

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT FACTORS AND OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT AMONG ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL IN CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Occupational burnout among administrative personnel has become an emerging concern in Chinese higher education institutions, particularly under ongoing governance reform and performance-oriented management systems. While existing studies have predominantly focused on faculty burnout, limited empirical attention has been given to administrative staff, who play a critical role in institutional operations. This study examines the relationship between educational management factors and occupational burnout among administrative personnel in Chinese higher education institutions. Drawing upon the Job Demands-Resources model and Maslach's three-dimensional burnout framework, the study investigates five key management dimensions: workload, organizational support, leadership style, career development opportunities, and job autonomy. A mixed-method approach was employed, including a questionnaire survey of 127 administrative personnel and in-depth interviews with five key informants. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85. The findings indicate that educational management factors are significantly associated with occupational health status. Among the examined dimensions, job autonomy and leadership style demonstrate the strongest positive relationship with reduced burnout levels, while workload and organizational support show comparatively weaker but still meaningful effects. The results highlight the importance of balancing managerial demands and organizational resources in Chinese higher education contexts. The study provides empirical evidence for optimizing educational management practices to enhance administrative personnel's occupational well-being and institutional sustainability.

Keywords: Educational management; Occupational burnout; Administrative personnel; Chinese higher education; Job Demands-Resources model

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Chinese higher education has undergone significant governance reform characterized by expansion, performance evaluation mechanisms, digital transformation, and increasing accountability requirements. Universities are expected not only to provide high-quality teaching and research but also to improve administrative efficiency and institutional management capacity. Within this reform context, administrative personnel have assumed increasingly complex responsibilities, including academic coordination, student services, quality assurance documentation, data management,

and policy implementation. As institutional expectations continue to rise, administrative staff frequently operate under conditions of intensified workload and role pressure.

Occupational burnout, originally conceptualized by Freudenberger (1974) and later developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), refers to a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment resulting from prolonged work stress. The World Health Organization (2019) recognizes burnout as an occupational phenomenon linked to chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Extensive research has demonstrated that burnout negatively affects individual well-being, job performance, organizational commitment, and service quality (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

In the field of higher education, prior research has primarily concentrated on teacher burnout, while comparatively limited attention has been given to administrative personnel. However, administrative staff constitute an essential component of university governance systems. Their work directly influences institutional effectiveness, operational stability, and educational service delivery. Particularly in Chinese higher education institutions—especially application-oriented and regionally based universities—administrative personnel frequently encounter high demands combined with relatively constrained organizational resources. This imbalance may increase the risk of occupational burnout.

Educational management plays a central role in shaping the working conditions of administrative personnel. Management practices related to workload distribution, leadership style, organizational support, career development systems, and job autonomy can either intensify job demands or provide essential organizational resources. According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), burnout emerges when job demands exceed available resources, whereas sufficient organizational resources can buffer stress and promote occupational well-being.

Despite the theoretical relevance of educational management to burnout outcomes, empirical evidence examining this relationship within the Chinese higher education context remains limited. Existing domestic studies largely focus on teaching staff and seldom analyze administrative personnel through an integrated management framework. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between educational management factors and occupational burnout among administrative personnel in Chinese higher education institutions. By focusing on five key management dimensions—workload, organizational support, leadership style, career development opportunities, and job autonomy—this research provides empirical insights into how management practices influence occupational health in a Chinese institutional setting.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method research design to examine the relationship between educational management factors and occupational burnout among administrative personnel in Chinese higher education institutions. The research was conducted in an application-oriented undergraduate institution located in Yunnan Province, China.

Participants

The population consisted of 188 administrative personnel across 15 administrative departments. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan sampling table (1970), a sample size of 127 respondents was determined and valid questionnaires were collected, yielding a response rate of 100% of the distributed sample. The respondents represented a diverse range of age groups, educational backgrounds, work experience levels, and employment statuses, ensuring adequate representativeness.

Instrument

The research instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire with two sections. The first section collected demographic information. The second section included 40 items measuring five educational management dimensions:

Workload

Organizational Support

Leadership Style

Career Development Opportunities

Job Autonomy

A five-point Likert scale was used. To facilitate interpretation, burnout indicators were converted into occupational health indicators, with higher scores representing lower burnout levels.

To ensure reliability, a pilot test was conducted with 30 participants. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.85, indicating good internal consistency.

In addition to the questionnaire survey, five in-depth interviews were conducted with administrative personnel and management representatives to provide contextual insights into management practices and occupational experiences.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were calculated to assess the overall occupational health level and the implementation status of each educational management factor. Content analysis was applied to interview data to supplement quantitative findings and enhance interpretative depth.

RESULTS

The results indicate that the overall occupational health status of administrative personnel was at a relatively high level, with a mean score of 3.61 (SD = 0.77). Since burnout indicators were reverse-coded, higher scores represent lower levels of occupational burnout. This suggests that, overall, administrative personnel in the studied institution demonstrate a moderate to low level of burnout under current educational management practices.

Among the five educational management dimensions examined, job autonomy received the highest mean score (M = 3.67, SD = 0.76), followed closely by leadership style (M = 3.65, SD = 0.79). Career development opportunities also showed a relatively strong level (M = 3.61, SD = 0.74). These findings suggest that administrative personnel perceive a relatively supportive leadership environment

and sufficient autonomy in performing their duties, which may contribute to maintaining occupational health.

Workload ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.78$) and organizational support ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.80$) were rated slightly lower compared to other dimensions, although still within a high-level range. Certain workload-related items, particularly those concerning long-term occupational sustainability and alignment between task allocation and resource support, received comparatively moderate scores. Similarly, items related to evaluation transparency and timely managerial guidance under the organizational support dimension reflected areas requiring further improvement.

Interview findings further supported the quantitative results. Participants indicated that while leadership communication and participatory decision-making were generally positive, administrative workload intensified during institutional evaluation periods and governance reform processes. Several interviewees emphasized that autonomy in task execution and constructive leadership feedback played important roles in reducing stress and maintaining motivation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that educational management factors are closely associated with occupational health conditions among administrative personnel. In particular, management practices that enhance autonomy and constructive leadership appear to contribute more strongly to reduced burnout risk, while workload management and organizational support mechanisms require continued optimization.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study examined the relationship between educational management factors and occupational burnout among administrative personnel in Chinese higher education institutions. Drawing upon the Job Demands–Resources framework, the research explored how five key management dimensions—workload, organizational support, leadership style, career development opportunities, and job autonomy—are associated with occupational health status.

The findings indicate that the overall level of occupational burnout among administrative personnel in the studied institution remains relatively moderate to low. However, variations across management dimensions reveal important structural patterns. Job autonomy and leadership style emerged as the strongest positive factors associated with occupational health, suggesting that participatory leadership, constructive communication, and flexible task execution play significant roles in buffering occupational stress. In contrast, workload and organizational support, although evaluated positively overall, demonstrated comparatively weaker performance, indicating potential areas for further managerial optimization.

Within the context of Chinese higher education governance reform, administrative personnel are increasingly positioned at the intersection of policy implementation, digital transformation, performance evaluation, and service coordination. These institutional pressures create heightened job demands. The findings of this study suggest that educational management practices that enhance organizational resources—particularly leadership support and autonomy—can mitigate burnout risk and promote sustainable administrative functioning.

This research contributes to the literature by shifting attention from faculty burnout to administrative personnel in Chinese higher education institutions. It also provides empirical support for

applying management-based explanatory frameworks to occupational well-being within educational organizations.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted within a single application-oriented institution, which may limit generalizability across different institutional types in China. Second, the research relied primarily on descriptive statistical analysis rather than inferential modeling. Future research may employ multi-institutional sampling and advanced statistical techniques, such as regression analysis or structural equation modeling, to examine causal pathways between educational management variables and burnout outcomes. Longitudinal designs may also help explore dynamic changes in occupational health under ongoing governance reform.

In conclusion, optimizing educational management structures—particularly in terms of leadership practices, workload allocation, and resource support—represents a crucial strategy for promoting administrative personnel's occupational well-being and enhancing institutional sustainability in Chinese higher education.

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