

# Balancing Act: Insights into Burnout and Work-life Dynamics among Experience Educators in private Institutions

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## Abstract

This qualitative study explores burnout among higher educators in private institutions through evidence from semi-structured interviews. Twenty-one respondents, all with over five years of tenure, were selected for in-depth interviews. The study examines the impact of burnout on educators' work-life balance and how they articulate their experiences, particularly the strategies they employ to voice concerns about their well-being. By analyzing the interplay between professional exhaustion and personal life, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of both structural and individual factors that influence burnout in the private education sector. The findings aim to inform policies and practices, offering pathways for higher education institutions to create environments that mitigate burnout and promote a healthier work-life balance.

**Keywords:** Work-life balanced, burnout, educators, qualitative, employee voice

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching professionals in higher education institutions (HEI) are those who are rewarded by having intellectual knowledge have facing challenges of improving their personal achievement whilst still having an overwhelming feeling which leads to burnout. Burnout is defined as an emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. This has been increasing among educators especially in private HEI. Most of the academic roles required them to fulfill the research, teaching and involvement in administrative responsibilities which might affect their emotional and lifestyle (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). This situation has growing concern as it can severely impact these educators' well-being, productivity, lifestyle and also work-life balance. According to Schaufeli et al., 2020, recent studies have indicated that private HEI are experiencing substantial growth and the educators felt pressure to meet the academic expectations, while ensuring enhanced student engagement and contributing to institutional goals. Although it may offer new opportunities towards educators, intensified workloads have an impact between professional role and personal life, thus leading to higher levels of stress and burnout among academic staff (Winefield et al., 2014).

This study focuses towards educators who are vulnerable to burnout which comes from their long-term involvement in academia. According to O'Meara et al., (2017), the academicians have exposed to heightened responsibilities and expectations. Whilst making sure they can juggle times with job scope, their involvement also relate to the student development, with high demands, research outputs and working with administrative

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commitments to exulcerated the responsibilities beyond their own capacity. This however, effecting their healthy work-life balance (Kinman & Wray, 2020). Previous studies also indicates that the mediation between academicians and job stress does relate to the burnout (Block et al., 2020; Rocha et al., 2020; Rusdi et al., 2023).

Thus, this paper explores further dyadic relationship between burnout and work-life balance among experience educators in private education institutions. Examining these, however, is expected to provide some significant insights on the main causes of the burnout, the implications as 'individualist' of educators and future planning for the professional careers. This may intricate exploratory in understanding the impacts of burnout. Many of higher education institutions enforcing various policies and guidelines to achieve the ultimate organizational goals and to received such higher reputation. As such condition, encourage participation of various stakeholders within the higher education institution namely, employees and employers is compulsory. To achieve these standards, the university academic staff need to work harder to bring sufficient output such as producing high impact publications, application of research grants and supervision of students (Salena Mohamed, 2021). The professionalism environments may impact the individual psychological and behavior concerns where it might affecting individual emotional. Working in higher education may overwhelm to some people but when it is unorganized and slightly unmanageable, these professional employees felt far from dignifying, exhaust them.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The term "burnout" was introduced by Herbert Freudenberg, an American psychologist in the 1970s. The term was proposed due to the concern of some professionals such as doctors and nurses, who overworked in order to serve the community. Maslach & Jackson (1984) defined burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Kristensen et al. (2005) simply referred burnout to fatigue and exhaustion. Similarly, Liu et. al, (2022) referred burnout as a kind of psychological reaction to long-term exposure to stressors. Based on these definitions, burnout can be defined as workers' fatigueless due to prolonged exposure to stressors. According to a survey done on 12,728 academicians, 84% respondents said that they work more than 40 hours per week; and 93% agreed that they have no energy left to work hard since they feel tired most of the time. Altogether, 65% show signs of burnout (Anthony, 2020). In Malaysia, burnout was found to be prevalent among academicians, especially the female (Henny et al., 2014), and junior rank (Chen, et al., 2014).

In higher education institutions (HEIs), academic staff face numerous jobs demands, with teaching being their primary responsibility. Lecturers and tutors are often required to conduct classes, including lectures and tutorials, which can total up to 27 hours per week. In addition to their regular teaching duties, they may be called upon to cover the workloads of colleagues on maternity leave, those who have left the institution, or while waiting for new hires to assume their roles. Preparing for classes also requires considerable time and effort, particularly for those responsible for multiple courses. Lecturers tasked with more than three courses must manage not only the development of lesson materials, such as slides and in-class activities, but also the continuous assessments and final examinations, further adding to their workload.

With the implementation of blended learning, lecturers now have to prepare for both face-to-face and online classes, covering both synchronous and asynchronous formats. Teaching and learning at HEIs are bound by policies and procedures, requiring lecturers to complete numerous forms and reports. An exploratory study conducted in one HEI found that the top three reasons for academic staff burnout were documentation, the number of students assigned, and additional responsibilities beyond teaching (Saifuddin, 2023).

These job demands do not include other tasks such as administrative duties, community activities, marketing, consultations, research, publications, and involvement in various clubs, task forces, and committees. While not overwhelming, these figures signal the existence of fatigue among academic staff at HEIs, which is a sign of burnout. The consequences of burnout can be destructive. According to Salena Mohamed (2021), burnout negatively affects job satisfaction among lecturers in one of the public universities. Burnout can also impact students' well-being (Chen et al., 2014). However, do academic staff in really have a burnout? What are the reasons for their burnout? What actions can be taken by the counselors, as early intervention? In the past, despite being a frequent issue being raised, not much research. was conducted in HEI to answer these questions. Therefore, a research will be conducted to determine burnout and causes of burnout among academic staff, and to design a counseling intervention program.

## 1.1 Multidimensional burnout

Burnout is a multidimensional concept. Table 1 shows the multidimensional parts of burnout, based on past well-known measurements.

Table 1: Burnout dimensions

Sources	Dimensions	Example Studies
Seidman & Zager (1986-1987)	Teacher Burnout Scale: 1. Career satisfaction 2. Perceived administrative support 3. Coping with job-related stress 4. Attitudes towards students	(Seidman & Zager, 1987; Steven A & Joanne, 1987)
Kristensen et al. (2005)	The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory: 1. Personal burnout 2. Work-related burnout 3. Client-related burnout	(Andrew Chin et al., 2018; Ogunsuji et al., 2022; Piperac et al., 2021; Rocha et al., 2020; Sestili et al., 2018; Tran et al., 2023)
Demerouti et al. (2003)	Oldenburg Burnout Inventory: 1. Disengagement 2. Exhaustion	(Andrew Chin et al., 2018; Ogunsuji et al., 2022; Piperac et al., 2021; Rocha et al., 2020; Sestili et al., 2018; Tran et al., 2023)
Maslach-Pines (2005)	Maslach Burnout Inventory: 1. Emotional exhaustion 2. Depersonalization 3. Reduced personal accomplishment	(Bošković, 2021; Bria et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2014; De Beer et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2020; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Ogunsuji et al., 2022; Portoghese et al., 2018; Soares et al., 2023)
Shirom (1989)	Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure (SMBM): 1. Physical fatigue 2. Cognitive weariness 3. Emotional exhaustion 4. Tension 5. Listlessness	(Gerber et al., 2018; Shoman et al., 2023)

Based on Table 1, we present several dimensions of burnout from various theoretical perspectives to provide an overview of existing research. For instance, Seidman and Zager (1986-1987) and Shirom (1989) were among the earliest scholars to explore burnout in the education sector. Their studies examined the prevalence and predictors of burnout among teachers and educational administrators, offering a fundamental understanding of how occupational stress impacts the educational environment. These early works laid the foundation for understanding burnout as a critical issue in educational settings, particularly in relation to the exhaustion experienced by educators. This supports the need for continued exploration, particularly in the current study.

Kristensen et al. (2005) expanded the discussion by developing the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, which distinguishes between personal and work-related dimensions of burnout. Their contribution is significant as it broadens the view of burnout to include not only emotional exhaustion but also physical exhaustion, both of which can profoundly affect individual educators. Building on this, Demerouti et al. (2003) introduced the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which emphasizes the pressures educators face, such as the balance between job demands and available resources. Their framework highlights the struggle many educators experience in trying to maintain equilibrium between organizational expectations and their own well-being, a challenge that often leads to burnout when support systems fail.

Similarly, Maslach-Pines (2005) developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which underscores the extended roles of educators, including balancing teaching, research, and administrative duties. These roles require sustained emotional energy and continuous engagement, making academic staff particularly susceptible to burnout. From this analysis, it is evident that burnout is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon encompassing emotional, mental, and physical aspects. It often manifests as emotional, mental, or physical exhaustion, and is associated with feelings of detachment from one's job. Some models further incorporate elements such as depersonalization, diminished self-efficacy, and external factors like coping mechanisms and support networks.

The complexity of burnout is reflected in the variety of models proposed, each shaped by the specific career contexts, environments, and coping strategies of individuals.

In summary, reviewing these key theoretical perspectives provides a rich foundation for understanding the dimensions of burnout, particularly in the academic field. This overview highlights the importance of integrating emotional, physical, and cognitive dimensions of burnout into the current study, reinforcing the need to examine how academic staff manage the balance between their multiple roles and organizational demands.

## **1.2 Factors influencing burnout**

There are quite a number of studies that identify the factors affecting burnout. Within the education industry, Mohamed (2020) found that burnout of academicians was caused by personal, work, and client-related matters. Raduan et al., (2022) revealed that personal burnout was the highest followed by work burnout. Radzuwan et al., (2023) found that burnout's dimension highest was emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and work roles are the main cause for fatigueness among one of the Malaysia local universities lecturers. Furthermore, technology adoption, labeled as technostress, added another burnout factor to academicians especially during and after pandemic Covid-19 (Raj, 2021).

Unfortunately, most of the studies focused on the health industry. Dimunová et al. (2018) found that the degree of burnout of Slovak Nurses is related to length of work experience, work shift, and type of department. Yun and Hu (2019) found that factors that caused burnout among clinical dental hygienists in hospitals and clinics in Korea were turnover intention, job stress, and emotional labor. Yildirim and Dinç (2019) The study findings showed that role conflict, role ambiguity, and workload, along with some personal factors such as age and gender have significant and positive influences on burnout of principals. Joshi et al. (2022) found that the existence of pandemic C19 affects the level of burnout among medical students, especially the female students. Cigirim et al. (2024) found that working conditions, especially the financial factors affect the burnout level of dentists working in different regions of Turkey. Tsybuliak et al. (2024) reveal that higher degrees of burnout among Ukrainian academic professionals are substantially correlated with closeness to hostilities and migration activities. Gender also played an important role where female staff reported more emotional exhaustion, while male staff exhibited higher levels of depersonalization. Usifo and Salawu (2024) showed that workplace conditions affect the burnout level of nurses in selected hospitals in Abeokuta, Ogun State. All of these studies showed that the main causes for burnout is the working condition, be it the work roles, salary given, job demand, adoption of technology, and even the location of the workplace.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

From January 2024 to March 2024, we conduct qualitative face-to-face semi-structured interviews as part of the primary data collection for this study. In the following sections, details of the interview process and subsequent data analysis are provided. A purposive sampling method was employed, prioritizing participants' backgrounds such as their work experience and their position between 5 years up to fifteen years. The study carefully selected 21 academics, consisting of lecturers and senior lecturers, based on their work experience, position, and involvement in academic or administrative activities. These participants were chosen for their ability to answer questions related to their academic and administrative settings at HEI settings. To invite participants, formal communication was made face-to-face for research consent. The participants were invited to participate in 20-minute face-to-face interviews. The selection process ensured that all participants possessed relevant academic experience and knowledge aligned with the study's objectives.

In this study, purposive sampling was used to select respondents who had been working in academia for a minimum of five years. This sampling method was chosen because it allows researchers to target participants with specific characteristics relevant to the research question. By focusing on academic staff with at least five years of experience, the study aimed to gather insights from individuals who have had substantial exposure to the demands of teaching, research, and administrative work.

The rationale behind this selection criterion is rooted in the assumption that burnout symptoms are more likely to manifest in individuals who have accumulated diverse experiences and have been subject to prolonged job pressures (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Academic staff with over five years of experience are typically more involved in various job scopes, such as taking on research projects, teaching large classes, supervising students, and fulfilling administrative roles. Over time, the demands of these responsibilities are likely to build up, increasing the risk of burnout (Maslach et al., 2016). Moreover, staff with more experience have had greater exposure to

institutional policies, changing management expectations, and other organizational factors that contribute to burnout (Jones et al., 2021).

By selective the right participants in this study, it allowed to explore burnout from a well-rounded perspective, as these respondents are likely to have experienced fluctuations in workload, changing administrative tasks, and evolving job expectations. Their insights are thus crucial in understanding how burnout develops over time and what interventions might be necessary to support long-term staff retention and well-being (Smith & White, 2019).

Table 2: Interview questions

Interview question	Purpose
1. How do you interpret burnout in the context of HEI?	To understand the respondent's personal definition and perception of burnout specific to their work environment.
2. Can you describe the work pressure situation at your workplace?	To gather insights into the specific sources of work-related pressure and stress within the institution.
3. During the year, when do you feel the most burnout?	To identify the peak periods of stress and burnout throughout the academic year.
4. Why do you think this happens and why?	To explore the root causes of burnout and the factors contributing to high levels of stress.
5. How do you think we can address this? (To reduce burnout among academic staff)	To obtain suggestions for solutions or strategies to mitigate burnout in the workplace.

Table 1 outline five questions that focus on academic staff in HEI experience, understanding and how they can describe the actual feelings when they burnout. These questions has been tested out during pilot study where the validations and realities for each questions refine accordingly. Through semi-structured interviews, we ask these leading questions and probs to getting more information from them. Each question is designed to set on its own purpose. For example, the first question focusses on general understanding of burnout and their own definition. This would create a better perception on how these academic staff felt related to their workplace. In second question, we provide a common scenario on work-related pressure. Following for the next question focus on the impact of burnout in their lifestyle and personal. The last question focusses on the suggestions and recommendations that the staff can propose for future work policy and other related. These questions have been validated and align with research objective and research question.

### 3.1 Pilot study

A preliminary study was conducted to have an overview to understand the burnout situation among academic staff at higher education institution. We gathered two (2) respondents who have work in HEI in Malaysia.

*"I can see that the demand of working in such a situation can lead to work-related stress among academic staff. We conduct a survey where we found 23% from our data is out of 'normal' range with remaining of 56% had higher anxiety levels and 19% are having depressions. It is very concerning.."*

- Certified Professional Counsellor at Higher Education Institution

### 3.2 Data analysis

The data is analyse using a thematic data analysis which will explain further. For transcribing process, the study used several qualitative software such as NVIVO and Atlas. Both software is a part of the tools to support the data analysis from data collection process. Following Rowley (2012) and Schlagwein and Hu (2016) research on thematic analysis, the study organized the data accordingly. Obtain data after each of interview process by documented the results according to the participant roles and categorized them under the same group. This is to ensure the participant is recognized based on their roles and position in the institutions. The interview conversation is recorded and transcribe phase by phase.

### 3.3 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) from the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with academic staff. This method is particularly suitable for examining burnout as it helps uncover the underlying issues and recurring themes experienced by respondents. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process of thematic analysis was followed, ensuring a rigorous and structured approach to data interpretation.

a) Familiarization with the data

The initial step involved thoroughly reading the interview transcripts multiple times to become deeply familiar with the content. This phase aimed to immerse the researcher in the data to grasp the essence of the respondents' experiences with burnout. Through this repeated exposure, early patterns and commonalities began to emerge, offering an understanding of the personal and professional challenges faced by academics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The aim was to fully capture how respondents articulated their feelings of burnout, including specific instances of workload pressure, emotional fatigue, and organizational stress.

b) Generating initial codes

Once familiarized with the data, the next step was to systematically code the data. Coding involves breaking the data down into meaningful units and assigning labels (codes) to segments of the text. Each code represented a specific aspect of burnout, such as "workload stress," "upper management pressure," "emotional exhaustion," or "insufficient resources." These codes were derived directly from the data, ensuring that they reflected the respondents' perspectives rather than preconceived categories (Saldana, 2021). At this stage, the goal was to organize the data into manageable chunks that capture key aspects of the respondents' experiences.

c) Identifying themes

After generating the initial codes, the next step was to group similar or related codes into broader themes. This stage involved organizing the codes into overarching categories that provided deeper insight into burnout. For example, codes related to time pressure, workload stress, and insufficient preparation time were grouped under the theme "Workload and Time Pressure." Similarly, codes related to emotional distress and mental fatigue were grouped into "Emotional and Physical Exhaustion." These themes represented broader patterns across the data that illustrated the key dimensions of burnout (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

d) Reviewing and refining themes

Once the initial themes were identified, they were reviewed and refined to ensure their coherence and relevance. This step involved ensuring that each theme was supported by sufficient data and that no significant information was left unrepresented. Themes that were too broad or overlapping were split into more specific categories, while others that lacked depth or coherence were either discarded or merged with related themes. For example, the themes "Management Pressure" and "Organizational Pressure" were merged into a single theme to capture the broader institutional stress faced by academic staff (Nowell et al., 2017). This process was crucial to enhance the clarity and focus of the analysis.

e) Defining and naming themes

In this step, each theme was clearly defined and given a concise name that reflected its core meaning. The themes were named in ways that captured the essence of the experiences described by the respondents. For instance, "Inadequate Compensation and Recognition" succinctly encapsulated respondents' feelings of dissatisfaction with their salaries and lack of promotion opportunities. Each theme was then defined in detail, explaining how it contributed to the overall understanding of burnout among academic staff (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step ensured that the themes were aligned with the research objectives and clearly communicated the study's findings.

f) Interpreting the findings

The final step involved interpreting the themes and drawing meaningful conclusions regarding burnout in academic staff at higher education institutions (HEIs). The themes provided insight into the main factors contributing to burnout, such as excessive workload, emotional fatigue, and organizational pressure. These findings addressed key research questions about how the working environment and job demands affected the emotional and physical well-being of academic staff. The thematic analysis also offered actionable insights into how institutions might reduce burnout, such as by improving workload management, offering greater recognition, and providing better support resources.

## **4. FINDINGS**

Based on the thematic analysis, five core themes emerged: Workload and Time Pressure, Management and Organizational Pressure, Emotional and Physical Exhaustion, Support and Resources, and Compensation and Recognition. These themes were derived by categorizing the responses based on recurring patterns and linking them to established burnout dimensions from various inventories, such as the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, Maslach Burnout Inventory, and Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure.

The results of this study offer a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors contributing to burnout, which include excessive workloads, limited administrative support, emotional and physical fatigue, and dissatisfaction with compensation and recognition. This thematic framework provides insights into the complex nature of burnout and highlights areas for intervention and improvement.

Table 3: Burnout dimensions with research themes

Theme	Related Burnout Inventory	Dimension(s)	Justification
<b>Workload and Time Pressure</b>	Kristensen et al. (2005) – Copenhagen Burnout Inventory	Work-related burnout	The heavy workload, short semesters, and time pressure are clearly tied to burnout related to work demands and inadequate recovery time.
	Maslach-Pines (2005) – Maslach Burnout Inventory	Emotional exhaustion	High workload and constant pressure lead to emotional exhaustion, as staff feel overwhelmed and unable to cope with tasks.
	Shirom (1989) – Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure	Physical fatigue	The theme involves excessive time pressure and heavy workload, resulting in physical fatigue.
<b>Management and Organizational Pressure</b>	Seidman & Zager (1986-1987) – Teacher Burnout Scale	Perceived administrative support, Coping with job-related stress	Staff experience stress from upper management's expectations, frequent audits, and lack of support, which is related to administrative and job-related stress.
	Demerouti et al. (2003) – Oldenburg Burnout Inventory	Disengagement	The continuous pressure from management may lead to disengagement, where staff feel disconnected from their work.
	Maslach-Pines (2005) – Maslach Burnout Inventory	Depersonalization	The pressure from management and repetitive tasks may result in depersonalization, where staff become detached from their work.
<b>Emotional and Physical Exhaustion</b>	Kristensen et al. (2005) – Copenhagen Burnout Inventory	Personal burn it out	This theme addresses emotional and physical exhaustion resulting from excessive workload and inability to maintain a work-life balance.
	Maslach-Pines (2005) – Maslach Burnout Inventory	Emotional exhaustion	Emotional and physical fatigue are directly linked to emotional exhaustion.
	Shirom (1989) – Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure	Emotional exhaustion, Physical fatigue, Cognitive weariness	The theme involves emotional exhaustion as well as physical fatigue and mental strain due to overwhelming tasks.
<b>Lack of Support and Resources</b>	Seidman & Zager (1986-1987) – Teacher Burnout Scale	Perceived administrative support	The lack of support from administrative units and technical problems is directly tied to the feeling of inadequate administrative support.
	Demerouti et al. (2003) – Oldenburg Burnout Inventory	Disengagement	The ongoing lack of resources can result in disengagement, where staff lose interest and motivation in their work due to frustration.
<b>Inadequate Compensation and Recognition</b>	Maslach-Pines (2005) – Maslach Burnout Inventory	Reduced personal accomplishment	Feeling underpaid and unrecognized can lead to a sense of reduced personal accomplishment and professional dissatisfaction.
	Shirom (1989) – Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure	Listlessness, Emotional exhaustion	Lack of recognition and compensation can result in emotional exhaustion and a sense of listlessness or demotivation in staff.

#### Theme 1: Workload and Time Pressure

This theme focuses on the significant workload and time constraints faced by academic staff in higher education institutions. The narratives reflect how lecturers across different institutions are burdened by excessive teaching hours and an intensified pace of work due to short semesters.

*"Heavy workload... I am too tired due to the heavy workload... classes and materials." (L1)*

*"Short semester requires lecturers to double the syllabus and complete tasks on time." (L2)*

*"Every semester, lecturers have maximum workload & no time to rest or recover." (L3)*

The common outcome across all narratives is a sense of fatigue and burnout due to unmanageable workloads and compressed teaching schedules. Lecturers feel they are unable to balance their responsibilities effectively because they are required to deliver a large amount of content in a limited time. The recurring nature of this issue each semester adds to their stress, as they are not provided with sufficient time to recover. The narratives suggest that this chronic overworking is a significant factor contributing to emotional and physical exhaustion, which can eventually lead to burnout. The findings point to the need for better workload management and time allocation in HEIs to alleviate the strain on academic staff and to promote a healthier work-life balance.

#### *Theme 2: Management and Organizational Pressure*

This theme captures the significant stress that academic staff experience as a result of organizational and managerial pressures. The narratives across the institutions indicate that lecturers often face stress not just from the workload, but also from lack of support, unclear responsibilities, and ineffective management practices.

*"The work stress comes from upper management... salary does not match the workload." (L5)*

*"Too many audits, no clear roles, management doesn't support lecturers properly." (L3)*

*"Orders overlap... the head of the department is never present to clarify issues." (L8)*

The narratives suggest that a major source of burnout among academic staff is the lack of managerial clarity and support. Lecturers are burdened by unclear roles and frequent bureaucratic demands, which add to the stress of their day-to-day responsibilities. The disconnect between workload demands and compensation, combined with ineffective communication from management, results in higher levels of frustration and emotional exhaustion. These issues point to the need for more effective leadership and communication within academic institutions, as well as a review of workload expectations and support systems to alleviate the organizational pressures that contribute to staff burnout.

#### *Theme 3: Emotional and Physical Exhaustion*

This theme highlights the profound emotional and physical toll that excessive workload and a lack of recovery time have on academic staff in higher education institutions. The narratives from the different institutions reflect the pervasive sense of fatigue and exhaustion that result from constant work pressures, without adequate time to recuperate.

*"Extreme tiredness due to additional workload besides teaching... leads to burnout." (L15)*

*"Emotional and physical fatigue from workload... tired all the time, no recovery." (L14)*

*"Emotional exhaustion due to dissatisfaction... no time for rest or recovery." (L12)*

The narratives collectively indicate that emotional and physical exhaustion is a critical issue for academic staff, directly linked to the overwhelming workload and the absence of sufficient downtime. The continuous strain of additional duties, combined with an inability to rest and recover, leads to chronic fatigue and emotional burnout. These findings highlight the importance of addressing both physical and emotional well-being in higher education institutions. Without adequate recovery time and a reduction in workload, staff are at risk of burnout, which can have negative consequences on their overall health and job performance. Institutions must therefore reconsider workload management and ensure that staff have sufficient opportunities for rest and recovery to prevent long-term burnout.

#### *Theme 4: Support and Resources*

This theme emphasizes the lack of sufficient support and resources provided to academic staff, which further exacerbates their workload and frustration. The narratives highlight the challenges that lecturers face when institutions fail to offer the necessary tools, understanding, or assistance to help manage their responsibilities effectively.

*"There are no effective solutions... lecturers have to find solutions for broken projectors." (L6)*

*"Admin doesn't understand lecturers' workload... no proper resources provided." (L8)*

*"Admin refuses verbal complaints... everything requires forms, wasting our time." (L10)*

The narratives clearly demonstrate that the lack of effective support and resources is a significant issue for academic staff. The absence of timely solutions to basic technical problems, such as broken equipment, and the lack of understanding from administration about the lecturers' workloads, contribute to a feeling of neglect and frustration. Additionally, the bureaucratic process of addressing complaints is seen as inefficient and time-consuming, further aggravating the workload. These findings indicate that higher education institutions must



improve the support systems for lecturers. Effective and timely solutions, better communication between staff and administration, and more efficient systems for addressing complaints are critical to ensuring lecturers can focus on their teaching and research, rather than dealing with operational issues. Without adequate support and resources, the overall job satisfaction and well-being of academic staff are likely to decline, contributing to burnout and decreased institutional performance.

#### *Theme 5: Compensation and Recognition*

This theme focuses on the inadequate compensation and lack of recognition for the effort and responsibility undertaken by academic staff. The narratives reflect the dissatisfaction with how lecturers are financially rewarded and acknowledged for their extensive workload and contributions, which adds to their overall sense of burnout.

*"Senior lecturers are not appreciated... low salary despite workload and responsibilities."*

*"No fair compensation, workload too high for pay... no recognition for the effort."*

*"Still under minimum wage... no recognition for the workload given."*

The narratives reveal a strong sentiment of dissatisfaction among lecturers regarding compensation and recognition. Despite the significant responsibilities they undertake, including teaching, research, and administrative duties, their financial compensation does not reflect these efforts. Moreover, there is a perceived lack of appreciation for their hard work, which further exacerbates feelings of burnout and underappreciation.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

These findings suggest that higher education institutions must reassess the compensation structures for academic staff. Adequate pay, especially for those carrying substantial workloads, is essential to reduce burnout and improve morale. Additionally, institutions should implement formal recognition systems that not only acknowledge lecturers' hard work but also help in retaining talent by making them feel valued within the institution. Without these adjustments, institutions may face higher turnover rates and lower staff engagement, which can negatively affect the quality of education and research outputs.

This study explored the experiences of academic staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) through a thematic analysis of their narratives on burnout. Five key themes emerged: Workload and Time Pressure, Management and Organizational Pressure, Emotional and Physical Exhaustion, Support and Resources, and Compensation and Recognition. The data reveals how these themes are intricately interwoven and how they contribute to the burnout phenomenon experienced by academic staff.

The first theme, workload and time pressure, reflects the overwhelming burden that academic staff carry, including long teaching hours, extensive course preparation, and the need to compensate for colleagues on leave. Lecturers across the institutions described the impact of short semesters, which further intensify workload, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion. These findings resonate with previous studies highlighting how excessive workload and time pressures are key contributors to burnout in educational settings (Demerouti et al., 2003; Shirom, 1989).

The second theme, management and organizational pressure, highlights the role of institutional factors in exacerbating stress. Academic staff described a lack of managerial support and unclear roles, leading to organizational dissonance. Additionally, the demands from upper management, including frequent audits and contradictory directives, further added to their stress. This theme aligns with the literature indicating that poor organizational structures and lack of clear leadership contribute to workplace burnout (Kristensen et al., 2005; Seidman & Zager, 1986).

Emotional and physical exhaustion, the third theme, points to the deep toll that workload and stress take on educators. Many lecturers expressed chronic fatigue, both emotionally and physically, with little time for recovery or personal well-being. The combination of continuous work demands and insufficient restorative periods has been shown to result in significant burnout in similar educational contexts (Maslach-Pines, 2005; Demerouti et al., 2003).

The fourth theme, support and resources, emphasizes the lack of adequate institutional resources and support. Lecturers described experiencing difficulties with malfunctioning equipment, absence of administrative assistance, and inadequate resources, such as insufficient technical or clerical support. This theme highlights the

importance of institutional support systems in mitigating burnout, as academic staff are often left to solve these problems independently (Kristensen et al., 2005; Shirom, 1989).

Finally, compensation and recognition emerged as a critical theme. Academic staff expressed dissatisfaction with their compensation, which they felt was disproportionate to the level of work and responsibilities they carried. The lack of recognition and appreciation for their efforts compounded their feelings of frustration and undervaluation, which are key contributors to burnout (Maslach-Pines, 2005; Seidman & Zager, 1986).

These five themes, when considered collectively, reflect the multifaceted nature of burnout in higher education. They highlight that burnout is not merely a result of high workload, but is deeply rooted in organizational factors, lack of support, and insufficient compensation and recognition. Addressing burnout requires a comprehensive approach that involves both institutional and personal interventions to alleviate stress and enhance overall well-being for academic staff.

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