Faculty Organizational Culture and Teacher Burnout in Chinese Universities: Role Conflict as a Mediator

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Teacher burnout in Chinese public universities, intensified by expansion and structural reforms, remains understudied in relation to decentralized faculty-level management systems and their manifestations, like emotional exhaustion. Faculty-level organizational culture traits significantly influence burnout through teaching-research role conflict mediation, with demographic variables like age and academic rank moderating these effects. This research aimed to examine the effects of organizational culture in university faculties on teacher burnout, with role conflict as a mediating factor, and to provide perspectives for enhancing the university environment.

Materials and Methods: A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The research sampled 333 faculty members and conducted 12 interviews with university administrators at Sichuan Normal University. The research utilized a modified questionnaire derived from the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS), the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale (RCAS). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and mediation analysis for quantitative data. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data from interviews.

Results: Multiple regression analysis revealed significant negative effects of faculty-level organizational culture dimensions (Mission: $\beta = -0.73$, $p < 0.001$; Involvement: $\beta = -0.45$, $p < 0.001$; Adaptability: $\beta = -0.60$, $p < 0.001$; Consistency: $\beta = -0.58$, $p < 0.001$) on burnout, with Mission and Involvement showing the strongest associations ($R^2 = 0.62$). Organizational culture explained 62% of the variance in burnout. Role conflict mediated this relationship significantly (indirect effect = -0.328, 95% CI [-0.387, -0.267]), explaining 64% of burnout variance ($\beta = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$). Demographic analyses identified higher burnout among early-career teachers (<5 years' experience), mid-career faculty (31–40 years), and junior/intermediate academic ranks. Descriptive statistics highlighted elevated Emotional Exhaustion (M = 2.68) and Cross-role Conflict (M = 2.55), while qualitative themes emphasized mission alignment, role clarity, and administrative efficiency as critical mitigation strategies.

Conclusion: The results indicated that: 1) Organizational culture in university faculties has a significant direct effect on teacher burnout, particularly through Mission and Involvement dimensions.2) Role conflict significantly mediates the relationship between organizational culture and teacher burnout, where unclear expectations and workload imbalance exacerbate burnout. 3)Demographic factors (age, teaching experience, and academic rank) influence the relationship between organizational culture, role conflict, and burnout, with younger and less experienced faculty showing higher burnout levels. 4)Perspectives to enhance the university environment, identifying four key areas: Enhancing Teachers' Sense of Mission and Participation, Managing Role Conflict, Strengthening Teacher Support Systems, and Improving Administrative Efficiency.

Keywords: Organizational Culture in University Faculties; Teacher Burnout; Role Conflict; University Environment

Introduction

Teacher burnout has become an increasingly critical issue in higher education, particularly amid the expansion and structural transformation of Chinese public universities. Characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, burnout significantly compromises faculty well-being and educational quality. Although the phenomenon is globally recognized, its specific dynamics within the context of Chinese public institutions---where administrative responsibilities and performance evaluations are progressively decentralized to faculty-level units---remain insufficiently explored. While prior research has examined burnout broadly, few studies have investigated the mediating role of role conflict in the context of decentralized faculty-level culture in Chinese public universities. Previous studies have focused largely on university-wide culture or individual psychological factors,

overlooking how local faculty-level organizational traits---such as mission, involvement, adaptability, and consistency---directly impact burnout. Specifically, the mechanism through which role conflict mediates the relationship between faculty-level culture and burnout remains under-investigated, particularly in decentralized systems where dual demands (e.g., teaching vs. research) are intensified. Demographic factors such as age, gender, teaching experience, and academic rank may further moderate these effects, yet their interplay with organizational culture and role conflict is underexplored.

This study, set in Sichuan Normal University, addresses these gaps by examining how faculty-level organizational culture influences teacher burnout, considering role conflict as a mediating variable and demographic characteristics as moderators. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research integrates quantitative survey data from 333 faculty members with qualitative insights from 12 university administrators. It aims to provide empirical evidence to support the development of practical strategies for enhancing organizational environments and mitigating burnout in Chinese higher education.

Objectives

1. To analyze the effects of organizational culture in university faculties on teacher burnout.

2. To examine the mediating effect of role conflict in the relationship between organizational culture and teacher burnout.

3. To investigate the effects of demographic variables (age, gender, teaching experience, academic rank) on the relationship between organizational culture, role conflict, and teacher burnout.

4. To provide perspectives for enhancing the university environment by addressing the effects of organizational culture, role conflict, and teacher burnout.

Literature review

This study integrates three theoretical perspectives to examine the interplay between organizational culture, role conflict, and teacher burnout:

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979):

Faculty roles are shaped by nested systems—microsystem (departmental norms), exosystem (university policies), and macrosystem (societal expectations). Role conflict arises from misalignment across these systems (e.g., teaching vs. research priorities), which may escalate burnout. Prior studies (e.g., Radu, 2023) found cultural misalignment increases burnout, yet others (Heng et al., 2020) reported non-significant effects in collectivist contexts, highlighting contextual inconsistencies.

Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998):

Collaborative faculty communities mitigate role conflict through shared problem-solving. However, empirical evidence is mixed: while Cuddapah & Clayton (2011) demonstrated reduced burnout in cohesive departments, Jamali et al. (2022) found no significant impact in hierarchical institutions, suggesting organizational structure moderates these effects.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985):

Cultures supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness buffer burnout. For instance, Slemp & Vella-Brodrick (2014) linked autonomy to lower emotional exhaustion, but Lei et al. (2021) noted this effect diminishes under high administrative burdens, indicating role conflict as a boundary condition.

Burnout, as defined by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), has three dimensions and is closely linked to role conflict. Emotional exhaustion occurs when prolonged role conflict, such as the imbalance between teaching and research, consumes emotional resources. Depersonalization arises as role conflict-induced stress leads individuals to adopt detachment as a way to cope. Reduced accomplishment happens when unresolved conflict diminishes one's sense of self-efficacy, as explained by Maslach & Leiter (2016).

Table 1 Theoretical Pathways

Theory	Predicted Pathway	Key Mechanism
Ecological Systems Theory	Culture → Role Conflict → Burnout	Misaligned systems amplify role conflict
Communities of Practice	Culture → Role Conflict → Burnout	Collaborative norms reduce conflict
Self-Determination Theory	Culture → Psychological Needs → Burnout	Unmet needs exacerbate conflict-induced stress

This study focuses on three core concepts：

Organizational Culture in University Faculties is defined according to the Denison model (Denison & Mishra, 1995; McNay, 1995), refers to shared values, beliefs, and practices shaping the faculty's working environment, including adaptability (responsiveness to change), mission (clarity and alignment of goals), involvement (participation in decision-making), and consistency (coherence of practices and expectations).

Teacher burnout is defined using the Maslach Burnout Inventory framework (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), refers to a psychological syndrome from chronic work-related stress, characterized by emotional exhaustion (feeling emotionally drained), depersonalization (detachment from students and colleagues), and reduced personal accomplishment (decline in professional efficacy).

Role conflict is defined using organizational behavior theory (Rizzo et al., 1970), refers to stress experienced by faculty members facing conflicting demands within their roles, including intra-role conflict (contradictory demands within one role, e.g., teaching expectations) and inter-role conflict (tensions between different roles, e.g., teaching versus research).

While these theoretical perspectives and empirical definitions offer a foundation for understanding the phenomena under investigation, prior research tends to focus on institutional-level culture or general stress factors, often overlooking how faculty-level organizational culture directly shapes teachers' role conflict and burnout.

The potential mediating role of role conflict and the moderating effects of demographic characteristics remain underexplored, especially in the Chinese public university context, where structural decentralization has intensified the dual demands on academic staff.

Conceptual Framework

Based on this review, the study adopts the following conceptual model: Organizational Culture in University Faculties is treated as the independent variable, Teacher Burnout as the dependent variable, and Role Conflict as the mediating variable. Demographic factors—age, gender, teaching experience, and academic rank—are considered moderators of these relationships.
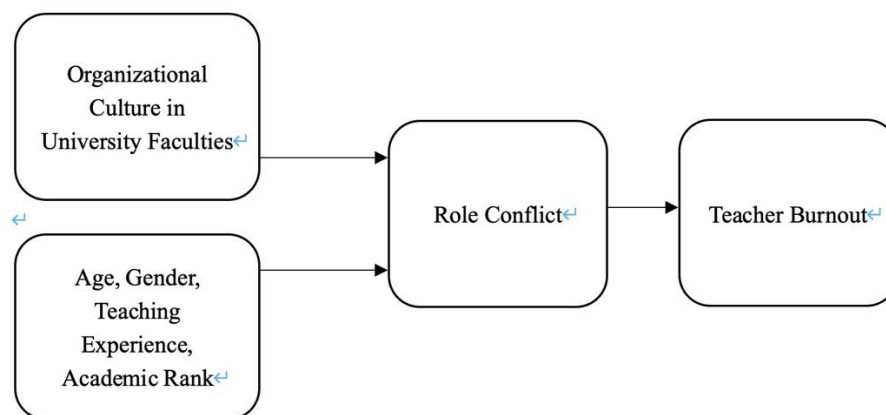
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of faculty culture and burnout.

Population and Sample

The study population consists of full-time, in-service faculty members, including only teaching staff, from 26 faculties at Sichuan Normal University. The total population size is 2,205 faculty members. 333 faculty members were selected through stratified random sampling， determined using Krejcie and Morgan's table (Krejcie& Morgan, 1970)and G*Power. 12 administrators were interviewed for qualitative insights.

Instruments

The Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) was selected for its validated multidimensional framework (Mission, Adaptability, Involvement, Consistency), which aligns with the hierarchical and collectivist nature of Chinese academic institutions. Previous studies (e.g., Denison & Mishra, 1995; Lei et al., 2021) have demonstrated its cross-cultural applicability in Asian contexts, particularly in capturing faculty-level dynamics. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale (RCAS) were chosen for their robust psychometric properties and extensive use in educational research, and the total number of items was 92. All sections used a standardized 5-point Likert scale for consistency.

To ensure the validity of the developed questionnaire, the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method was applied. All items in the demographic section, teacher burnout section, and interview protocol received perfect IOC scores of 1.0. The organizational culture section achieved an average IOC of 0.958, with ten items slightly lower (0.75), indicating minor revisions for clarity. The role conflict scale showed similarly high validity with an average IOC of 0.975. This result underscores the strong alignment between the questionnaire items and the research objectives.

A pilot test was conducted among faculty from 26 faculties at Sichuan Normal University using stratified random sampling and online questionnaires. Items were randomly arranged to minimize order effects. Comprehensibility testing confirmed that all 92 items were clearly understood, requiring no further modification.

Reliability analysis showed acceptable to high internal consistency across all scales and subscales (92 items), with Cronbach's α ranging from 0.689 to 0.975.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed to evaluate construct validity. For the Organizational Culture in University Faculties Questionnaire (OCUFQ), 20 items with low loadings were removed, resulting in a 40-item instrument with four retained dimensions. The Teacher Role Conflict

Questionnaire (TRCQ) retained all 10 items across two factors (intra- and inter-role conflict). The Teacher Burnout Questionnaire (TBQ) was refined by removing 7 items with weak loadings, yielding a 15-item scale aligned with its three theoretical dimensions. The final instrument consisted of 65 items used for the formal data collection.

The finalized questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.975 for the OCUFQ (95% CI: 0.971–0.979), 0.907 for the TRCQ (95% CI: 0.891–0.921), and 0.919 for the TBQ (95% CI: 0.541–0.798).

Mplus was selected over SPSS for CFA due to its superior capacity to handle complex latent variable models, including mediation and moderation analyses. While SPSS is suitable for basic factor analysis, Mplus provides more precise estimation of model parameters and robust fit indices for multidimensional constructs.

The CFA results for the Teacher Burnout Questionnaire (TBQ) showed moderate fit (RMSEA = 0.11). This may reflect the complexity of burnout as a multidimensional construct or potential cultural nuances in item interpretation. Although the RMSEA value exceeds the conventional threshold of 0.08, the model was retained due to strong factor loadings ($\beta > 0.6$) and theoretical alignment. This limitation is further discussed in the Discussion section.

This study used Mplus to conduct Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the OCUFQ, TRCQ, and TBQ scales and measured the model fit for these scales. The fit indices for the three scales used in the study are shown in Table 2：

Table 2 CFA (n=333) Model Fit Indices for OCUFQ, TRCQ, and TBQ

Scale	Model	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (90% CI)
OCUFQ	CFA Four-factors	2474.58	734	0.91	0.92	0.09 (0.08 - 0.10)
TRCQ	CFA Two-factors	112.53	34	0.95	0.94	0.08 (0.07 - 0.10)
TBQ	CFA Three-factors	418.39	87	0.89	0.87	0.11 (0.10 - 0.12)

Data Collection

Data were collected through both online surveys and semi-structured interviews with full-time faculty and administrative staff at Sichuan Normal University. The questionnaire was distributed via the university's internal communication system using the Wenjuanxing platform, accompanied by an informed consent letter. After the quantitative phase, interviews were conducted with selected administrators via Tencent Meeting or Zoom, each lasting 30–45 minutes.

Before analysis, the survey data underwent cleaning procedures to ensure quality. Questionnaires showing uniform responses, repeated patterns, or unrealistically short completion times were removed. Minor missing values in valid responses were handled through imputation. A total of 333 valid questionnaires were retained from 365 collected, resulting in a response rate of 91.2%.

Ethics

The study was approved by Rangsit University's ethics committee, and informed consent was obtained.

Results

Results Related to Objective 1

The results of the multiple regression analysis answered Research Objective 1. The multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the relationship between organizational culture in university faculties (Mission, Adaptability, Consistency, Involvement), role conflict, and burnout (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, Reduced Personal Accomplishment).

Table 3 Regression Analysis for Organizational Culture in University Faculties, Role Conflict, and Burnout

Dependent Variable	Predictor Variable	R²	β	t
Burnout	Organizational Culture in University Faculties	0.62	-0.74	-23.32***
	Mission	0.49	-0.73	-17.77***
	Adaptability	0.36	-0.6	-13.76***
	Consistency	0.44	-0.58	-15.95***
	Involvement	0.4	-0.45	-14.96***
Role Conflict	Organizational Culture	0.45	-0.71	-16.39***
	Mission	0.37	-0.71	-13.86***
	Adaptability	0.29	-0.6	-11.59***
	Consistency	0.31	-0.56	-11.12***
	Involvement	0.27	-0.42	-11.15***
Burnout	Role Conflict	0.64	0.71	24.08***

***: P< 0.001

Results Related to Objective 2

The results of the mediation analysis answered Objective 2. Considering that the effect of organizational culture in university faculties on burnout might not be direct, but mediated by other factors, this study employed mediation analysis to verify whether role conflict plays a significant role in this relationship.

The mediation effect was analyzed using SPSS and the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes. Specifically, the bias-corrected bootstrap method was employed with 5000 resampling iterations to construct 95% confidence intervals, ensuring the robustness of the mediation effect. The results, presented in Table 4.2, show that role conflict significantly mediates the relationship between organizational culture in university faculties and teacher burnout, with the confidence intervals for the mediation effect not including zero. This indicates that the mediation effect is statistically significant.

Table 4 Mediation Analysis Results (n=333)

Pathway	Effect Type	Effect	Boot SE	95%CI	
				Lower	Upper
Organizational Culture in University Faculties → Role Conflict → Teacher Burnout	Total Effect	-0.742	0.032	-0.805	-0.680
	Direct Effect	-0.434	0.035	-0.502	-0.366
	Indirect Effect	-0.328	0.030	-0.387	-0.267

Results Related to Research Objective 3

The results of the descriptive statistics answered Objective 3. Table 4 presents the distribution of key demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, age, teaching experience, and academic rank.

Table 5 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	140	42.00
	Female	193	58.00
Age	21-30 years	60	18.02

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Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
	31-40 years	105	31.53
	41-50 years	90	27.03
	51-60 years	58	17.42
	Over 60 years	20	6.01
	Less than 5 years	68	20.42
	6-10 years	92	27.63
	11-15 years	75	22.52
Teaching Experience	16-20 years	48	14.41
	21-25 years	30	9.01
	26-30 years	10	3.00
	Over 31 years	10	3.00
	None	5	1.52
	Junior	56	16.97
Academic Rank	Intermediate	116	35.15
	Associate Senior	93	28.18
	Senior	60	18.18

Descriptive statistics for each dimension of the Organizational Culture in University Faculties, Role Conflict, and Teacher Burnout are summarized as follows.

Table 6 Organizational Culture in University Faculties Scores

Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Range (Min-Max)	Interpretation
Mission	4.55	0.65	1.0 - 5.0	High alignment with the university's mission, strongly linked to lower burnout.
Adaptability	3.55	0.82	1.0 - 5.0	Moderate adaptability, with varying levels of agreement.
Consistency	3.42	0.75	1.0 - 5.0	Moderate consistency in institutional behavior.
Involvement	4.38	0.71	1.0 - 5.0	High levels of involvement, positively related to engagement and lower burnout.

Table 7 Role Conflict Scores

Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Range (Min-Max)	Interpretation
Cross-role Conflict	2.55	0.79	1.0 - 5.0	Teachers report moderate conflict between different roles (teaching vs. administration).
Intra-role Conflict	2.47	0.8	1.0 - 5.0	Slightly lower conflict within the same role (e.g., curriculum vs. student needs).

Table 8 Burnout Scores

Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Range (Min-Max)	Interpretation
Emotional Exhaustion	2.68	0.84	1.0 - 5.0	Teachers report the highest levels of emotional exhaustion, the primary driver of burnout.
Depersonalization	2.42	0.78	1.0 - 5.0	Moderate feelings of depersonalization towards students.
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	2.59	0.76	1.0 - 5.0	Moderate feelings of reduced personal accomplishment.

The high mean scores for Mission and Involvement suggest that teachers generally perceive their faculties' mission and level of involvement as strong. The relatively lower scores for Adaptability and Consistency indicate moderate agreement, with some variability among teachers. The results show that Cross-role Conflict is experienced more strongly by teachers compared to Intra-role Conflict, suggesting that teachers perceive greater conflict between different roles, such as teaching and administrative duties. The burnout data reveal that Emotional Exhaustion is the most significant contributor to burnout among teachers, followed by Depersonalization and Reduced Personal Accomplishment. These results indicate that teachers are most affected by feelings of emotional drain.

Results Related to Objective 4

The findings from the interviews answered Objective 4. The interview data were analyzed using open coding and theme categorization, leading to the identification of four major themes: Improvement of Organizational Culture, Management of Role Conflict, Strengthening Teacher Support Systems, and Enhancement of Administrative Efficiency. Each theme was further broken down into sub-themes, from which specific recommendations for improvement were derived.

Discussion

Organizational culture in university faculties has a significant direct effect on teacher burnout, particularly through the dimensions of Mission and Involvement.

One of the main reasons for this is that when teachers strongly identify with their institution's mission, they feel a greater sense of purpose in their work. Teachers who are more involved in faculty activities experience greater relatedness to their colleagues, which reduces isolation and enhances emotional support, further decreasing burnout. Teachers who do not feel aligned with the university's mission or are excluded from decision-making may feel disconnected. This disconnection can lead to role ambiguity and emotional exhaustion, both of which are risk factors for burnout. The lack of engagement reduces teachers' intrinsic motivation and emotional involvement in their work, leading to higher stress levels.

According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), a supportive university culture—fostering alignment with the institution's mission—acts as a positive environmental layer that reduces burnout. When teachers experience alignment with their university's mission, they feel a sense of purpose, which reduces role ambiguity and the stress associated with conflicting expectations (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2024). Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering motivation and reducing burnout. Mission alignment promotes intrinsic motivation, making teachers feel more competent and valued in their roles, thus reducing emotional exhaustion (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2014).

Role conflict significantly mediates the relationship between organizational culture in university faculties and teacher burnout.

Teachers with higher levels of mission alignment and teacher involvement reported lower role conflict, which in turn led to lower burnout levels. Role conflict, which arises when teachers' various roles—teaching, research, and administrative duties—come into conflict, was found to be a key mechanism linking organizational culture and burnout. The main reason for this mediation effect is that when teachers have a clearer understanding of their roles and a stronger sense of mission alignment, they are better able to manage the competing demands of teaching, research, and administration. A clear and supportive organizational culture reduces role ambiguity, which helps teachers balance their multiple roles more effectively, reducing role conflict and burnout.

Ecological Systems Theory helps explain how role conflict is influenced by the environment. A supportive organizational culture can reduce role conflict by aligning expectations across different roles. When organizational culture provides clarity and support for teachers, it helps them balance their competing responsibilities, reducing role conflict and preventing burnout (Radu, 2023; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Communities of Practice Theory posits that collaborative learning and shared practices within a community can reduce role conflict. When teachers are involved in shared decision-making and collaborative activities, role conflict is mitigated through better communication and mutual support (Iraola et al., 2024).

Age, teaching experience, and academic rank significantly influence role conflict and burnout.

Teachers in the 31-40 age group, with less than 5 years of experience or lower academic rank, reported higher levels of role conflict and burnout. One of the key reasons behind this is that younger and less experienced teachers are often less prepared to handle the diverse responsibilities of teaching, research, and administration (Rahida Aini et al., 2018). They may struggle with role clarity and lack the experience needed to manage the conflicting demands of these roles. Similarly, teachers with lower academic ranks face more challenges in balancing roles and expectations, which contributes to higher levels of role conflict and burnout.

Ecological Systems Theory provides a framework for understanding how individual characteristics (such as age and experience) interact with the environment. Younger teachers or those with less experience may not have the coping strategies or support structures in place to effectively manage their multiple roles. Teachers in lower academic ranks may also have fewer resources and less autonomy, which makes balancing roles more difficult. (Amzat et al., 2021). Self-Determination Theory emphasizes that individuals with lower autonomy and competence are more susceptible to burnout. Younger and less experienced teachers, as well as those in lower academic ranks, often have less control over their roles and responsibilities (Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

Four perspectives for enhancing the environment

1. Improvement of Teachers' Sense of Mission and Participation

The qualitative data indicated that enhancing teachers' sense of mission and participation in decision-making significantly reduces burnout. The key reason behind this finding is that mission alignment and participation increase teachers' sense of purpose and relatedness. Teachers who participate in decisions feel more autonomous and valued. When teachers are involved in decision-making and connected to the university's mission, they experience a greater sense of autonomy and relatedness, which in turn helps reduce burnout by increasing motivation and job satisfaction (Yurt, 2022). Teachers who are engaged in decision-making are more likely to feel part of a community of practice, where their contributions are valued. This sense of belonging reduces burnout by promoting shared responsibility and collective problem-solving (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011).

To enhance teachers' sense of mission and involvement, research suggests the following strategies:

Clarifying and Communicating the University's Mission: Universities should focus on defining their mission clearly and communicating it regularly. This could be achieved through workshops, meetings, and online platforms that reinforce the university's core values. Providing faculty with a clear understanding of the institution's mission can create a sense of purpose and increase their commitment to their roles (Batugal & Tindowen, 2019).

Fostering Greater Teacher Involvement in Decision-Making: Universities need to create more opportunities for faculty to participate in strategic decision-making processes. This involvement motivates faculty and fosters a collaborative atmosphere that encourages engagement and reduces stress. Universities can facilitate this by establishing committees, task forces, or collaborative projects (Jamali et al., 2022).

2. Managing Role Conflict

The study suggests that rational allocation of teaching, research, and administrative tasks, along with simplifying administrative processes, can help manage role conflict and reduce burnout. The underlying reason for this is that when the expectations for each role are clear and manageable, teachers are less likely to experience stress from competing demands. Managing role conflict involves creating an environment where roles are clearly defined, and support is provided to manage multiple responsibilities (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017). And teachers can collaborate and share responsibilities, making it easier to balance multiple roles. By participating in collaborative decision-making, teachers can distribute tasks and reduce role conflict (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011).

Specific management recommendations are as follows:

Defining Clear Role Expectations: It is crucial to define and communicate clear expectations for faculty members regarding their responsibilities in teaching, research, and administration. A transparent framework outlining the division of labor and providing perspectives for balancing multiple duties (Hassan, 2013).

Reducing Administrative Burdens on Teachers: Another effective approach to managing role conflict is by alleviating the administrative burdens placed on faculty. According to recent studies, adopting technology to streamline these administrative duties is one of the most effective ways to free up time (Lei et al., 2021; Woelert, 2023).

Providing Administrative Support Teams: Establishing dedicated administrative support teams is another key strategy. Studies have demonstrated that by providing faculty with access to administrative assistants or support staff, universities can help alleviate the burden of non-teaching responsibilities (Heng et al., 2020).

3. Strengthening Teacher Support Systems

When teachers feel supported in their professional growth and emotional well-being, they are better equipped to cope with the demands of their roles and avoid burnout. According to Self-Determination Theory, providing support for competence and relatedness helps prevent burnout. Teachers who receive adequate support feel more competent in their roles and more connected to the institution, which buffers against burnout (Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

To effectively address teacher well-being and reduce burnout, universities can implement the following strategies:

Providing Psychological and Emotional Support: Universities should invest in well-being programs that include access to counseling services, stress management workshops, and mental health support. Additionally, fostering peer support networks where faculty can share challenges and coping strategies can create a sense of community (State et al., 2024).

Supporting Professional Development and Career Growth: Providing opportunities for career advancement through professional development programs, attending conferences, and engaging in research pursuits can significantly boost faculty morale and sense of purpose (Xie et al., 2022).

Building a Collaborative and Supportive Community: Establishing a community of practice where teachers can collaborate on research, share ideas, and support each other's professional growth is essential. Universities should encourage collaborative decision-making between faculty and leadership, promoting shared governance and alignment on academic policies (Sihite et al., 2023).

Tailoring Support to Faculty Demographics: Mentoring programs, role-specific training, and increased opportunities for autonomy are particularly beneficial for newer faculty. Providing more resources and decision-making power for faculty in lower academic ranks (Peterson & Baule, 2023).

4. Enhancing Administrative Efficiency

Streamlining administrative processes reduces stress and enhances teachers' ability to manage their roles effectively, leading to reduced burnout. From the perspectives of Ecological Systems Theory, administrative processes are part of the broader environment in which teachers operate. When these processes are simplified, the ecological environment becomes more supportive.

To effectively reduce faculty stress and improve their well-being, universities should implement the following strategies to enhance administrative efficiency:

Streamlining Administrative Processes: Universities should review and optimize their administrative procedures to ensure they are as efficient as possible. Research has shown that reducing excessive paperwork, eliminating redundant steps, and automating routine tasks through technology can significantly lighten the administrative load for faculty (Deep et al., 2024).

Integrating Technology to Reduce Administrative Burdens: Universities can use digital tools and systems to automate time-consuming tasks such as scheduling, grading, and attendance tracking. By embracing technologies such as cloud-based platforms, artificial intelligence, and machine learning, universities can create more efficient workflows (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2021).

Fostering a Collaborative Administrative Environment: When faculty members collaborate with administrators to streamline procedures, it creates a sense of partnership and shared responsibility, and better alignment of faculty needs with administrative practices (Matriano & Bueno, 2024).

Establishing Clear Role Definitions for Administrative Tasks: By clearly delineating the responsibilities of each role, universities can avoid overlapping duties. A well-defined structure ensures that faculty know which administrative tasks they are expected to handle and which ones will be managed by support staff (Woelert, 2023).

Offering Professional Development for Administrative Staff: Ensuring that administrative staff are well-trained in the needs and challenges faced by faculty. This not only helps in streamlining administrative processes but also fosters a more collaborative and supportive work environment (Shi, 2024).

5. Cross-Cultural Comparisons

The findings align with studies in Western contexts (e.g., Maslach & Leiter, 2016) where role conflict mediates burnout, yet distinct cultural factors emerge. In Chinese universities, collectivist norms amplify the impact of mission alignment, whereas individualistic cultures (e.g., US/Europe) prioritize autonomy (Lei et al., 2021). For instance, while decentralized faculty systems in China intensify teaching-research conflicts, European universities often buffer such stress through institutional support (Woelert, 2023). These differences highlight the need for culturally tailored interventions.

6. Policy Implications for University Leadership

To address burnout, universities should:

Revise HR Policies: Integrate role clarity into tenure evaluations and reduce administrative burdens for junior faculty.

Leadership Training: Train deans to foster participatory decision-making and align departmental goals with institutional missions.

Support Systems: Establish mentoring programs for early-career teachers and provide access to mental health resources.

7. Longitudinal Research Potential

Future studies should explore how organizational culture and burnout co-evolve over time. For example, longitudinal tracking of faculty cohorts could reveal whether cultural reforms (e.g., enhanced involvement) lead to sustained reductions in burnout or if systemic pressures (e.g., publication demands) negate such gains. Additionally, cross-national comparisons could identify universal versus context-specific pathways.

Conclusion

Based on the key findings, the conclusion can be described as follows.

This study analyzed the effects of organizational culture in university faculties on teacher burnout. The results of the data analysis showed that organizational culture in university faculties has a significant direct effect on teacher burnout, particularly through the dimensions of Mission and Involvement.

This study examined the mediating effect of role conflict in the relationship between organizational culture and teacher burnout. The results of the data analysis showed that role conflict significantly mediates the relationship between organizational culture and teacher burnout.

This study investigated the effects of demographic variables (age, gender, teaching experience, and academic rank) on the relationship between organizational culture, role conflict, and teacher burnout. The analysis also showed that age, teaching experience, and academic rank influence the relationship between organizational culture, role conflict, and teacher burnout.

This study provided perspectives for enhancing the university environment by addressing the effects of organizational culture, role conflict, and teacher burnout. This study, through a combined analysis of quantitative and qualitative research, identified four key areas that significantly impact the improvement of the university environment: Enhancing Teachers' Sense of Mission and Participation, Managing Role Conflict, Strengthening Teacher Support Systems, and Improving Administrative Efficiency.

The findings highlight the urgent need for institutional reforms to address faculty well-being in Chinese universities. First, implementing role clarity frameworks is essential. Universities need to define clear expectations for teaching, research, and administrative duties, especially for early-career and junior faculty, as ambiguity in these areas often leads to burnout. Second, decentralizing decision-making by empowering faculty through participatory governance models, such as faculty senates, can strengthen mission alignment and reduce role conflict. Third, launching well-being mandates by integrating mental health support and workload audits into university accreditation standards will ensure that resources for faculty support programs are consistently allocated. Lastly, adopting AI-driven administrative tools, in collaboration with tech firms, can automate routine tasks like grading and scheduling, thereby freeing up faculty time for core academic activities. These evidence-based steps can help transform universities into environments where faculty members can truly thrive rather than merely survive.

Recommendation

The findings of this study are specific to Sichuan Normal University and should be interpreted with caution when applied to other institutions. Differences in organizational culture and teacher experiences across regions and university types may limit the generalizability of the results. Future studies in diverse and international contexts are needed to test and extend these findings.

Future research should explore how organizational culture and burnout interact in various settings, assess the effectiveness of psychological support systems, and refine cultural models by examining dimensions such as mission, involvement, and leadership. These efforts will help develop targeted strategies to improve teacher well-being.

The 4P Model provides a comprehensive framework for universities to address faculty burnout through a combination of short-term and long-term strategies. In the short term (1–2 years), universities should focus on process optimization, such as streamlining administrative workflows through automation of grading and simplification of reporting, and establishing dedicated support teams for non-academic tasks. At the same time, expanding psychological support is crucial, involving the launch of mandatory mental health workshops and the creation of peer counseling networks. For the long term (3–5 years), universities need to align purpose by integrating mission clarity into tenure criteria and performance evaluations, and developing role-specific guidelines to balance teaching and research expectations. Participation enhancement is also vital, which can be achieved by implementing faculty senates for decentralized decision-making and creating cross-departmental committees to align goals and reduce role conflict.

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