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Burnout among University Educators: Mapping Research Trends and Identifying Risk Factors through Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Burnout among university educators has become a critical issue due to its potential to affect the quality of education. The relevance of this topic has increased alongside rising job demands, the digitalization of education, and changes in the higher education work environment. This study aims to map research trends and identify factors influencing burnout among university educators through a systematic literature review (SLR) using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol. From an initial 118 articles identified in the Scopus database, 38 articles were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The findings show an increasing publication trend in recent years, with noticeable fluctuations beginning in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most studies originate from China, while contributions from other countries remain limited. The literature is largely dominated by the Job Demands–Resources and Conservation of Resources theory, with most studies employing quantitative survey-based approaches. Publications are primarily concentrated in reputable journals in psychology, education, and public health. The review also identifies various factors contributing to burnout, confirming its multidimensional nature. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of burnout dynamics and offers practical implications for developing policies that support the well-being of university educators.

1. Introduction

Burnout among university educators has become a global issue that is gaining increasing attention in modern higher education discourse. Burnout refers to a condition of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment resulting from prolonged work-related stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). This condition affects not only educators' psychological well-being but also the quality of teaching, research productivity, and academic interactions with

students (Aeni et al., 2026; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The development of higher education systems over the past decade has increased the complexity of academic work demands. Rising expectations for scientific publication, administrative responsibilities, and teaching quality have intensified the workload faced by university educators (Parlangeli et al., 2022). Major changes in learning systems during the COVID-19 pandemic have also required educators to adapt to digital learning technologies within a short period (Imran et al., 2022, 2023; G.-H. Wang et al., 2023). This situation indicates that burnout among university educators cannot be understood solely as an individual issue but as a phenomenon linked to structural changes in work and the broader dynamics of global higher education.

A growing body of research has attempted to document burnout among university educators using various theoretical and empirical approaches. Earlier research by Xu (2019) applied the Job Demands-Resources Theory to explain that conflicts between teaching and research roles constitute a major source of work-related stress among university educators in China. Such role conflict creates tension as educators are required to fulfill two equally important academic demands simultaneously (Rizka et al., 2026; Xu, 2019). Subsequent studies have extended this perspective by showing that job stress and job satisfaction act as mediating variables in the relationship between job demands and burnout (Lei et al., 2021; P. Wang et al., 2020). Recent research has expanded the analytical context by considering broader changes in the academic work environment. Evidence from Italy indicates that changes in learning systems during the COVID-19 pandemic increased work pressure and significantly affected educators' psychological well-being (Parlangeli et al., 2022). Findings from Finland also show that the transition to online learning increased task complexity and elevated the risk of emotional exhaustion among educators (Virtanen & Parpala, 2023). These findings suggest that burnout among university educators has been examined across diverse contexts and continues to evolve alongside changes in higher education.

Despite these contributions, the existing literature still presents several limitations. Most prior studies focus on psychosocial factors such as role conflict and job satisfaction as primary determinants of burnout (Lei et al., 2021; P. Wang et al., 2020; Xu, 2019). This perspective explains key psychological mechanisms but does not fully capture the complexity of burnout in modern academic environments. Recent studies have introduced additional factors, including emotional intelligence and organizational support, which may influence burnout levels among educators (Heng et al., 2020; Puertas-Molero et al., 2018). Other research has explored biological and health-related aspects, such as the role of physical activity in strengthening resilience to academic work stress (Y. Li et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024). Emerging evidence also highlights that the use of digital learning technologies may generate technostress, which exacerbates work pressure (Lawal et al., 2025; G.-H. Wang et al., 2023). These diverse approaches indicate a shift toward a more multidimensional understanding of burnout. The literature remains fragmented across different perspectives and does not yet provide a systematic overview of research trends, determinants, and future directions.

These limitations highlight the need for a study that synthesizes the development of burnout research among university educators in a more systematic and comprehensive manner. This study aims to provide a structured understanding of the dynamics of burnout research in higher education. Four main objectives are proposed. The first objective is to map research trends on burnout among university educators over the past decade. The second objective is to identify research gaps that remain underexplored in the academic literature. The third objective is to identify key factors contributing to stress and burnout among university educators based on existing empirical findings. The fourth objective is to formulate recommendations that can inform policy development and prevention strategies in higher education institutions. This approach distinguishes the study from prior research by integrating trend mapping, gap identification, and factor analysis within a single systematic synthesis framework.

2. Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review approach by following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure transparency in the study selection process and methodological consistency in the literature synthesis. The PRISMA protocol is widely recognized as a standard for improving the quality of reporting in systematic reviews across various disciplines (Moher et al., 2009). Its application enables researchers to conduct the identification, screening, and selection of literature in a systematic and replicable manner (Panic et al., 2013; Siddaway et al., 2019). The literature identification process focused on the Scopus database, as it is known for its rigorous curation and indexing system, which provides valid and relevant scientific sources for academic inquiry (Bergman, 2012; Rocha et al., 2019). The search was conducted using the keywords “Teacher Burnout University” and “Teacher Stress University.” The initial search yielded 118 article records. This stage resulted in the removal of 8 duplicate records, 10 records outside the publication period of 2016-2026, 11 records that did not meet the specified journal tier criteria, and 1 record without an abstract.

The screening stage shows that 16 records were excluded because they were not relevant to the focus of the study on burnout among university educators. This process resulted in 72 articles being advanced to the full-text retrieval stage. During the full-text collection process, 32 articles could not be obtained and were therefore excluded from further analysis. The eligibility assessment was then conducted on the 40 articles for which full texts were successfully retrieved. This evaluation led to the exclusion of 2 articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The selection process ultimately resulted in 38 articles that satisfied all criteria and were included in the systematic review. As a result, 88 records were retained for the screening process based on titles and abstracts, as shown in Figure 1.

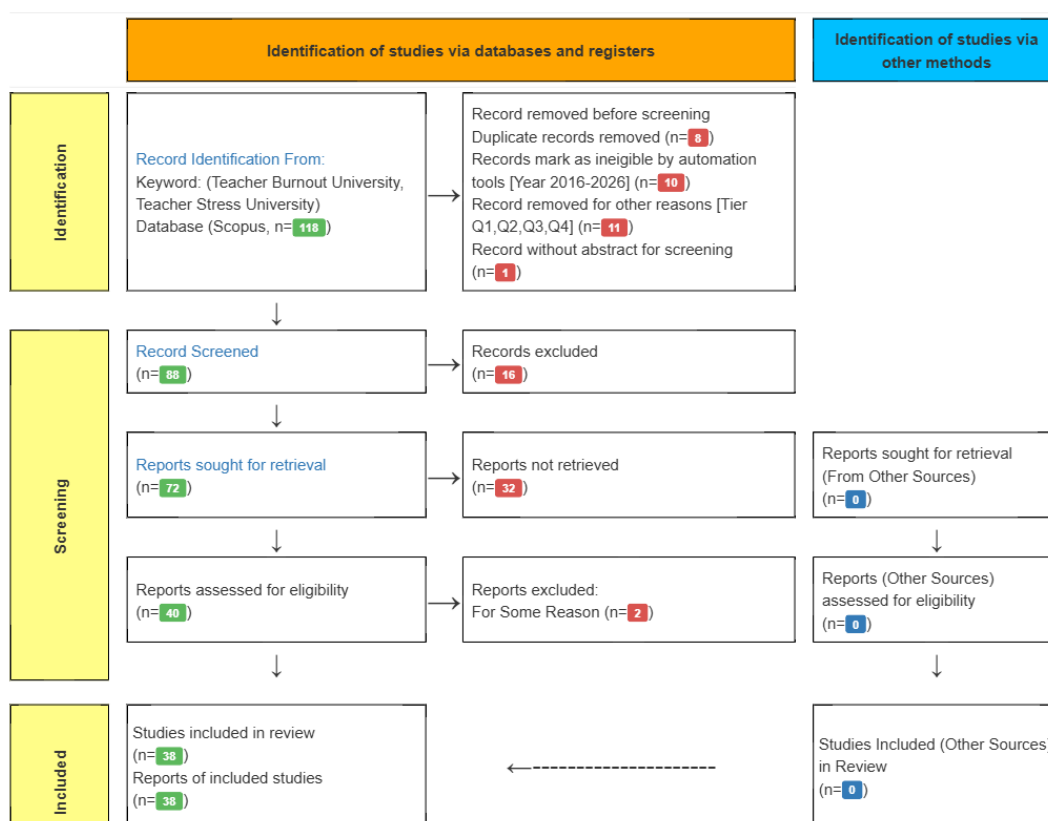


Figure 1. PRISMA

The analysis stage was then carried out using a thematic analysis approach to identify research patterns and risk factors associated with burnout among university educators. This analytical process was also supported by the Sistem Watase Uake framework, which facilitated the organization of data and the systematic synthesis of research findings (Wahyudi, 2024). This approach enabled the mapping of publication trends, the identification of burnout determinants, and the synthesis of research recommendations based on the findings from the 38 selected studies.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the analysis of studies that have undergone the selection process using the PRISMA protocol. The selection process resulted in 38 articles that met all inclusion criteria and were relevant to the research focus on burnout among university educators. These studies were then systematically analyzed to identify research development patterns and the factors influencing burnout in higher education settings. The analysis was conducted to understand how academic attention to the issue of burnout has evolved over time and how research on this topic has been carried out across different contexts. The discussion is structured progressively to provide a comprehensive overview of the research dynamics reflected in the literature. It begins with an analysis of annual publication trends to examine the development of research output over time. The subsequent

analysis reviews the geographic distribution of studies, the theoretical frameworks employed, and the methodological approaches applied in previous research. The discussion also includes the classification of journals in which the articles were published, as well as a synthesis of the main factors influencing burnout among university educators based on empirical findings from the selected studies.

Yearly Trends

The analysis of publication years indicates that research on burnout among university educators has developed dynamically in recent years. The topic first appeared in 2017 with 2 published articles. The number of publications then increased to 5 articles in 2018, although a decline occurred in 2019 with only 1 article published. A renewed increase was observed in 2020, with 6 articles published, indicating growing academic attention to burnout among university educators. This increase is associated with major changes in higher education systems during that period, particularly due to heightened work pressure during the COVID-19 pandemic (Parlangeli et al., 2022; G.-H. Wang et al., 2023). This situation encouraged researchers to further examine the relationship between academic job demands, the use of digital learning technologies, and educators' psychological well-being, as presented in Figure 2.

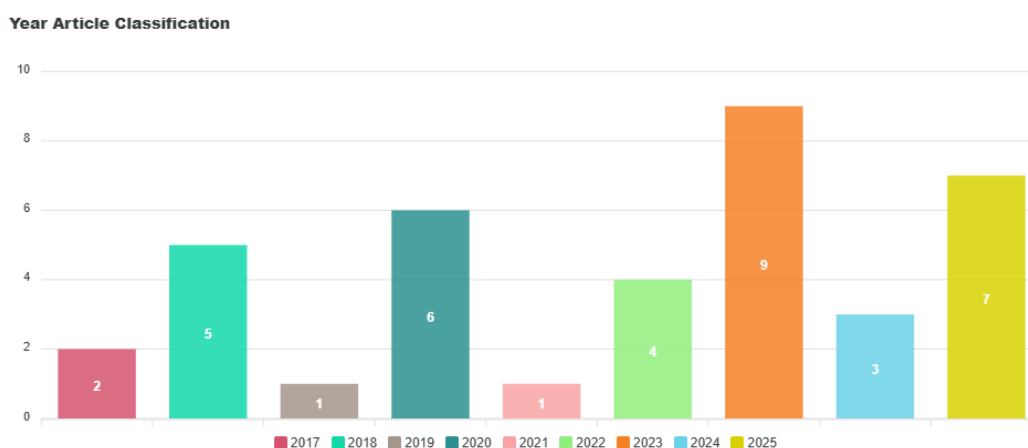


Figure 2. Yearly Trends

The publication trend became even more pronounced in the post-pandemic period. The data show that the number of articles increased to 4 publications in 2022 and reached its peak in 2023 with 9 published articles. This increase indicates that burnout among university educators has gained stronger attention in the global academic literature. Publications then remained relatively stable with 3 articles in 2024 and increased again to 7 articles in 2025. This pattern suggests that research on burnout has not merely emerged as a response to a temporary crisis but has developed into a sustained research topic in higher education studies. The trend reflects the growing concern over burnout among university educators as academic work environments become increasingly complex.

Geographic Distribution of Studies

The geographic distribution of studies indicates that research on burnout among university educators is not evenly distributed across countries. The analysis shows a strong dominance of China as the primary research setting. Of the 38 studies analyzed, 23 were conducted in China. This dominance suggests that burnout among university educators has become a major concern within the country's higher education context. High academic pressure, publication demands, and intense competition within universities are frequently identified as factors driving scholarly attention to this issue (Heng et al., 2020; Lian et al., 2021; Yin et al., 2020). Studies from China have also made significant academic contributions, as reflected in their high citation impact. The study by Xu (2019), for instance, is among the most cited works in the literature on burnout among university educators. This pattern indicates that research from China is not only dominant in quantity but also highly influential in shaping the development of the academic literature on burnout, as presented in Figure 3.

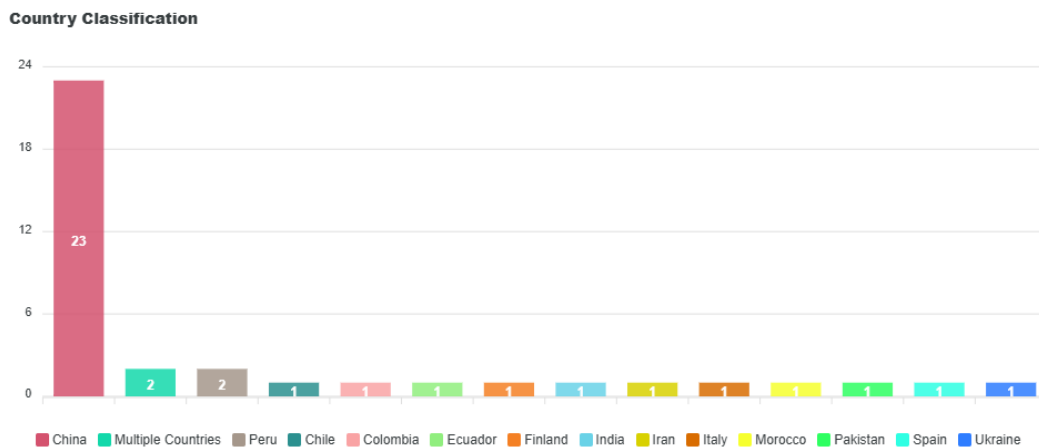


Figure 3. Geographical Distribution

The distribution of studies outside China shows a smaller and more dispersed pattern across several countries. The data indicate that cross-country studies account for 2 articles, while Peru and Spain each also contribute 2 studies. Several other countries, including Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Finland, India, Iran, Italy, Morocco, Pakistan, and Ukraine, each contribute only one study within the analyzed dataset. This distribution pattern suggests that research on burnout among university educators remains concentrated in specific regions and has not yet been widely distributed on a global scale. Studies from developing countries such as India (Garg et al., 2022) and Pakistan (Saleem & Malik, 2023) provide additional perspectives on the relationship between academic work pressure and educators' psychological well-being. Research from other regions, such as Colombia (Bedoya et al., 2017) and Ukraine (Dubynska et al., 2026), also indicates that social and institutional contexts shape the experience of burnout among university educators. This geographic pattern confirms that although burnout is a global issue in higher education, the existing literature is still dominated by a limited number of countries,

creating opportunities for future studies to broaden the geographic scope of research.

Theory Classification

The theory classification indicates that not all studies on burnout among university educators employ an explicit theoretical framework. The analysis shows that 17 studies did not specify any particular theory as the basis for their analysis. This suggests that a considerable portion of the literature does not directly refer to a defined conceptual framework. Even so, several studies do employ theory to explain the mechanisms underlying burnout in academic work contexts. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory is the most frequently used framework in the analyzed literature. This theory is applied in 8 studies examining the relationship between job demands, resource availability, and burnout levels among university educators (Heng et al., 2020; Lei et al., 2021; Y. Li et al., 2019, 2022; Parlangeli et al., 2022; Tian et al., 2024; G.-H. Wang et al., 2023; P. Wang et al., 2020; Xu, 2019). The prominence of this theory indicates that many researchers conceptualize burnout as a consequence of an imbalance between job demands and the resources available to individuals, as presented in Figure 4.

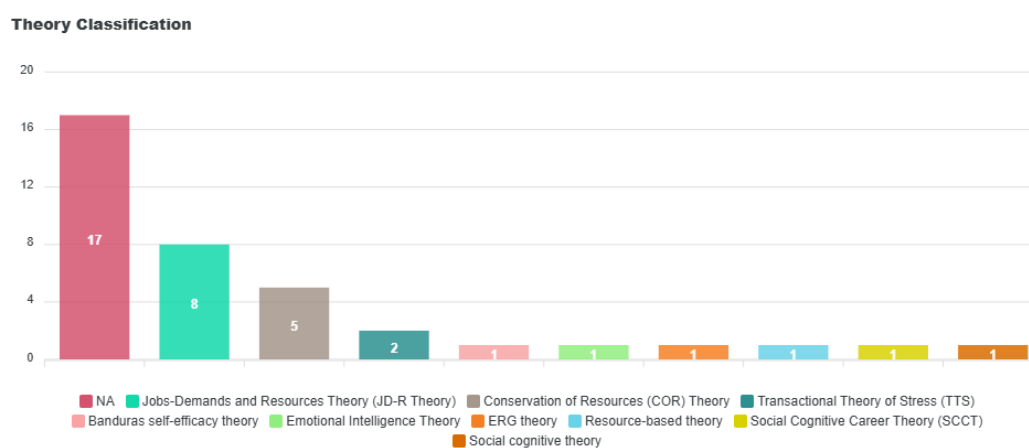


Figure 4. Theory Classification

In addition to JD-R Theory, several studies employ other theoretical perspectives to explain the dynamics of burnout among university educators. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory is the second most frequently used framework, with 5 studies adopting this perspective in their analyses (Bao et al., 2025; H. Li & Liu, 2025; Liao & Hu, 2025; Sha & Chang, 2025; G.-H. Wang et al., 2023). This theory emphasizes that individuals are likely to experience stress and burnout when their psychological resources decline or are depleted. Other theories appear less frequently, including Transactional Theory of Stress, Bandura's self-efficacy theory, Emotional Intelligence theory, ERG theory, Resource-Based Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory. Each of these theories is used in only one or two studies, indicating a relatively limited contribution within the analyzed literature. This pattern suggests that research on burnout among university educators is still largely shaped by two dominant frameworks, namely

JD-R Theory and COR Theory, while the use of alternative theories remains relatively rare and fragmented across a small number of studies.

Methods Classification

The classification of research methods indicates that the quantitative approach is the most dominant method in studies on burnout among university educators. Of the 38 studies analyzed, 34 employed survey methods using questionnaire instruments. The dominance of survey methods suggests that most researchers seek to measure burnout levels and related variables through respondents' direct perceptions. This method generally relies on self-administered questionnaires completed by university educators as research participants. The survey approach also enables researchers to collect large-scale data efficiently in order to test relationships among variables associated with job stress and burnout. Data analysis in survey-based studies often uses statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling and regression analysis to examine the relationships between job demands, organizational support, and educators' psychological well-being (Heng et al., 2020; G.-H. Wang et al., 2023). This pattern indicates that research on burnout among university educators predominantly adopts a quantitative approach to understand causal relationships among variables affecting the psychological condition of academic staff, as presented in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Methods Classification

Other research methods appear in much smaller numbers compared to survey-based studies. The data indicate that only 2 studies employed a mixed methods approach, while 1 study each used a case study design and clustering analysis. This relatively small number suggests that qualitative approaches and exploratory analytical methods remain underutilized in the analyzed literature. Studies using mixed methods aim to combine the strengths of quantitative and qualitative analysis to provide a deeper understanding of educators' burnout experiences (Dubynska et al., 2026; Xu, 2019). The case study method is generally used to describe burnout phenomena within a specific institutional context in greater detail. Clustering analysis is employed to identify particular patterns or groups of characteristics in educators' burnout experiences. This methodological distribution indicates that

research on burnout among university educators remains heavily dominated by quantitative survey approaches, while methodological diversity is still relatively limited in the existing literature.

Journal Classification

The journal classification shows that research on burnout among university educators has been published across various international journals with different quality tiers. The analyzed articles are distributed across journals ranging from Q1 to Q4. The journal with the highest publication contribution is *Frontiers in Psychology*, which published 6 articles with a total of 180 citations. This position suggests that the journal has become one of the main publication outlets for burnout research in the fields of psychology and education. Several other Q1 journals also make important contributions, such as *Journal of Affective Disorders* with 3 articles and *Studies in Higher Education* with 2 articles that have received a relatively high number of citations. Other Q1 journals, including *Journal of Clinical Medicine* and *BMC Public Health*, each published 2 articles related to burnout among university educators. This pattern indicates that burnout among university educators is not only a concern in education studies but also in health psychology and public health, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Journal Classification

| No | ISSN | Journal | Tier | Citation | Total Articles |
|----|----------|--|------|----------|----------------|
| 1 | 16641078 | Frontiers in Psychology | 1 | 180 | 6 |
| 2 | 01650327 | Journal of Affective Disorders | 1 | 23 | 3 |
| 3 | 2504284X | Frontiers in Education | 2 | 30 | 3 |
| 4 | 21582440 | SAGE Open | 4 | 0 | 2 |
| 5 | 20770383 | Journal of Clinical Medicine | 1 | 98 | 2 |
| 6 | 2076328X | Behavioral Sciences | 2 | 6 | 2 |
| 7 | 03075079 | Studies in Higher Education | 1 | 125 | 2 |
| 8 | 09720502 | Journal of Interdisciplinary Mathematics | 4 | 20 | 2 |
| 9 | 26629992 | Humanities and Social Sciences Communications | 2 | 6 | 2 |
| 10 | 14712458 | BMC Public Health | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 11 | 10773525 | International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health | 2 | 29 | 1 |
| 12 | 13596748 | Research in Post-Compulsory Education | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| 13 | 13562517 | Teaching in Higher Education | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| 14 | 13533452 | Science and Engineering Ethics | 3 | 12 | 1 |
| 15 | 00333085 | Psychology in the Schools | 2 | 27 | 1 |
| 16 | 10444068 | International Journal of Conflict Management | 3 | 32 | 1 |
| 17 | 08830355 | International Journal of Educational Research | 2 | 46 | 1 |
| 18 | 07185006 | Formaci in universitaria | 4 | 17 | 1 |
| 19 | 02607476 | Journal of Education for Teaching | 1 | 30 | 1 |
| 20 | 01907409 | Children and Youth Services Review | 2 | 40 | 1 |

Source: Data processed (2026)

The publication distribution also shows contributions from journals in other tiers. Several Q2 journals, such as *Frontiers in Education*, *Behavioral Sciences*, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, and *International Journal of Educational Research*, have also published studies on burnout among university

educators. These journals indicate that the topic has cross-disciplinary relevance in education, psychology, and the social sciences. Several Q3 journals, such as *Science and Engineering Ethics* and *International Journal of Conflict Management*, also include studies related to the dynamics of academic work pressure. Q4 journals, including *SAGE Open*, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Mathematics*, and *Formación Universitaria*, also contribute, although the number of articles remains relatively limited. This distribution pattern indicates that research on burnout among university educators has been published across a wide range of international journals with varying quality levels, reflecting the broad academic concern over educator well-being in higher education environments.

Factors Influencing Burnout among University Educators

The variable mapping results indicate that the term burnout is not consistently represented by a single label in the literature, but often appears in forms such as job burnout, stress, technostress, or emotional exhaustion. These differences in terminology are shaped by the research focus and the specific types of pressure experienced by university educators. In general, the first major factor frequently discussed relates to job demands. This factor includes work overload (G.-H. Wang et al., 2023), workload (Kovács et al., 2025), and work–private life conflict, which appears across several studies (Bao et al., 2025; Kovács et al., 2025; G.-H. Wang et al., 2023). These factors indicate that excessive workload and difficulties in balancing professional and personal life can increase educators' psychological strain. Work-related pressure may also arise through invasion of privacy associated with the use of technology and digital work systems (G.-H. Wang et al., 2023), as well as workplace ostracism, which reflects social exclusion in the work environment (G.-H. Wang et al., 2023). These findings suggest that job demands and organizational dynamics are important contributors to the emergence of job burnout, stress, technostress, or emotional exhaustion among university educators, as part of a broader mapping of burnout-related variables as presented in Figure 6.

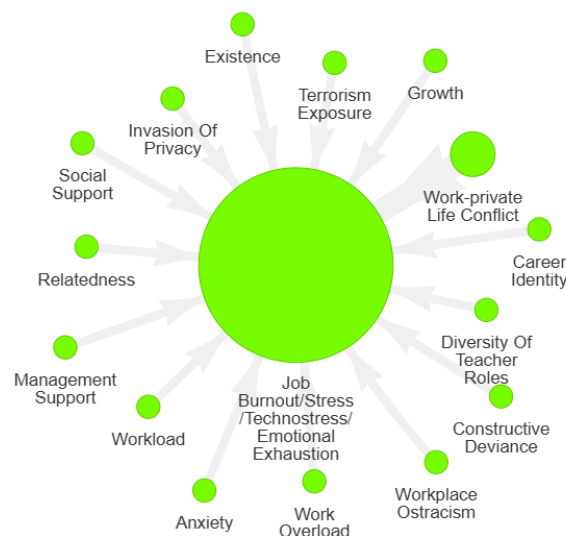


Figure 6. Factors Influencing Burnout among University Educators

Beyond job demands, burnout among university educators is also influenced by individual psychological factors, social support, and contextual conditions. From a psychological perspective, several studies highlight the role of anxiety (Saintila et al., 2025), career identity (Lian et al., 2021), and basic psychological needs such as existence, relatedness, and growth (Yang & Ling, 2023), all of which may affect educators' mental well-being. Social support also plays an important role, particularly social support (Saintila et al., 2025) and management support, where inadequate managerial support may intensify burnout levels (Kovács et al., 2025). Several variables also reflect the complexity of academic roles, such as the diversity of teacher roles, which captures the wide range of responsibilities held by university educators in higher education (Kovács et al., 2025), as well as constructive deviance, referring to innovative behavior that sometimes emerges as a response to work pressure (Garg et al., 2022). The literature also identifies broader contextual factors, such as terrorism exposure, which may affect educators' mental health in specific regions (Saleem & Malik, 2023). Overall, these findings confirm that burnout among university educators is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of job demands, individual psychological conditions, social support, and the broader work and social environment.

Discussion

The discussion of burnout among university educators can be understood by examining the development of research trends, geographic context, theoretical approaches, research methods, journal publications, and the causal factors identified in the literature. The analysis of annual trends shows that research on burnout among university educators has increased significantly in recent years and has received substantial citation attention, with fluctuating growth beginning in 2020, which is widely associated with major changes in higher education systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies during this period highlight the increasing pressure of academic work, adaptation to digital learning, and the emergence of technostress resulting from the use of technology in educational processes. In terms of geographic distribution, most studies originate from China, reflecting the strong concern for educator well-being within a highly competitive and performance-oriented higher education system. Even so, studies from other countries also show that local contexts influence the emergence of burnout, for example through external factors such as exposure to security threats or changes in the work environment. From a theoretical perspective, most studies adopt the Job Demands–Resources Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory, which explain burnout as the result of an imbalance between job demands and the resources available to individuals. Methodologically, the literature is dominated by quantitative survey-based approaches, enabling researchers to systematically test inter-variable relationships and generate generalizable findings. Research has also been widely published in highly reputable journals such as *Frontiers in Psychology* and *Studies in Higher Education*, indicating the strong relevance of burnout within international academic discourse. Within this literature, burnout is frequently described through terms such as job burnout, stress, technostress, or emotional exhaustion, and is influenced by multiple factors, including job demands such as work overload, workload, and work–private life conflict; organizational factors such as inadequate

management support, workplace ostracism, and invasion of privacy; and psychological factors such as anxiety, career identity, and psychological needs including relatedness, existence, and growth. Other factors such as social support also emerge as protective variables that may reduce burnout levels. These findings indicate that burnout among university educators is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of job demands, individual psychological conditions, organizational support, and the broader social context. High academic workloads, the complexity of educators' roles, and pressure to adapt to digital technology emerge as key drivers of emotional exhaustion and work-related stress. At the same time, social support and management support are shown to function as important resources that help individuals cope with such pressures. Within the broader academic landscape, these findings reinforce the view that burnout is not merely an individual problem but also a reflection of organizational structures and increasingly competitive and digital higher education systems. Research on burnout therefore contributes not only to the theoretical understanding of educator well-being but also offers practical implications for developing higher education policies that better support work-life balance, mental health, and the sustainability of the academic profession.

4. Conclusion

This systematic literature review indicates that burnout among university educators is a multidimensional phenomenon that has gained increasing attention over the past decade, examined across various countries using diverse theoretical and methodological approaches, and influenced by interrelated factors. The findings show that burnout is shaped not only by individual factors but also by organizational conditions and broader work environments. A clear understanding of these determinants provides an essential foundation for developing more effective prevention and intervention strategies in higher education.

Implication

The theoretical implications of this study suggest that research on burnout among university educators is largely grounded in frameworks that emphasize the relationship between job demands and the availability of individual and organizational resources. The synthesis reinforces the importance of theoretical perspectives that conceptualize burnout as the result of an imbalance between work demands and available support. Practical implications highlight the need for higher education institutions to place greater emphasis on educator well-being. Clear identification of burnout determinants enables the design of more targeted and actionable interventions. Lack of such understanding often leads to abstract and less effective responses. Institutional safeguards therefore become essential, including psychological support systems, more balanced workload management, and work environments that promote educator well-being.

Recommendation

Several recommendations emerge from the findings of this study. Educators need to strengthen awareness of mental health and develop effective stress management strategies to cope with complex academic demands. Higher education institutions are encouraged to adopt more proactive policies in creating healthy work environments through realistic workload allocation, accessible psychological support services, and the reinforcement of supportive organizational cultures. Policymakers at a broader level need to establish frameworks that prioritize educator well-being as part of sustaining higher education quality. Such efforts may include regulations that support work-life balance, adequate resource allocation for institutions, and the strengthening of support systems for academic staff. Burnout among educators has cascading effects that ultimately influence the quality of education, which makes preventive action essential. Future research should adopt more diverse methodological approaches and contexts. Greater use of mixed methods and longitudinal designs would allow a deeper understanding of burnout dynamics over time. Expanding geographic coverage is also necessary to capture a more global perspective on higher education. Future studies may further explore emerging factors related to digital transformation and evolving academic work systems.

Limitation

Despite providing a comprehensive overview of burnout among university educators, this study has several limitations. The analysis attempts to connect the general concept of educator burnout with the specific context of higher education. The review is limited to publications indexed in a single database, Scopus, which may introduce selection bias. The scope of the study remains relatively broad in addressing burnout among university educators. Future research may develop more focused investigations, such as burnout in the context of educational digitalization, the role of academic organizational culture, or the impact of government policies on educators' working conditions and well-being.

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