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Examining Burnout Using the MBI-ES and Its Contributing Factors Among Academic Staff in Saudi Universities During the Educational Reform Period

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Abstract:
Purpose: This study is aimed to investigate the prevalence of burnout among academic staff in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia and exploring its influencing factors.

Methods: A cross-sectional correlational study was performed involving 208 faculty members from several governmental universities around Saudi Arabia. Data were gathered by a self-administered questionnaire that included demographic variables and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, independent t-tests, ANOVA tests, and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Results: Overall, 59.7% of participants reported low burnout levels, 29.4% moderate burnout, and 10.7% high burnout. Emotional exhaustion was positively correlated with depersonalization and negatively correlated with personal accomplishment. Significant associations were found between burnout dimensions and workload, job satisfaction, perceived threats, managerial relationships, income, and intention to leave employment.

Conclusion: Although 59.7% of participants reported low burnout levels, 40.1% experienced moderate-to-high burnout, indicating that a substantial proportion of academic staff remain at risk. Institutional strategies targeting workload management, organizational support, and fair compensation are essential to enhance faculty well-being and sustain academic productivity.

Keywords: Keywords: burnout; academic staff; Saudi Arabia; higher education.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, universities have experienced substantial transformations influenced by technical progress, market growth, and globalization (McCaffery, 2024). These changes have significantly influenced the academic workplace, augmenting and expanding the responsibilities of academic personnel. The demands encompass on-campus and online instructions, student performance assessments, mentoring, academic advising, administrative responsibilities, professional development, publication pressure, institutional accreditation tasks, and adaptation to organizational changes (Salvagioni et al., 2017; Kinman & Wray, 2018). This extensive range of tasks leads to professional burnout among academic personnel.

Burnout prevalence in different professions varies between 5% and 45%, contingent upon the specific field (Li, Li, & Castaño, 2019). Higher education institutions experience significantly elevated burnout rates, with estimates exceeding 40% (Stelmokienė, Genevičiūtė-Janonė, & Gustainienė, 2019). Consequently, universities bear a significant obligation to enhance their workforce's capacity to manage burnout and meet institutional demands (Cadena-Povea et al., 2025). The cumulative performance pressure on academic staff can significantly impact their quality of life and the overall quality of education (Kinman & Wray, 2018; Watts & Robertson, 2011), leading to increased burnout rates and a decline in student outcomes. Long-term exposure to a stressful environment can lead to burnout (Kurczoba et al., 2025).

Burnout is a multifaceted condition defined by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal achievement (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). It presents itself as emotional fatigue, resulting from persistent excessive work demands, a tendency to distance oneself from others as a coping mechanism (depersonalization), and an awareness of the disparity between their initial optimistic outlook and their current perspective, leading to feelings of inadequacy in social interactions and job performance (diminished personal accomplishment).

Research has classified the origins of burnout into environmental and individual components. Environmental factors encompass elevated teaching responsibilities, substantial research obligations, administrative tasks, insufficient administrative support, job security concerns, a detrimental work atmosphere, restricted access to training and development opportunities, and inflexible schedules and expectations that promote prolonged working hours, all of which hinder staff from achieving a healthy work-life balance (Salami, 2011). Individual sources contributing to burnout include leadership challenges, insufficient trust and collaboration within the team, an inability to pursue professional development, and a deficiency in recognition and rewards (Akram et al., 2022). Additionally, individual sources of burnout encompass social factors, including lifestyle choices, social isolation, and insufficient interpersonal trust (Protasenko, 2025; Hunderfund et al., 2022), alongside work-related factors such as perceptions of supervision and attitudes towards work and workload (Teven, 2007; Olivos-Jara et al., 2014).

Burnout has significant consequences for both individuals and institutions. At the individual level, it is associated with psychological issues such as exhaustion, reduced professional efficacy, cynicism, and mental health problems (Putri & Dudija, 2024), as well as physical health risks, including insomnia affecting approximately 25% of nurses, which is linked to sleep apnea, cancer, hypertension, chronic pain, gastrointestinal, autoimmune, and endocrine disorders (Nagy et al., 2021). At the organizational level, burnout negatively influences turnover intentions, commitment, work engagement, job satisfaction, and work quality (Pranata et al., 2025; Malik, 2025) and may also impact students' development (Pu et al., 2016). Collectively, these effects compromise both individual well-being and the quality of education and research productivity (Deep et al., 2025).

While burnout in primary and secondary education has been thoroughly examined, the COVID-19 pandemic has led researchers to concentrate more on burnout syndrome within higher education institutions (Jihan Turkistani et al., 2022; Marinoni, Van't Land, & Jensen, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2024). Despite the increasing interest in this field, limited research has examined the frequency of burnout syndrome among academic personnel (Naidoo-Chetty & Plessis, 2021). The higher education system in Saudi Arabia has experienced substantial adjustments recently, propelled by the nation's ambitious Vision 2030 initiative (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2020). The reforms intend to modernize the education sector, improve learning results, and augment the worldwide competitiveness of Saudi universities (OECD, 2020). Nonetheless, the execution of these reforms has encountered its own difficulties. A primary issue is the welfare and job satisfaction of university personnel. Moreover, the expectations imposed on university personnel in Saudi Arabia, including heightened workloads, administrative duties, and pressure to achieve performance benchmarks, may lead to increased stress and burnout.

Burnout syndrome is an increasing issue among healthcare professionals in Saudi Arabia, particularly nurses (Alenezi et al., 2022). Healthcare and social professionals in the country have documented a significant incidence of adverse work-related responses (Jaber et al., 2025). The literature has predominantly concentrated on

healthcare workers; nonetheless, it is essential to examine the prevalence and contributing factors of burnout among university faculty in Saudi Arabia, especially in light of current educational changes. Furthermore, the cultural and social context in Saudi Arabia, where peer influence and social pressures play a significant role in shaping individuals' well-being (Alshehri, 2021), may exacerbate the risk of burnout among university staff, particularly as these factors can lead to increased stress and decreased job satisfaction in an already challenging educational environment.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, which emphasizes the promotion of mental health, and SDG 4: Quality Education, which focuses on empowering educators to deliver inclusive and equitable education, are relevant to the Saudi Arabian context. Addressing burnout among academic staff aligns with Saudi Vision 2030, which emphasizes building a globally competitive education system and prioritizing the well-being of educators as a foundation for national growth and innovation. By effectively managing burnout, Saudi universities can strengthen the resilience of their educational institutions, create a supportive and productive academic environment, and ensure that faculty members are well-equipped—both mentally and physically-to deliver high-quality education to support the Kingdom's long-term sustainable development goals.

The proposed research study aims to measure the prevalence of burnout and analyze the contributing factors among university staff in Saudi Arabia. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges that faculty members face and provides a foundation for developing evidence-based strategies to promote their well-being and maintain high educational standards. This study is aimed to examine the prevalence of burnout and its contributing factors among the faculty in government universities in Saudi Arabia during the current period of educational reforms. The objectives of the study were:

1. To identify sociodemographic factors associated with burnout among academic staff.
2. To determine the correlations among emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization.

2. Methodology

This research utilized a cross-sectional correlational design to examine the prevalence and factors contributing to burnout syndrome among teaching members at Saudi universities. A convenience sample of two hundred eight (N = 208) faculty members from several governmental colleges in Saudi Arabia, including Jazan University, Taibah University, Umm Al-Qura University, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Taif University, Islamic University of Madinah, and King Saud University. The sample size was calculated using the formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times SD^2}{e^2}$$

Where Z = 1.96 (95% confidence Interval). SD = Standard Deviation (approximate value), based on the Range of Emotional Exhaustion = (54/4) =13.5, e = Margin of Error (selected as 2 for larger sample size and higher precision). The sample size calculated was 175. Total of 208 samples were included to ensure adequateness and sufficiency. Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27. Descriptive statistics, such as means, medians, modes, and percentages, were computed to summarize the sample characteristics and the incidence of burnout syndrome. Correlation and Spearman rank correlation studies were used to investigate the associations between burnout and other demographic and occupational variables. Independent t-tests were employed to compare burnout level domains with the overall burnout score. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to evaluate the normality of the data distribution.

2.1 Operational Definition

2.1.1 Educational Reform:

Educational reform is operationally defined as the ongoing structural and organizational changes in Saudi higher education aligned with Saudi Vision 2030, including increased performance expectations, accreditation requirements, digital transformation, and expanded academic roles. In this study, it is operationalized as the current work environment experienced by academic staff during the period 2020–2025.

2.2 Measures

This study employed an online self-administered questionnaire divided into two sections. The initial segment gathered sociodemographic, personal, and professional information. The personal data encompassed age, gender, marital status, number of children, monthly income, and nationality. The professional data encompassed years of experience, contentment with schedules and workloads, and relationships with management. Workload was assessed using a self-reported item measuring average weekly working hours, categorized as less than 35 hours, 35–40 hours, and more than 40 hours per week, in addition to items evaluating satisfaction with workload and working conditions.

The second section of the questionnaire employed the validated Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES; Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 2017), delivered in both English and Arabic languages. The MBI-ES assesses burnout in three areas: emotional

exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion, evaluated using nine items, measures feelings of depletion resulting from work obligations. Depersonalization, assessed by five measures, examines negative and cynical attitudes towards service recipients. The personal accomplishment scale, consisting of eight items, assesses sentiments of competence and achievement in the workplace. The MBI-ES utilizes a 7-point Likert scale from 0 (never) to 6 (every day) to evaluate the frequency of the feeling 'lack of satisfaction and unproductiveness', through its 22 components. Elevated scores on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization subscales are associated with an increased level of burnout. Conversely, diminished scores on the personal accomplishment subscale, signify elevated degrees of burnout. Burnout, in this sense, is defined as a continuous variable ranging from low to high levels of the feeling of being ineffective or unproductive.

2.3 Ethical Approval

Before initiation, ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Deanship of Graduate Studies and Scientific research, Jazan University, Saudi Arabia (reference no. REC-43/08/172). An informed consent form asking participants to volunteer to be human research participants was obtained. The identities of the participants were not disclosed for privacy, and confidentiality was strictly maintained on all the collected questionnaires.

3. Results

3.1 Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Faculty Members

For this research, a total of 208 faculty members from various Saudi universities were recruited. The findings revealed that the median age of the people who participated in the study was forty years old or older. In terms of gender and marital status, the majority of the faculty members were married and female (81.3% and 80%, respectively). This was the case according to the data collected. Sixty-seven percent of the faculty members had between one and three children, and 57.2% of the participants claimed that their monthly wages were greater than thirty thousand Saudi Riyals (SRs), as shown in Table 1. The high number of contributions in answering the questionnaire was shared by non-Saudi faculty members, with a total of 61% of participants, in contrast to the 39% of participants who were Saudi.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the study subjects

Characteristics	No	%
Age		
< 25	4	1.9
25 – 29	64	30.8
30-39	12	5.8
≥ 40	128	61.5
Mean ± SD	3.52±0.7	
Gender		
Male	42	20
Female	166	80
Number of children		
No children	43	20.7
1-3 children	118	56.7
More than 3 children	47	22.6
Mean ± SD	1± 0.7	
Monthly income		
Less than 10000 SR	8	3.8
10000-19000 SR	41	19.7
20000-30000 SR	40	19.2
More than 30000 SR	119	57.2

In terms of the participants' occupations, the largest percentage of those who took part in the research were professors (46.6%). The percentage of lecturers who were represented was the lowest, at 0.4 percent. Considering the classification of job titles according to nationality, the largest percentages of non-Saudi and Saudi individuals were found to be professors (29.9% and 16.8%, respectively). The lectures, on the other hand, had the lowest percentages of both non-Saudi and Saudi speakers, with less than 2.8 percent in each group. (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of study subjects according to job title and nationality

Job title	Nationality				Total	
	Non-Saudi		Saudi			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Demonstrator	46	22.1	9	4.3	55	26.44
Lecturer	4	1.9	2	0.8	6	2.88
Assistant professor	5	2.4	26	12.5	31	14.90
Associate professor	10	4.8	9	4.3	19	9.13
Professor	62	29.9	35	16.8	97	46.63
Total	127	61.1	81	38.9	208	100

3.2 Burnout Level Among Faculty Members

A percentage distribution of the study participants is presented in Table 3, which is organized according to the levels of burnout domains. An examination of the table revealed statistically significant differences between the participants in the study in terms of the mean scores of the three different domains of burnout ($p<0.001$). Furthermore, the greatest percentage of faculty members exhibited low levels of emotional exhaustion, a lack of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (38.4%, 62.0%, and 78.8%, respectively), during the course of their careers. In terms of the mean total burnout score, there was no statistically significant difference between the participants in terms of the mean burnout score ($p = 0.813$). A total of 59.7% of the people who participated in the survey reported a low level of burnout, which was the highest number reported. On the other hand, 29.4% of the participants reported moderate burnout, whereas 10.7% of the individuals reported significant emotional exhaustion.

Table 3. Distribution of the percentages of study participants according to the levels of burnout

Burnout domains	No.	%	t- test	p - value
Emotional exhaustion High Moderate Low	 51 77 80	 24% 37.0% 38.4%		
Mean ± SD	24.41± 14.42		24.4**	<0.001
Personal accomplishment High Moderate Low	 8 71 129	 3.8% 34.1% 62.0%		
Mean ± SD	34.73 ±9.26		54.04**	<0.001
Depersonalization High Moderate Low	 8 36 164	 3.8% 17.3% 78.8%		
Mean ± SD	5.4 ±6		5.97**	<0.001
Total burnout score High Moderate Low	 67 184 373	 10.7% 29.4% 59.7%		

Higher levels of emotional exhaustion (45%) and depersonalization (21%) were observed among participants aged <25 years. In contrast, lower levels of personal accomplishment were more prevalent among participants aged 30–39 years and ≥40 years (43.17% and 43.48%, respectively). Emotional exhaustion (38.7%) and depersonalization (12.2%) were more prevalent among Saudi staff, whereas reduced personal accomplishment was more common among non-Saudi staff (43.63%). The mean of each domain was compared with that of the overall burnout mean. Therefore, we used t-test to compare, to gain insights, if the means were statistically significantly different. Repeated ANOVA analysis is conducted and shown in Table 7.

Table 4. Correlations between selected sociodemographic characteristics and burnout domains

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Emotional exhaustion		Personal accomplishment		Depersonalization	
	ρ	p-value	ρ	p-value	ρ	p-value
Age	-0.109	0.05	0.115	0.040	-0.098	0.089
Nationality	0.230**	0.00	-0.138*	0.017	0.222**	0.000
Marital status	-0.033	0.60	-0.071	0.200	0.004	0.900
Number of children	-0.082	0.13	-0.024	0.700	-0.129*	0.024
Do you have domestic support at home?	-0.005	0.927	-0.095	0.099	0.057	0.339
Is your spouse currently employed?	-0.117*	0.034	0.0220	0.685	-0.122*	0.032
Level of education	0.003	0.961	0.0860	0.127	-0.039	0.503
Job title	-0.021	0.698	0.0090	0.872	-.039	0.484

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Emotional exhaustion		Personal accomplishment		Depersonalization	
	ρ	p-value	ρ	p-value	ρ	p-value
Monthly income	0.131*	0.016	-0.027	0.600	0.124*	0.028
Years of experience in current university	-0.017	0.75	0.0550	0.307	0.099	.0750
Position	0.062	0.274	-0.030	0.598	0.166**	.0040
Work hours per week	0.189**	0.000	0.0790	0.078	0.129*	0.022

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**
*** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

Table 4 shows the correlations between selected sociodemographic characteristics and the burnout domains (emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment and depersonalization). The correlations between age and the selected domains are weak positive for PA and weak negative for EE and DP. Similarly, a statistically significant negative correlation was found between nationality and personal accomplishment. Furthermore, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between the number of children and depersonalization (faculty members with more than 3 children experienced lower depersonalization levels than faculty members with 1 to 2 children and who had no children). The work of the husband or wife has a statistically significant negative correlation with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Monthly income shows slightly greater correlations than the other sociodemographic do. As the level of education increases, income increases; hence, the workload increases. Therefore, we observe a significant but weak positive correlation between monthly income and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Although the work per hour gives the participants a sense of personal accomplishment, it increases the EE and DP.

Table 5 displays the relationships among specific components of burnout, including emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization. Statistically significant positive associations were found between the emotional exhaustion domain, perceived threat, administrative work, and the intention to leave employment. Nevertheless, it has a statistically significant inverse link with work satisfaction, relationships with management, perceptions of health status, satisfaction with schedules, satisfaction with workload, and remuneration. In the realm of personal accomplishment, there are statistically significant positive relationships with work satisfaction, the relationship with one's manager, satisfaction with one's schedule, and satisfaction with one's workload. In the realm of depersonalization, statistically significant positive relationships were observed between depersonalization, feelings of threat, and the intention to leave one's job. Nevertheless, it has a statistically significant inverse link with work satisfaction, relationships with management, perceptions of health conditions, satisfaction with work schedules, and work.

Table 5. Correlations between selected items related to burnout domains

Items related to burnout	Emotional exhaustion		Personal accomplishment		Depersonalization	
	ρ	p-value	ρ	p-value	ρ	p-value
Have been exploited or perceived threat inside the academia	.360**	.000	-0.055	.338	.177**	.003
Administrative work is one of my responsibilities	.184**	.001	.022	.700	.088	.139
Satisfaction with work	-.445**	0.000	.164**	0.002	-.348**	0.000
Relationship with manager	-.279**	0.000	.132*	.019	-.226**	0.000
Perception of health status	-.339**	0.000	.171**	.002	-.77**	0.000
Intention to leave job	.465**	0.000	-0.064	.246	.310**	0.000
Satisfaction with current schedule	-.430**	0.000	.109*	.050	-.285**	0.000
Satisfaction with workload	-.483**	.000	.112*	.041	-.338**	.000
Is salary commensurate with effort?	-.299**	0.000	-.027	.619	-.198**	0.000

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**
*** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

Table 6 shows the correlations between emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization. According to the table, there were statistically significant positive correlations between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (r = .595, p = 0.000). However, statistically significant negative correlations were found between emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment (r = -0.162, p = 0.019). Moreover, statistically significant negative correlations were found between personal accomplishment and depersonalization (r = -.391, p = 0.000).

Table 6. Correlations between emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment and depersonalization

Domains	Personal exhaustion		Personal accomplishment		Depersonalization	
	ρ	p-value	ρ	p-value	ρ	p-value
Emotional exhaustion	1	<0.001	-.162*	0.019	.595**	<0.001
Personal accomplishment	-.162*	0.019	1	0.000	-.391**	<0.001
Depersonalization	.595**	<0.001	-.391**	0.000	1	<0.001

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level**
*** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level**

Table 7. Repeated ANOVA comparing the domains emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-Value	p-value	Effect size
Burnout	92066.39	2	46033.19	438.81	<0.001	0.679

The repeated ANOVA indicates that there is statistically significant difference between the burnout domains. The effect size is large (0.679) emphasizing the statistical significance. The p-value of linear trend and quadratic trend were <0.001, indicated that both the linear and quadratic patterns are significant. Therefore, we can conclude that the burnout dimensions do not uniformly change, rather their variation is non-linear.

4. Discussion

4.1 Overall burnout levels

This study investigated the prevalence of burnout among faculty members and explored its relationship with various sociodemographic and professional factors. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of workplace well-being in academic settings and offer insights for potential interventions. The study revealed that a majority of participants (59.2%) exhibited a low level of burnout, suggesting a generally positive view of their overall well-being. These results are consistent with those of previous studies conducted in different countries showing that many faculty members can maintain a healthy level of emotional and professional engagement through supportive job resources and individualized approaches (Duke et al., 2019; Mudrak et al., 2017).

However, the study also revealed that a significant portion of the faculty (29.4%) experienced a moderate level of burnout, and an additional 10.7% reported a high level of burnout. This suggests that a number of faculty members are at risk of experiencing the detrimental effects of burnout, which can include decreased job satisfaction, poor mental and physical health, and reduced productivity (Asfahani, 2023). In the broader MENAT region, Alhassan et al. (2025) reported high emotional exhaustion among 40% of healthcare and educational workers, depersonalization among 31%, and reduced personal accomplishment among 38%. These regional findings suggest that although low burnout was most common in the present study, the proportion of faculty reporting moderate-to-high burnout remains important and should not be overlooked.

4.2 Associations between faculty demographic and professional characteristics and their level of burnout

As with the second aim of this study, the findings shed light on the complex interplay of various factors that contribute to the burnout experienced by faculty members at participating Saudi governmental universities. The study revealed a weak correlation between the age of faculty members and the emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment subscales. This finding is consistent with Zabrodska and others (2018), who reported that there is a small negative correlation between worker age and emotional exhaustion. However, these findings contrast with the findings of other studies, which revealed that younger faculty members were more susceptible to high levels of emotional exhaustion due to factors such as limited coping mechanisms, work–life balance challenges, and pressure to establish themselves in their careers (Rožman, Grinkevich & Tominc, 2019; Sestili et al., 2018; Watts & Robertson, 2011), whereas their older counterparts reported higher levels of lack of personal accomplishment, as individuals approach retirement, their time horizon for achieving long-term work goals naturally shrinks (Obliopas et al., 2019; Watts & Robertson, 2011).

Older faculty members often experience less emotional exhaustion and depersonalization while reporting higher levels of personal satisfaction. This pattern likely reflects a set of interconnected influences, including accumulated professional experience, the gradual development of adaptive coping strategies, whereby individuals unable to cope effectively may have already withdrawn from the profession (Giuseppe et al., 2021). Even if there is a weak correlation, it does not mean that age directly affects these outcomes.

The study results also revealed that working spouses were negatively related to the level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Similarly, the results of a study carried out by Yang and others (2023) indicated that primary health workers who have work-family support can protect against burnout syndrome. Partners can provide emotional support, practical assistance, and a shared understanding of work-related challenges, which can prevent burnout (Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2005; Claponea, & Iorga, 2023). The impact of a working spouse likely depends on individual coping mechanisms, relationship quality, and the specific nature of both partners' work (Krannitz, Grandey, Liu, S., & Almeida, 2015). Supportive relationships with healthy communication and shared responsibilities might protect against emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

The present results highlight that perceived threats and the intention to leave the job can contribute to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The perceived threats by faculty members could include job insecurity, a lack of resources, unfair treatment, or being the victim of work incivility (Cadena-Povea et al., 2025; Erdemir, 2023). Threats to one's job or career can disrupt feelings of control and predictability, leading to increased anxiety and a diminished sense of personal agency and control. Depersonalization might manifest as a way to cope with this loss of control by emotionally distancing oneself from the situation or work (Edú-Valsania, Laguía & Moriano, 2022). Previous research has indicated that feelings of depersonalization, rather than emotional exhaustion, are a direct factor in decisions to leave a job (Maniscalco, Enea, de Vries et al., 2024).

On the one hand, a lack of satisfaction with work, schedules, and workloads; poor relationships with managers; and poor health contribute to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment among faculty members. Heavy workloads, conflicting demands, and poor workplace relationships can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed, depleted, and disconnected from one's work and colleagues (Sabagh et al., 2018). This interpretation is further supported by Gulf-based literature indicating that burnout among academic staff is shaped by institutional and occupational demands. In Saudi and Gulf universities, rapid higher education expansion, role conflict, workload, research productivity expectations, administrative duties, and limited institutional support have been identified as important contributors to faculty burnout (Asfahani, 2023; Polo & Abid, 2025). This can negatively impact faculty members' well-being, job satisfaction, and ability to effectively fulfil their teaching, research, and service responsibilities. Additionally, many faculty members can cope with these challenges successfully (Sabagh et al., 2018). Through effective time management and access to wellness resources, they may be able to navigate the demands of their roles without experiencing burnout (Salimzadeh et al., 2021). Moreover, factors such as intrinsic motivation, a sense of purpose, and strong collegial relationships can serve as protective factors against burnout, allowing faculty to thrive even in the face of significant workloads and stressors (Sabagh et al., 2018). In contrast, the study by Quesada-Puga et al. (2024) suggested that a sense of overall satisfaction is beneficial; this alone may not be sufficient to prevent emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

The study findings revealed that inadequate remuneration (in this study, only direct financial compensation, which is in the form of salaries), can contribute to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among faculty members. When pay and benefits are perceived as insufficient or unfair, they can lead to feelings of being undervalued and undercompensated for the significant workloads and emotional labor required in their roles (Essien et al., 2025). This can exacerbate feelings of burnout and detachment. A study of pharmacists who experienced long-term job stress indicated that remuneration was an important factor that affects burnout, which ultimately affects turnover intention (Matloob, Bhatti, Halim & Sikander, 2018). Furthermore, transparent and merit-based pay structures can foster perceptions of organizational justice, which may reduce feelings of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Claponea & Iorga, 2023).

Finally, this study revealed that emotional exhaustion among faculty members is positively correlated with depersonalization and negatively correlated with personal accomplishment. This finding is consistent with the literature, as high levels of emotional exhaustion can potentially lead to a lack of energy to focus on relationships, which further contributes to emotionally drained individuals being less likely to focus on their job, resulting in a subsequent lack of personal accomplishment (Anastasiou & Belios, 2020; Parayitam et al., 2021).

4.3 Strengths and limitations

4.3.1 Strengths

This study has made a number of key contributions to the understanding of burnout among university academic personnel in Saudi Arabia. First, it uses a strong cross-

sectional correlational design with a sample of 208 faculty members from several governmental universities in Saudi Arabia, thus giving the findings more breadth than single-institution studies. Burnout is measured with conceptual fidelity and cultural sensitivity by using a validated and internationally recognized instrument, the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES), administered in both English and Arabic, to minimize the risk of language-related measurement error in a bilingual academic workforce.

Secondly and more importantly, our work fills a real and well documented vacuum in the area literature. A review of the primary academic literature discovered only two studies that addressed burnout among university professors in Saudi Arabia (Alhassan, 2023; Alhassan, 2025). Research on burnout in Saudi Arabia and the wider Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region has focused largely on healthcare personnel, especially nurses and doctors, with very little attention paid to the academic workforce. The virtual absence of research on faculty burnout in this location is not a limitation of the present study but instead represents a gap that the study is designed to address. Thus, this study is one of the few empirical studies on teacher burnout in Saudi higher education and the first, to our knowledge, to explore it in the context of the educational reform phase of Vision 2030.

Third, the study explored a wide range of predictors such as sociodemographic variables, professional qualities, organizational factors, and individual views, allowing for a complex analysis of the burnout landscape among Saudi academic professionals. The substantial connections between aspects of burnout and satisfaction with workload, relationships with management, perceived threats, appropriateness of compensation and intention to leave employment give an empirically supported basis for institutional intervention. These findings are particularly important considering Saudi Arabia's continued investment in higher education transformation under Vision 2030, making faculty well-being both a strategic and a human resource concern.

Finally, this study is consistent with and directly contributes to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly, SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education), by providing evidence that can help inform the protection of educator well-being as a basis for inclusive, equitable, and quality education provision in the Kingdom.

4.4 Limitations

Despite these contributions, some limitations should be acknowledged while interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design of the present study does not allow to establish causal links between the sociodemographic and professional variables analyzed and the burnout aspects. Thus, the interactions described should be considered as associations rather than causal effects and longitudinal studies will be needed to explore the direction and stability of these relationships over time. Second, the study adopted a convenience sample technique that limits generalizability of the findings to the wider population of Saudi university teachers. Participants were selected from several governmental universities in Saudi Arabia. However, the sampling method does not allow us to claim that the sample is fully representative of the country.

Third, the sample was weighted towards female participants (80%) and non-Saudi faculty members (61%). These distributions may partly reflect the demographic composition of the universities surveyed, particularly when recruiting from female dominated academic schools, but they restrict the extent to which findings may be generalised to male faculty and to Saudi national academic staff. Saudi and expatriate academics may have different burnout profiles due to different employment security, contract kinds, cultural expectations, and institutional positions. Future research should fill this gap, with emphasis on gender-balanced and nationality-stratified sampling. Finally, we did not measure individual-level coping methods and institutional support systems, both known moderators of burnout, and these may have influenced the observed relationships. Future studies combining these variables will offer a more holistic view of factors protecting professors from or making them more vulnerable to burnout in the Saudi higher education setting.

4.5 Research, Practical and Policy Implications

4.5.1 Future Research Recommendations

This work presents a number of fruitful options for further research. These findings should be taken with the noted lack of research on professor burnout in the Saudi and larger Gulf region. The literature search revealed only two studies investigating burnout among university academic personnel in Saudi Arabia (Alhassan, 2023; Alhassan, 2025), while the rest of the burnout literature in the region has been conducted on healthcare workers. The very lack of evidence provides a powerful incentive to additional research. The present study can be seen as a first contribution to an area yet severely underexplored. Future research should address the methodological constraints of this research by using longitudinal designs that allow for the tracking of burnout trajectories over time, especially throughout different periods of the Vision 2030 reform cycle. Longitudinal data would allow causal conclusions that cannot be drawn from cross-sectional designs and would allow researchers to determine if organizational changes associated with reform increase or decrease risk of burnout over time. Future study

should also focus on gender-balanced sample and include stratified analyses by nationality (Saudi vs. expatriate) and by academic level. The strong connections between nationality and burnout dimensions found in the present study with Saudi faculty expressing higher emotional tiredness and depersonalization, and non-Saudi faculty reporting lesser personal accomplishment need focused investigation. Such patterns are likely due to different structural pressures and job characteristics that should be analyzed in disaggregated fashion rather than estimated in pooled fashion. Qualitative and mixed methods techniques would also contribute greatly to the evidence base. In-depth interviews or focus groups with faculty members may shed light on the lived experience of burnout in the Saudi academic context, the meaning faculty members attribute to reform-related pressures, and the informal coping techniques they use. Preliminary qualitative work would be beneficial to understand why male faculty members appear to be underrepresented in burnout research participation, a pattern that is seen in this study and more broadly in the occupational health literature, so that future studies can design more inclusive recruitment strategies. Finally, future research should expand the measurement of compensation and institutional support to include non-salary benefits, availability of mentorship, research infrastructure and formal wellness programs, all of which may provide meaningful buffers against burnout and whose effects have not been adequately assessed in the Saudi academic context yet.

4.6 Practical Advice for University Administrators

Prioritize faculty wellbeing during reform by monitoring workload and redistributing tasks where possible. Offer accessible mental health resources and confidential counseling. Establish peer-support and mentoring programs. Provide clear communication and participatory decision-making to reduce uncertainty. Invest in professional development and time for research/teaching balance. Implement regular wellbeing assessments to identify at risk groups. Consider targeted interventions (e.g., reduced administrative load, teaching relief, or flexible scheduling) for those showing signs of burnout.

4.7 National-Level Stakeholder Policy Recommendations

National policymakers should prioritise faculty wellbeing in reform by providing targeted funding for mental health services and developing institutional capacity, issuing clear national guidelines on workload limits and fair evaluation practices and requiring regular confidential wellbeing monitoring across all universities. Support should encompass funds for professional development, incentives for institutions that incorporate evidence-based burnout prevention (peer support, counseling and flexible scheduling) and mandates for transparent reporting and evaluation of faculty working conditions. And fund longitudinal research to track the effects of changes, promote the exchange of best practices among institutions, and use performance indicators connected to staff welfare to hold universities accountable so that reforms do not undermine the health or productivity of academic staff.

5. Conclusion

The issue of burnout among university faculty members is a significant concern that warrants further investigation and action. According to this study, faculty burnout in Saudi universities generally involves a low level. However, a considerable proportion of faculty members remain at risk. Burnout was found to be associated with several key factors, including workload, working hours, job satisfaction, satisfaction with work schedules, perceived threat or exploitation, managerial relationships, income, perceived health status, and intention to leave employment. Universities can develop targeted strategies addressing these factors to support the well-being and productivity of their academic staff, ultimately benefiting the entire academic community.

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