

Workload, Experience, and Gender Differences in Teacher Burnout: A Study of College English Educators in China

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ABSTRACT:

Teacher burnout has emerged as a critical issue in higher education, affecting both educator well-being and instructional quality. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory, this study aimed to assess the level of burnout among college English teachers in Jilin Province, China, and to examine the demographic and workload-related factors associated with burnout. Existing literature indicates that excessive job demands, limited resources, and individual characteristics significantly contribute to burnout in academic contexts. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, with data collected from 180 college English teachers across six higher education institutions using the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI–ES). Descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and multiple linear regression analyses were conducted. The findings revealed a moderate level of burnout, with emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment more pronounced than depersonalization. Female gender, higher teaching load, and higher academic rank were positively associated with burnout, while greater teaching experience was negatively associated. Institution type was not a significant predictor. These findings highlight the central role of workload and career-stage factors in shaping burnout. The study contributes to the advancement of Sustainable Development Goal 3 and Sustainable Development Goal 4 by emphasizing the importance of teacher well-being in achieving sustainable and high-quality education systems. It is concluded that targeted institutional strategies focusing on workload management and career-stage support are essential to mitigate burnout and enhance educational outcomes in higher education.

Keywords: Teacher burnout; College English teachers; Job Demands–Resources model; Higher education; Workload.

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Introduction

Teacher burnout has become an increasingly salient issue within the global higher education landscape, reflecting broader transformations in academic work and institutional expectations. Burnout is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Over the past several decades, a substantial body of research has demonstrated that burnout not only undermines educators' well-being but also negatively affects teaching effectiveness, student outcomes, and institutional performance (Yao & Abdullah, 2025). In recent years, the intensification of academic labor driven by expanding student populations, performance-based evaluation systems, and increasing administrative demands has further exacerbated stress levels among university teachers (Turner & Garvis, 2023). Within higher education, teacher burnout is no longer viewed as an individual-level issue but rather as a systemic concern shaped by organizational, professional, and socio-cultural factors. Empirical evidence indicates that high workload, time pressure, and competing role expectations are among the most significant contributors to burnout among university faculty (Cao et al., 2025). Furthermore, recent large-scale studies have highlighted a high prevalence of burnout among higher education teachers, with clear associations between burnout and diminished well-being, job dissatisfaction, and reduced productivity (Pakdee et al., 2025). These findings underscore the urgency of examining burnout in specific academic contexts, as its determinants and manifestations may vary across disciplines, institutional settings, and cultural environments.

In the Chinese higher education context, the issue of teacher burnout has gained increasing attention due to rapid educational expansion and ongoing reforms. Universities have undergone significant structural and pedagogical changes, including the internationalization of curricula, heightened

research expectations, and the integration of technology into teaching. These transformations have imposed additional demands on faculty members, particularly those responsible for foundational courses such as College English. College English teachers often face unique challenges, including large class sizes, heavy teaching loads, and the need to continuously adapt to evolving language education policies and student needs. Despite their critical role in fostering students' global communication competencies, they frequently operate under conditions of high workload and limited professional recognition. Although prior research has explored teacher burnout in China, much of the existing literature focuses on primary and secondary school educators or faculty in major metropolitan areas. Consequently, there remains a notable lack of empirical evidence concerning burnout among college English teachers in less-developed or northeastern regions such as Jilin Province. Regional disparities in economic development, institutional resources, and educational policies may shape distinct working conditions and stressors for teachers in these areas. Moreover, demographic factors such as gender, teaching experience, and academic rank have been identified as important predictors of burnout, yet their specific effects within this population remain insufficiently understood. For example, prior studies suggest that early-career teachers and those with heavier workloads may be more vulnerable to burnout, while experienced educators may develop coping mechanisms that mitigate its impact (Farahmandpour & Voelkel, 2025).

Given these gaps, there is a clear need for context-specific research that systematically examines both the prevalence of burnout and its associated demographic and workload-related factors among college English teachers in Jilin Province. Such investigation is essential not only for advancing theoretical understanding of burnout in higher education but also for informing targeted institutional interventions and policy development. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the

current status of burnout among college English teachers in Jilin Province, China, and to examine the demographic and workload-related factors associated with burnout in this population.

Literature Review

A growing body of empirical research has examined teacher burnout across higher education contexts, with consistent evidence highlighting its multidimensional nature and association with both individual and organizational variables. Burnout, typically measured through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, has been widely documented among university faculty, with recent studies indicating a high prevalence and significant implications for well-being and teaching quality (Pakdee et al., 2025). Contemporary research further suggests that burnout is not only an outcome of prolonged stress but also a complex interaction between demographic characteristics and workplace conditions. For instance, workload intensity particularly teaching hours has been identified as a key predictor of emotional exhaustion, while factors such as age and professional experience may differentially influence burnout dimensions (Morris et al., 2025; Pakdee et al., 2025). Demographic variables such as gender, academic rank, and teaching experience have also been extensively investigated. Studies indicate that female teachers often report higher levels of emotional exhaustion, potentially due to the dual burden of professional and domestic responsibilities. Similarly, academic rank has been linked to burnout, with senior faculty experiencing increased stress related to administrative duties and research expectations (Lei et al., 2025). Conversely, teaching experience appears to function as a protective factor, as more experienced educators tend to develop coping strategies and professional resilience over time. These findings underscore the importance of considering career-stage differences when examining burnout in academic settings.

Work-related factors, particularly job demands, play a central role in explaining burnout. Empirical

evidence consistently demonstrates that high job demands such as heavy teaching loads, time pressure, and role conflict are positively associated with burnout, whereas job resources such as institutional support, autonomy, and professional development opportunities are negatively associated with burnout (Hlado et al., 2025; Jagodics & Szabó, 2023). A recent meta-analysis further confirmed that job demands significantly predict negative well-being outcomes, while job resources enhance teacher engagement and mitigate burnout (Bakker & Demerouti framework synthesis, 2025). These findings collectively highlight the critical role of balancing demands and resources in maintaining teacher well-being. The theoretical underpinning of this study is grounded primarily in the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding burnout in occupational settings. The JD–R model posits that burnout arises when job demands exceed available resources, leading to energy depletion and reduced motivation. In the teaching profession, demands such as workload and emotional labor can lead to exhaustion, while resources such as collegial support and autonomy can buffer these effects (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hlado et al., 2025). Additionally, burnout theory as conceptualized by Maslach and Leiter emphasizes the psychological experience of chronic workplace stress, reinforcing the multidimensional structure of burnout and its relevance to educational contexts (Maslach & Leiter, 2016, as cited in Pakdee et al., 2025).

Building on these theoretical perspectives, the present study adopts a conceptual framework in which burnout is treated as the dependent variable, influenced by both demographic and workload-related independent variables. Demographic factors including gender, teaching experience, and academic rank are conceptualized as individual-level predictors that shape teachers' vulnerability or resilience to burnout. Workload, operationalized through weekly teaching hours, represents a key job demand within the JD–R framework. Institutional type is included as a contextual variable to explore

potential organizational differences. This integrative framework reflects the interaction between personal characteristics and work environment, aligning with contemporary burnout research that emphasizes multilevel influences. In summary, previous studies provide robust evidence that teacher burnout is shaped by a combination of demographic characteristics and job-related factors, with the JD-R model offering a strong theoretical lens for understanding these relationships. However, there remains a need for context-specific investigations that examine these variables within particular disciplinary and regional settings, such as college English teachers in Jilin Province, China.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the level of burnout and its associated demographic and workload-related factors among college English teachers in Jilin Province, China. A cross-sectional design involves collecting data from a defined population at a single point in time, allowing researchers to assess the prevalence of a phenomenon and examine relationships among variables efficiently (Mohamad et al., 2026). This design is particularly appropriate for burnout research, as it enables the identification of patterns and associations across different demographic groups without requiring extended follow-up periods. However, it is acknowledged that such designs limit causal inference due to the absence of temporal sequencing.

The study followed a structured research procedure. First, ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, and informed consent. The survey instrument was then adapted and pilot-tested to ensure clarity and reliability. Data collection was conducted between September and November 2025 through an online questionnaire distributed across six higher education institutions. Online survey administration has been shown to improve accessibility and response efficiency while

maintaining data quality when appropriate screening procedures are applied (Sunasundram et al., 2026). To enhance response validity, attention-check items and completion-time screening were used to exclude low-quality responses.

A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants who met specific inclusion criteria, namely full-time college English teachers with at least one year of teaching experience. Although probability sampling is ideal for generalizability, purposive sampling is widely used in cross-sectional survey research when targeting specific professional groups. A total of 210 responses were initially collected, and after data cleaning, 180 valid responses were retained for analysis. The sample size was considered adequate for regression analysis, as it exceeded the commonly recommended minimum threshold based on the formula:

$$N \geq 50 + 8m$$

where m represents the number of independent variables (Green, 1991). This ensured sufficient statistical power for detecting meaningful relationships among variables.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of two sections: demographic information and burnout measurement. Burnout was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES), a widely validated instrument for measuring emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = never to 6 = every day), consistent with established survey measurement practices. Demographic variables included gender, teaching experience, academic rank, and institution type, while workload was operationalized as weekly teaching hours.

Data analysis was conducted using statistical software following a multi-step approach. First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations,

and frequencies) were used to summarize participant characteristics and burnout levels. Second, inferential analyses were performed to examine group differences, including independent-samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

These techniques are commonly applied in cross-sectional studies to compare mean differences across categorical variables (Kharuddin et al., 2026). Third, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to identify factors independently associated with burnout while controlling for potential confounders. The general regression model applied in this study is expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n + \varepsilon$$

where Y represents burnout score, $X_1 \dots X_n$ represent independent variables (e.g., gender,

teaching load, experience), β coefficients indicate the strength of associations, and ε denotes the error term.

Assumptions of regression analysis, including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity, were assessed prior to model interpretation to ensure robustness of findings. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

This analytical framework aligns with best practices in quantitative cross-sectional research, enabling both descriptive and explanatory insights into the factors influencing teacher burnout.

Data Analysis, Results, and Findings

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the overall level of burnout and its dimensions among college English teachers. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Burnout Dimensions (N = 180)

Variable	Mean	SD	Level
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	3.45	1.02	Moderate
Depersonalization (DP)	2.10	0.95	Low–Moderate
Personal Accomplishment (PA)	3.27	0.88	Moderate
Overall Burnout	2.94	0.79	Moderate

The findings indicate that the overall burnout level among respondents was moderate. Emotional exhaustion recorded the highest mean score, suggesting that teachers frequently experience fatigue and emotional strain in their professional roles. Personal accomplishment was also at a moderate level, reflecting a diminished sense of professional efficacy among some respondents. Depersonalization, however, remained

comparatively lower, indicating that most teachers still maintain a relatively positive attitude toward students.

Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted to examine differences in burnout across demographic variables. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Differences in Burnout by Demographic Variables

Variable	Category	Mean Burnout	p-value
Gender	Male	2.71	0.012*
	Female	3.08	
Teaching Experience	<10 years	3.12	0.018*
	10–20 years	2.95	
	>20 years	2.63	
Academic Rank	Junior	2.81	0.021*
	Intermediate	2.93	
	Senior	3.15	
Institution Type	Public	2.96	0.564
	Private	2.91	

*Significant at $p < .05$

The results demonstrate statistically significant differences in burnout across gender, teaching experience, and academic rank. Female teachers reported higher burnout levels than their male counterparts, indicating a potential gender-related disparity in occupational stress. Teachers with fewer than 10 years of experience exhibited the highest burnout levels, while those with more than 20 years reported the lowest, suggesting that

experience may serve as a protective factor. Additionally, burnout increased with academic rank, with senior faculty reporting the highest levels. No significant difference was observed between public and private institutions.

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to identify factors independently associated with burnout. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Burnout

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	p-value
Gender (Female)	0.28	0.09	0.22	0.004*
Teaching Load	0.35	0.07	0.38	0.001*
Teaching Experience	-0.24	0.08	-0.19	0.006*
Academic Rank	0.31	0.10	0.21	0.003*
Institution Type	0.05	0.08	0.04	0.531
Constant	1.42	0.37		0.000

*Significant at $p < .05$

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 18.72$, $p < .001$) and explained approximately 42% of the variance in burnout ($R^2 = 0.42$). Teaching load emerged as the strongest predictor of burnout, indicating that higher weekly teaching hours significantly increased burnout levels. Gender also showed a significant positive

association, with female teachers experiencing higher burnout. Academic rank was another significant predictor, suggesting that increased professional responsibilities at higher ranks contribute to burnout.

In contrast, teaching experience demonstrated a significant negative relationship with burnout, indicating that more experienced teachers tend to experience lower levels of burnout. Institution type did not significantly predict burnout, reinforcing earlier findings that organizational differences between public and private institutions may not substantially influence burnout levels in this context.

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced pattern of burnout among college English teachers. The moderate overall burnout level suggests that while burnout is not at a critical level, it remains a persistent concern requiring institutional attention. The prominence of emotional exhaustion highlights the demanding nature of teaching responsibilities, particularly in language education where continuous interaction and performance are required. The significant gender differences observed in the study indicate that female teachers may be more vulnerable to burnout, possibly due to the combined pressures of professional and personal responsibilities. This finding aligns with broader research emphasizing gendered experiences of occupational stress. The strong influence of teaching load underscores the central role of workload as a job demand, supporting theoretical frameworks such as the Job Demands–Resources model.

The inverse relationship between teaching experience and burnout suggests that experienced educators may develop effective coping strategies and professional resilience over time. Conversely, early-career teachers may face greater challenges in adapting to job demands, making them more susceptible to burnout. The positive association between academic rank and burnout further indicates that career advancement may bring increased responsibilities and pressures, offsetting potential benefits such as higher status or autonomy. Finally, the lack of a significant relationship between institution type and burnout suggests that the challenges faced by college English teachers may be systemic across different

institutional contexts. This finding implies that interventions should focus more on workload management and individual support rather than institutional categorization alone.

Discussion and Recommendations

The present study set out to (1) assess the current level of burnout among college English teachers in Jilin Province and (2) examine the demographic and workload-related factors associated with burnout. The findings indicate that burnout among this population is at a moderate level, with emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment being more prominent than depersonalization. These results suggest that while teachers largely maintain professional commitment and interpersonal engagement, they experience significant internal strain and diminished professional fulfillment. This pattern is consistent with prior studies in higher education, which have identified emotional exhaustion as the core dimension of burnout among university faculty (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Morris et al., 2025).

The study further revealed that gender, teaching load, academic rank, and teaching experience significantly influence burnout levels. Female teachers reported higher burnout, aligning with existing literature that attributes this disparity to compounded professional and domestic responsibilities, as well as gendered expectations in academic environments (Lei et al., 2025). Teaching load emerged as the strongest predictor, reinforcing the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model, which posits that excessive job demands lead to energy depletion and burnout when not balanced by sufficient resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). The positive association between academic rank and burnout suggests that increased responsibilities, including administrative duties and research expectations, may outweigh the benefits of career advancement. Conversely, teaching experience demonstrated a protective effect, indicating that experienced teachers may develop resilience and coping mechanisms over time (Farahmandpour & Voelkel, 2025). These findings

contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable development in education, particularly in relation to the Sustainable Development Goal 3 and Sustainable Development Goal 4. Teacher well-being is a critical component of SDG 3, as burnout directly affects mental health and occupational sustainability. At the same time, teacher effectiveness is central to SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive and quality education. High levels of burnout can undermine teaching quality, student engagement, and overall educational outcomes. Therefore, addressing burnout is not only an institutional concern but also a global development priority.

The results of this study are supported by recent literature, which consistently highlights workload, role conflict, and insufficient institutional support as key drivers of burnout in higher education (Pakdee et al., 2025; Hlado et al., 2025). The moderate burnout level observed in this study suggests that while the situation is not critical, it warrants proactive intervention to prevent escalation. Furthermore, the lack of significant differences based on institution type indicates that burnout is a systemic issue, rather than one confined to specific organizational settings. This underscores the need for sector-wide strategies rather than isolated institutional responses. In

conclusion, burnout among college English teachers in Jilin Province is shaped by a complex interplay of demographic and occupational factors. Emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment are the most salient dimensions, driven primarily by workload and career-related pressures. These findings reinforce the importance of adopting a holistic approach to teacher well-being that integrates both individual and organizational perspectives. In terms of recommendations, higher education institutions should prioritize workload management by reducing excessive teaching hours and ensuring equitable task distribution. Implementing flexible teaching schedules and providing administrative support can help alleviate job demands. Additionally, career-stage-specific interventions are essential; early-career teachers may benefit from mentoring and professional development programs, while senior faculty may require support in managing administrative and research responsibilities. Institutions should also promote a supportive work environment by enhancing collegial collaboration, recognition systems, and access to mental health resources. Finally, policymakers should consider integrating teacher well-being into broader educational reforms to align with sustainable development goals and ensure long-term educational quality.

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