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Investigating burnout factors among higher education teachers in Guilin, China: Implications for quality education

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the impact of transformational leadership, workload, and teacher self-efficacy on teacher burnout in universities in Guilin, and to provide administrators with strategic suggestions for reducing teacher occupational stress, improving education quality, and enhancing teacher retention. This study is based on the Bush collegial model, which emphasizes teacher participation in decision-making and equal voice, achieving organizational goals through collaboration and consensus, and improving teacher professional identity and job satisfaction, thereby effectively alleviating occupational burnout. The research adopts a quantitative method, utilizing an online questionnaire survey of teachers in three universities in Guilin, employing tools such as MBI-ES, MLQ-5X, and TSE Teacher Self-efficacy Scale to collect and analyze data on the factors influencing teacher burnout. Data from 338 respondents indicated that transformational leadership and teacher self-efficacy are negatively correlated with burnout, while workload is positively correlated. This study addresses a gap in the literature on teacher burnout in Guilin universities by applying Tony Bush's collegial model and offers intervention strategies for university administrators to cultivate transformational leadership, optimize workload management, and enhance teacher self-efficacy, aiming to reduce burnout and improve job satisfaction and career development.

Keywords: Collegial model, Higher education management, Quality education, Teacher burnout.

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1. Introduction

China's higher education is in a stage of vigorous development. By 2023, the total number of students in all types of higher education in China will reach 47,631,900, an increase of 2.32% over the previous year. In line with the growth in the number of higher education students and the expansion of scale, the teaching staff of colleges and universities has continued to expand. As of the latest statistics, there are 2,074,900 full-time teachers in higher education nationwide, an increase of 97,100 over the previous year, representing a 4.91% increase, of which 64% are teachers in ordinary undergraduate schools [1]. It can be observed that, with the development of higher education in my country, the number of students and teachers in Chinese colleges and universities has been increasing year by year.

With the promotion of digitalization and economic development, China's higher education is transforming toward a more modern direction [2]. In this context, college teachers have begun to evolve from traditional to modern academic professional identities. They not only undertake the mission of disseminating and creating knowledge but also serve as leaders in scientific research across many fields. Additionally, they play multiple roles, such as promoters of cultural leadership and exemplars of contemporary college students' outlook on life, worldview, and values [3]. Teacher burnout has increased due to the fast pace of higher education. This burnout usually stems from demanding work requirements and the pursuit of lofty goals [4]. In addition, the current focus on quantitative, result-oriented performance evaluation methods emphasizes instrumental rationality and utilitarianism [5], which has brought tremendous pressure to teachers, and the problem of teacher burnout in colleges and universities is becoming increasingly serious [6].

The China Human Resources Development Network published China's first "China's Job Burnout Index Survey," and teachers' job burnout ranked third Gu [7]. García-Arroyo et al. [8] also mentioned in their research that Chinese teachers' emotional exhaustion ranks second in the world. It can be seen that the problem of job burnout among college teachers is becoming increasingly serious and has attracted widespread attention from academia and society. Many studies have shown that job burnout can have serious consequences for teachers and education [9-12]. For example, low mood, anxiety, depression, and even illness. This emotional fatigue and dehumanization can also lead to a decline in the quality of education and ultimately resignation. Job burnout leads to problems such as teacher absence, low efficiency, and high turnover rates, which in turn increase the economic costs for the school and pose greater challenges to school management [13]. Therefore, this quantitative study will use transformational leadership, workload, and teachers' self-efficacy as three key factors to explore their relationship with teacher burnout.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Teacher Burnout

The concept of burnout was first proposed by Freudenberger [14], who believed that burnout can lead to physical discomfort and emotional problems. Pines and Aronson [15] defined burnout from an emotional perspective as a state of physical and psychological exhaustion in an environment with excessive emotional demands.

Later, Maslach and Jackson [16] further developed this concept, believing that "burnout is a psychological syndrome that occurs in individuals who work with others, manifested as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment." And from a social psychological perspective, burnout is divided into three dimensions, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Many subsequent researchers have adopted and verified the theoretical framework of Maslach and Jackson [16] in their studies [17, 18]. Maslach's definition of burnout has been widely accepted and recognized by the academic community. Therefore, this study also adopts Maslach and Jackson's concept of burnout.

Previous studies on the factors affecting job burnout can generally be divided into two categories. One is external factors, such as workload, work environment, leadership style of leaders, student composition, etc. [19-21]. The other factors are internal, such as personality and self-efficacy [22]. These complex multiple factors not only affect work performance and turnover decisions but also reduce the overall quality of education. Therefore, alleviating job burnout among college teachers has become essential. However, there is currently a lack of relevant research on the job burnout of college teachers in Guilin.

2.2. Transformational Leadership

Leadership style is a leadership theory proposed by Burns [23], who divided leadership styles into three types: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. Transformational leaders are characterized by being role models, motivating and inspiring the team, creating a supportive work environment, valuing individual differences, and achieving higher goals [24].

As one of the most widely studied leadership types in the field of education [25], previous studies have shown that transformational leadership has a significant impact on teacher burnout. Transformational leaders can generally reduce teacher burnout by focusing on teachers' needs, encouraging innovation, and emphasizing common goals [4]. However, Noureen et al. [26] found no significant relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction, emotional fatigue, or burnout. Given the inconsistent results, this study will use Tony Bush's Collegial Model theory to further explore the relationship between these variables.

2.3. Workload

According to Widodo et al. [27], workload refers to the work requirements that must be completed within a specified time frame. Work overload often occurs when employees receive multiple work requirements that exceed their capabilities [28]. researchers generally believe that workload is one of the important indicators for measuring employee work stress,

and excessive workload can lead to burnout [29, 30].

Workload has been considered an important determinant of burnout in various industries [31]. The study by Md Shah et al. [19] showed that teachers who face heavy work demands are more likely to suffer from burnout, which leads to decreased job satisfaction and increased intention to leave. In addition, teachers often take on additional administrative tasks in schools, which increases their workload, a significant stress factor leading to teacher burnout [20]. However, these studies have not focused on the higher education environment in Guilin, China. Therefore, this study will explore whether "workload" is a key factor in teacher burnout in Guilin higher education institutions.

2.4. Teacher Self-Efficacy

The concept of "self-efficacy" was first proposed by the American psychologist [32]. He believed that self-efficacy does not refer to a person's skills or abilities, but to people's beliefs and confidence in their own abilities. Teacher self-efficacy is an extension of self-efficacy, which refers to teachers' belief in their ability to influence student outcomes [33] and includes three dimensions: teaching strategies, student engagement, and classroom management [34]. Teachers with high self-efficacy are usually able to handle problems with optimism and confidence and continue to work hard in complex situations [35]. In contrast, teachers with low self-efficacy often feel incompetent, uninspired, and dissatisfied with their work [36].

Teacher self-efficacy has been highlighted as a determinant of burnout among educators [37]. Studies have demonstrated a negative correlation between teacher self-efficacy and burnout, meaning that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy are less likely to suffer from burnout. Furthermore, teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy can reduce levels of emotional fatigue and depersonalization, which are key components of burnout [36]. These studies are crucial for preventing burnout and improving teacher well-being. Despite the significance of teacher self-efficacy for burnout, more research is needed to examine the relationship between the two variables in the context of higher education in Guilin, China.

2.5. Collegial Model

The Bush Collegial Model is a management theory that emphasizes collaboration and consensus. It focuses on teacher participation in the decision-making process, teachers having an equal voice, and building a supportive academic environment. The model advocates achieving organizational goals through consultation and collective decision-making, emphasizing the importance of trust and shared values [38]. Transformational leadership aligns with the collegial model and may enable all stakeholders to participate in achieving educational goals [39].

In higher education institutions, the Bush collegial model in higher education promotes a collaborative environment where teachers engage in management decisions, boosting job satisfaction and career development [40]. Research indicates that supportive, participatory environments enhance teachers' professional identity and job satisfaction, while also contributing to continuous development and reducing burnout [41]. In addition, in this model, teacher development is regarded as an important part of organizational development. Studies have shown that information meetings, emotional support, and collaboration can improve teachers' self-efficacy [42]. When teachers have more say and influence in the decision-making process, they will feel a greater sense of professional accomplishment and control, thereby reducing the risk of burnout [43].

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design, aiming to provide objective and data-driven conclusions for our research [44]. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors influencing professional burnout among teachers at Guilin universities, aiming to provide a theoretical foundation and practical guidance for alleviating burnout. The study involves teachers from Guilin Tourism University, Guilin College, and Guangxi Normal University as samples, with 338 teachers selected through convenience sampling to participate in an online questionnaire survey. The questionnaire comprises five sections: teachers' basic information, transformational leadership, workload, teacher self-efficacy, and experiences of professional burnout. Data collection employed a 5-point Likert scale and analysis was conducted using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSE), and Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-ES). To minimize interference, participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Profile

Data were collected from 338 participants, of whom 39.9% (135 people) were male and 60.1% (203 people) were female, reflecting the high proportion of women in the education industry. The distribution of work experience showed that 43.5% (147 people) had 6-10 years of experience, 34.3% (116 people) had less than 5 years, 15.1% (51 people) had 11-20 years, and 7.1% (24 people) had more than 20 years, indicating that most teachers had medium years of experience. In terms of school distribution, 26.0% (88 people) were from Guilin Tourism University, 21.6% (73 people) were from Guilin University, and 52.4% (177 people) were from Guangxi Normal University.

Table 1.
Demographic.

		Frequency(n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	135	39.9
	Female	203	60.1
Years of Experience	1 Less than 5 years	116	34.3
	6-10 years	147	43.5
	11-20 years	51	15.1
	Over 20 years	24	7.1
Schools	Guilin Tourism University	88	26.0
	Guilin University	73	21.6
	Guangxi Normal University	177	52.4

4.2. Preliminary Analysis

This study used the results of KMO and Barrett's sphere to verify the validity of the questionnaire. The data were considered valid because KMO>0.6 and p<0.05. In addition, the data were considered reliable because Cronbach's α was greater than 0.7 [45, 46].

Table 2.
KMO and Bartlett's Test.

KMO		0.945
Bartelett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6491.173
	df	595
	Sig.	0.000

Table 3.
Reliability Statistics.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.746	338

4.3. Pearson Correlation

Table 4 the text discusses the relationships between three variables and teacher burnout. The study found that transformational leadership was significantly negatively correlated with teacher burnout (Pearson r = -.334), indicating that higher levels of transformational leadership are associated with lower teacher burnout. Workload was significantly positively correlated with teacher burnout (Pearson r = .404), suggesting that increased workload correlates with higher burnout. Teacher self-efficacy (TSE) was significantly negatively correlated with teacher burnout, meaning that higher teacher self-efficacy is associated with lower burnout.

Table 4.
Correlations.

	TL	WL	TSE	TB
TL	1			
WL	-0.290**	1		
TSE	0.380**	-0.318**	1	
TB	-0.334**	0.404**	-0.461**	1

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Transformational Leadership (TL); Workload (WL); Teacher Self-efficacy (TSE); Teacher burnout (TB).

4.4. Multiple Linear Regression

Table 5 shows the regression analysis of teacher burnout. The standardized coefficient for Transformational Leadership is -0.134 (p = 0.008), indicating a significant negative impact on teacher burnout; higher transformational leadership correlates with lower burnout. The standardized coefficient for Workload is 0.261 (p = 0.000), showing a significant positive impact, higher workload correlates with higher burnout. The standardized coefficient for Teacher Self-efficacy is -0.327 (p = 0.000), signifying a significant negative impact, higher self-efficacy correlates with lower burnout.

Table 5.
Coefficients[a].

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.752	0.288		13.036	0.000
Transformational Leadership	-0.141	0.053	-0.134	-2.650	0.008
Workload	0.274	0.052	0.261	5.303	0.000
Teacher Self-efficacy	-0.326	0.051	-0.327	-6.425	0.000

Note: a. Dependent Variable: Teacher Burnout.

Table 6 shows the results of the ANOVA, indicating the overall significance of the regression model. The F test value of 47.832, $p < 0.001$, is highly significant, indicating that the regression model has a significant predictive effect on teacher burnout.

Table 6.
ANOVA[a].

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	65.173	3	21.724	47.832	0.000b
Residual	151.697	334	0.454		
Total	216.871	337			

Note:
a. Dependent Variable: Teacher Burnout
b. Predictors: (Constant), Transformational Leadership, Workload, Teacher Self-efficacy.

5. Discussions

$H_{1:}$ Transformational leadership has a significant effect on burnout among higher education teachers in Guilin, China.

The transformational leadership factor did affect teacher burnout. When leaders had higher transformational leadership, teacher burnout was significantly reduced (Beta=-0.134, p=0.008). Transformational leadership reduces teacher burnout in a variety of ways, including helping teachers set goals through inspiring motivation, challenging teachers through inspiring motivation, challenging teachers through intellectual stimulation, and treating each teacher in an individualized manner so that they feel respected and understood. This leadership style not only creates a collaborative atmosphere but also improves teachers' job satisfaction and motivation, which helps reduce burnout [47, 48].

This finding was unexpected because, as discussed earlier, past studies have found inconsistent results regarding the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher burnout [26, 47, 48]. However, the results of this study suggest that transformational leadership may be one of the important factors in reducing teacher burnout in higher education settings. The research results provide new support and evidence for research in this field, fill the gaps in existing research, and offer new directions for future research and practice.

$H_{2:}$ Workload has a significant effect on burnout among higher education teachers in Guilin, China.

The positive correlation coefficient of the research data indicates that an increase in workload leads to an increase in burnout (Beta=0.261, p=0). This finding is consistent with previous literature conclusions. According to the results of Anees et al. [49] in the higher education environment, workload and work pressure are two major problems faced by scholars. These factors significantly increase teacher burnout and have a substantial impact on teacher retention. Therefore, to prevent burnout, schools need to develop effective strategies to manage teachers' workload, enhance teamwork, and provide necessary resource support [50].

$H_{3:}$ Teacher self-efficacy has a significant effect on job burnout of higher education teachers in Guilin, China.

The results showed that there was a significant negative correlation between teacher self-efficacy and burnout (Beta=-0.372, p=0). It is worth noting that among all independent variables, teacher self-efficacy has the greatest impact on burnout.

This means that as the level of TSE increases, teachers' confidence in teaching strategies, student engagement, and classroom management will also increase, and this sense of achievement and confidence significantly reduces their burnout [35]. It is worth noting that the standardized coefficient of TSE is -0.327, and among all independent variables, TSE has the greatest impact on occupational burnout. Therefore, school management should focus on enhancing teachers' self-efficacy and stress management capabilities to effectively reduce occupational burnout [51].

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a significant positive correlation between teacher burnout and workload, which indicates that as the workload increases, teacher burnout will also increase. There is a significant negative correlation between teacher burnout and transformational leadership, and teacher self-efficacy. This shows that as the levels of these two variables increase, teacher burnout tends to decrease. The standardized coefficient of teacher self-efficacy is -0.327, which has the greatest impact on teacher burnout among the predictors.

By cultivating transformational leadership, schools can create a collaborative atmosphere, increase teacher job satisfaction and motivation, and thus reduce burnout [9, 52, 53].

Universities should enhance teachers' self-efficacy and work enthusiasm through continuous training, academic advancement, and practical experience [42, 54]. The training content should include positive psychology, resilience, self-management, and positive thinking to help teachers manage stress [19]. Policymakers and educational leaders should prioritize the allocation of resources to ensure that teachers have the support and tools they need to perform their duties effectively, including technology, educational materials, and personnel support [55].

7. Limitations

This study has three main limitations in exploring the problem of teacher burnout in colleges and universities in Guilin. First, the scope of the study is limited to three colleges and universities in Guilin, lacking coverage of science and engineering colleges, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Second, the convenience sampling method used

may lead to sample selection bias and affect the representativeness of the results. Finally, the data were mainly collected through self-report questionnaires, which may be affected by social desirability effects and self-assessment bias.

8. Future Study

This study explored teacher burnout based on Tony Bush's academy model. In the future, other theoretical frameworks, such as organizational behavior, psychology, or sociology theories, can be considered to provide a more comprehensive perspective. At the same time, it is recommended to combine qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, with quantitative research and use mixed methods to enhance the reliability and validity of the research. The research subjects should be expanded to different types of schools, including private, vocational, and international schools, and cover various subject areas to compare the differences in burnout. In addition, future research can explore the impact of job specialization on teacher burnout to further reveal related factors.

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