.89 (SD = 0.93), reflects occasional questioning of their role's value, echoing findings by Wang Meng (2019) on the need for improved job recognition and support. The lowest-ranked item, "I don't like learning new things at work," with a mean of 1.85 (SD = 0.90), suggests that while disinterest in professional development is present, it is less frequent among respondents.

The occasional depersonalization symptoms reported by teachers suggest that while feelings of detachment and dissatisfaction are present, they are not pervasive. Addressing these issues requires implementing strategies that foster a sense of purpose and achievement, such as setting clear professional goals, providing regular feedback, and enhancing job satisfaction. Research by Shi Ke (2022)

emphasizes the importance of improving the university climate and resource management to support teacher well-being. Additionally, offering emotional wellness programs and creating a more collaborative work environment can help reduce depersonalization, ultimately enhancing teachers' sense of purpose and job satisfaction.

3) Decreased sense of personal fulfillment

Table 4. Teacher Respondents' Assessment of their Level of Burnout based on a Decreased Sense of Personal Fulfillment

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation	Adjectival Interpretation	Rank
Since I became a college teacher, I became colder and colder.	1.97	0.97	Sometimes	Occasional	7
I don't care what happens to my colleagues or myself.	2.00	1.02	Sometimes	Occasional	5
I often take responsibility for my colleagues.	2.10	1.02	Sometimes	Occasional	1.5
I'm afraid I'm losing my patience with my job.	2.10	1.03	Sometimes	Occasional	1.5
I'm under a lot of stress at work.	2.05	1.03	Sometimes	Occasional	3
I always look forward to holidays so I don't have to go to work.	2.04	1.01	Sometimes	Occasional	4
I often feel detached from the students I teach, viewing them more as tasks rather than individuals with unique needs.	1.99	1.02	Sometimes	Occasional	6
Overall	2.04	0.86	Sometimes	Occasional	

Scale: 4.00-3.51=Always/Constant; 3.50-2.51=Often/Frequent; 2.50 -1.51=Sometimes/Occasional; 1.50-1.00=Never/Infrequent

The assessment of teachers' burnout levels, specifically regarding their sense of personal fulfillment, reveals an overall mean score of 2.04, indicating that teachers "sometimes" experience burnout symptoms related to decreased personal fulfillment. This suggests that while burnout is present, it is not constant across all teachers.

The top-ranked items, "I often take responsibility for my colleagues" and "I'm afraid I'm losing my patience with my job," both have a mean score of 2.10 (SD = 1.02, 1.03). These scores suggest that teachers occasionally feel burdened by their responsibilities and fear losing patience with their jobs, reflecting stress and frustration. According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017), these feelings can be indicative of emotional exhaustion, a key component of burnout.

The third-ranked item, "I'm under a lot of stress at work," with a mean score of 2.05 (SD = 1.03), indicates that stress is a frequent experience, aligning with Maslach and Leiter's (2016) work on how chronic workplace stress contributes to burnout. Teachers' anticipation of holidays, reflected in the mean score of 2.04 (SD = 1.01) for "I always look forward to holidays, so I don't have to go to work," suggests fatigue and a need for recovery, a common burnout symptom noted by Schaufeli et al. (2009).

The item "I don't care what happens to my colleagues or myself," ranked fifth with a mean score of 2.00 (SD = 1.02), points to occasional detachment, a concerning sign of burnout. Similarly, "I often feel detached from the students I teach," with a mean of 1.99 (SD = 1.02), reflects occasional emotional distancing from students, a critical aspect of

burnout highlighted by Jennings and Greenberg (2009).

The lowest-ranked item, "Since I became a college teacher, I became colder and colder," with a mean score of 1.97 (SD = 0.97), suggests that some teachers feel they have become emotionally distant over time, though this is not a universal experience.

The findings indicate that teachers experience moderate burnout, with occasional feelings of stress, detachment, and reduced fulfillment. The variability in responses suggests that individual factors, such as coping mechanisms and support systems, play a significant role in how burnout is experienced. To address these issues, schools should consider implementing stress management training, fostering a collaborative work environment, promoting work-life balance, and encouraging emotional connections with students and colleagues. According to Richards et al. (2018), these interventions can help reduce burnout and create a more supportive and fulfilling work environment for teachers.

6. Conclusion

(1) The diverse profile of respondents in terms of sex, age, academic qualifications, job title, years of working experience, and remuneration provides a comprehensive view of the faculty demographic. This diversity allows for a nuanced understanding of burnout experiences and highlights the need for inclusive strategies to address faculty well-being.

(2) Teacher respondents reported significant levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased sense of personal fulfillment. These findings underscore the critical

need for targeted interventions to mitigate burnout and improve overall faculty well-being, as these dimensions of burnout are prevalent among the academic staff.

(3) While burnout levels showed no significant variation based on sex, age, academic qualifications, job title, or remuneration, significant differences were noted based on years of working experience. This suggests that experience level may influence burnout intensity, indicating that tenure and experience are important factors in understanding and addressing burnout among university faculty.

(4) The varied assessments of burnout factors, including management systems, compensation and benefits, work tasks, mitigation resources, and interpersonal relationships, highlight the complexity of burnout. These diverse perceptions point to the need for multifaceted strategies to address burnout, considering the different factors that contribute to faculty stress and dissatisfaction.

(5) Significant differences in perceptions of burnout factors, influenced by sex and job title, alongside variations related to years of working experience, indicate that these factors shape how faculty perceive and experience burnout. However, academic qualifications and remuneration do not significantly affect perceptions, suggesting that elements beyond educational background and salary play a more crucial role in comprehending burnout experiences. With this, factors affecting burnout are particularly influenced by the roles and institutional contexts faculty navigate, emphasizing the complexity of their experiences.

(6) The significant but very low negative correlations between burnout levels and perceived causes reflect a slight inverse relationship, implying that while burnout factors influence burnout levels, other elements are likely more salient. This finding underscores the necessity for a holistic approach to managing burnout, considering both the identified dimensions of emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment alongside additional contextual factors. Hence, comprehensive strategies that foster well-being among educators can enhance their engagement and effectiveness in academic environments, addressing the multifaceted nature of burnout experienced by faculty.

7. Recommendations

Teachers experience occasional emotional exhaustion, with significant individual variability. This underscores the need for targeted support and recognition to manage stress effectively. Depersonalization symptoms also vary, highlighting the importance of strategies to improve job satisfaction and emotional support. Moderate levels of burnout among teachers suggest a need for stress management, collaboration, and work-life balance initiatives.

Teachers generally perceive the management system as supportive but see room for improvement in feedback and teaching support. Their view on compensation is generally positive, though issues with salary fairness and overall satisfaction persist. While teachers appreciate recognition and alignment with their career goals, increasing task variety and achievement is necessary for greater job satisfaction.

Support from the university's resources and environment is generally positive, but enhancing autonomy and professional development could further reduce burnout. Interpersonal relationships are supportive, yet more robust support from

school leaders could improve satisfaction and mitigate burnout.

Hence, the study suggests the following:

(1) Develop tailored support programs that address individual burnout symptoms. Implement regular recognition initiatives to acknowledge teachers' hard work and contributions, which can help mitigate emotional exhaustion and increase job satisfaction.

(2) Introduce strategies focused on improving job satisfaction and emotional support. This can include clearer goal-setting, regular feedback sessions, and access to counseling services to address depersonalization and emotional difficulty.

(3) Provide comprehensive stress management training and promote work-life balance. Foster collaborative work environments and address emotional distance by creating opportunities for teachers to engage in team-building activities and professional development.

(4) Enhance the management system by increasing the frequency and quality of feedback provided to teachers. Support teaching practices more effectively and ensure fairness in career growth opportunities.

(5) Reevaluate the compensation package to address issues of salary fairness and overall satisfaction. Ensure that non-salary benefits are aligned with teachers' needs, and consider introducing additional financial incentives or benefits that enhance overall job satisfaction.

(6) Increase job satisfaction by diversifying work tasks and enhancing teachers' sense of achievement. Implement strategies that offer varied responsibilities and recognize teachers' successes more prominently.

(7) Improve university resources and academic support by increasing autonomy and providing more professional development opportunities. This will help in boosting job satisfaction and reducing burnout.

(8) Increase support from school leaders to strengthen interpersonal relationships within the workplace. Foster a more supportive work environment by promoting open communication and providing additional resources for teacher well-being.

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