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**MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES IN
EMOTIONAL JOB DEMANDS, COLLEAGUE SUPPORT, AND JOB
BURNOUT IMPACTING UNIVERSITY STAFF IN JIANGSU, CHINA**

By

MIAO LEI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

November 2024

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Abstract Presented to the Senate Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfillment of the Requirement of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES IN EMOTIONAL JOB DEMANDS, COLLEAGUE SUPPORT, AND JOB BURNOUT IMPACTING UNIVERSITY STAFF IN JIANGSU, CHINA

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November 2024

Chairman : Professor Gazi Mahabubul Alam, PhD
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Universities are seen as centers of learning, as well as workplaces where intricately complex interpersonal dynamics are evident. A large number of administrative staff make up one of the most important parts of university personnel who fulfil the aims of educational management policies. This research examines the mediating role of emotion regulation strategies on the relationship between emotional job demands, colleague support and job burnout felt by university administrative staff who work in Jiangsu Province, China. Jiangsu has the largest number of universities, the best resources in the country and is recognised as a leading region in education.

In this study, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is used as the theoretical framework, and the quantitative cross-sectional design was employed. Stratified random sample method served to select 443 administrative staff from 10 universities while structured questionnaires were used to collect data. 75.4% of the responses were retrieved and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results show that

the indirect effect of emotional job demands on job burnout through emotion regulation are significant; indirect effects values are $B=0.161$ for reappraisal and $B=0.172$ for suppression. A positive association was found between emotional job demands and burnout ($\beta=0.627$, $p=0.001$), whereas reappraisal and suppression had opposite effects on burnout ($\beta=-0.308$, $p=0.001$; $\beta=0.281$, $p=0.001$). Interestingly, colleague support did not predict job burnout ($\beta=0.035$, $p=0.458$). It emphasises the significance of university administrative staff handling emotional issues. Emotional job demands significantly contribute to burnout, however, emotion regulation strategies (e.g. reappraisal) have potential in reducing its effects. According to these findings, universities should begin incorporating emotion focused training and support mechanisms into their institutions' policies. The universities will be able to foster environments in which effective emotion regulation can be promoted, including administrative staff's well-being, burnout prevention, and make possible education management sustainability. Consequently, the study's implications hold for policymakers and university administrators as well. A pragmatic way to help alleviate administrative stress and build a more supportive workplace is to give important consideration to prioritising emotion regulation strategies. Achieving the best possible university management system and at the same time maintaining Jiangsu Province's educational excellence status requires these interventions.

Keywords: Administrative Staff, Emotion Regulation, Job Burnout

SDG: GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being, GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERANAN STRATEGI REGULASI EMOSI SEBAGAI PERANTARAAN
UNTUK TUNTUTAN EMOSI KERJA, SOKONGAN RAKAN SEKERJA DAN
KELESUAN UPAYA KERJA YANG MEMBERI KESAN KEPADA
KAKITANGAN UNIVERSITI DI JIANGSU, CHINA**

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Universiti dilihat sebagai pusat pembelajaran serta tempat kerja yang memiliki dinamik interpersonal yang rumit dan kompleks. Sebilangan besar kakitangan pentadbiran merupakan salah satu komponen paling penting dalam kalangan warga universiti yang berperanan memenuhi matlamat untuk mencapai objektif pengurusan pendidikan. Kajian ini mengkaji peranan pengantara strategi pengawalan emosi dalam hubungan antara tuntutan emosional kerja, sokongan rakan sekerja, dan kelesuan upaya kerja dalam kalangan kakitangan pentadbiran universiti di Wilayah Jiangsu, China. Jiangsu mempunyai bilangan universiti terbesar serta sumber pendidikan terkaya di negara ini dan diiktiraf sebagai wilayah peneraju dalam bidang pendidikan.

Dalam kajian ini, model Tuntutan Kerja-Sumber (JD-R) digunakan sebagai kerangka teori dengan reka bentuk kuantitatif secara tinjauan keratan rentas. Kaedah pensampelan rawak berstrata digunakan untuk memilih 443 kakitangan pentadbiran dari 10 universiti, manakala soal selidik berstruktur digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Sebanyak 75.4% respons telah diperoleh dan dianalisis menggunakan statistik

deskriptif dan inferensi. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa kesan tidak langsung tuntutan emosional kerja terhadap kelesuan upaya kerja melalui pengawalan emosi adalah signifikan; nilai kesan tidak langsung ialah $B=0.161$ untuk penilaian semula dan $B=0.172$ untuk penekanan. Terdapat hubungan positif antara tuntutan emosional kerja dan kelesuan upaya kerja ($\beta=0.627$, $p=0.001$), manakala penilaian semula dan penekanan memberikan kesan yang bertentangan terhadap kelesuan upaya kerja ($\beta=-0.308$, $p=0.001$; $\beta=0.281$, $p=0.001$). Menariknya, sokongan rakan sekerja tidak menunjukkan hubungan signifikan dengan kelesuan upaya kerja ($\beta=0.035$, $p=0.458$). Penemuan ini menekankan kepentingan kakitangan pentadbiran universiti dalam menangani isu-isu emosi. Tuntutan emosional kerja secara signifikan menyumbang kepada kelesuan upaya kerja, namun strategi pengawalan emosi (contohnya, penilaian semula) mempunyai potensi untuk mengurangkan kesannya. Berdasarkan penemuan ini, universiti disarankan untuk mengintegrasikan latihan berfokuskan emosi dan mekanisme sokongan ke dalam dasar organisasi mereka. Langkah ini dapat membantu universiti mewujudkan persekitaran yang mempromosikan pengawalan emosi yang berkesan, termasuk kesejahteraan kakitangan pentadbiran, pencegahan keletihan kerja, dan memastikan kelestarian pengurusan pendidikan. Oleh itu, implikasi kajian ini amat relevan kepada pembuat dasar dan pentadbir universiti. Pendekatan pragmatik untuk mengurangkan tekanan pentadbiran dan membina tempat kerja yang lebih menyokong adalah dengan memberi keutamaan kepada strategi pengawalan emosi. Untuk mencapai pengurusan universiti yang optimum serta mengekalkan status kecemerlangan pendidikan di Wilayah Jiangsu, pelaksanaan intervensi ini adalah sangat diperlukan.

Kata kunci: Lesu Upaya, Pengawalan Emosi, Staf Pentadbiran.

SDG: MATLAMAT 3: Kesihatan Yang Baik dan Sejahtera, MATLAMAT 8: Pekerjaan Yang Baik dan Pertumbuhan Ekonomi

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"It always seems impossible until it's done"- Nelson Mandela

The completion of this doctoral journey has been a testament to the wisdom encapsulated in Nelson Mandela's enduring words.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

β	Standardized Weight Regression
AGFI	Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index
AMOS	Analysis Moment of Structure
ARWU	Academic Ranking of World Universities
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
B	Unstandardized Weight Estimate Regression
C.R.	Critical Ratio
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CI	Confidence Interval
CMIN	Chi-Square Value
CR	Construct Reliability
CS	Colleague Support
DCM	Demand-Control Model
DF	Degree of Freedom
DV	Dependent Variable
EJD	Emotional Job Demands
ERQ	Emotion Regulation Questionnaire
ERS	Emotion Regulation Strategies
ESCM	Educational Supply Chain Management
GFI	Goodness-of-Fit Index
IFI	Incremental Fit Index
IV	Independent Variable
JB	Job Burnout

JD-R	Job Demands-Resources Model
LB	Lower Boundary
M	Mean
MBI	Maslach Burnout Inventory
MI	Modification Indices
MLE	Maximum Likelihood Estimates
MMA	Multi Model Analysis
MoE	Ministry of Education
MSV	Maximum Shared Variance
N	Number
NAS	Numbers of Administrative Staff in Universities
NUA	Numbers of Academic Staff in Universities
NUS	Numbers of Enrolment Students in Universities
OA	Office Automation
P	Significance Value
PhD	Doctor in Philosophy
RE	Reappraisal
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
RQ	Research Question
SCM	Supply Chain Management
SD	Standard Deviation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SE	Standard Error
SEM	Structural Equation Model
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SRMR	Standardized Root Mean Square Residual
SU	Suppression

TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
UB	Upper Boundary
WHO	World Health Organization



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Universities are academic learning centres and at the same time complex workplaces where constant interactions and intricate interpersonal relationships occur. Administrative staff are one of the most aspects of university operations, providing a key part to making sure education management is effective. This thesis focuses on administrative staff in Jiangsu Province, China, a leading region in the country regarding the number of universities and academic resources where higher education has grown rapidly. There has been a commensurate increase in the workload and staff responsibilities. However, due to increasing complexity, this has led to heightened emotional demands at an administrative level, and hence comes as no surprise when staff are at risk of job burnout.

It is thus crucial to understand the interplay between emotional job demands, colleague support and job burnout to eventually develop specific strategies to support this workforce. This study uses the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model of job design to analyse how emotion regulation strategies, including reappraisal and suppression, mediate these relationships. In addition to filling an important gap in the literature, this research aims to offer practical insights into how to promote well-being and improve the operational effectiveness of higher educational institutions.

1.2 Background of the Study

In the modern world's changing information era and technologies, education institutions are challenged to adapt to the rapidly evolving needs of society and the relentless march of technology. As Smolentseva (2023) asserts, the management capacities of universities must be fine-tuned to meet these shifting expectations. However, at the forefront of this transition are university administrative staff who are specifically employed to execute bureaucratic and related duties (Guidetti et al., 2022). They are expected to shoulder the burden of this evolution.

China, in particular, presents a compelling case study. Since 1999, the nation has seen an explosive growth in higher education, with an influx of students and a subsequent increase in administrative intricacy (Chi, 2021). These institutions, vast and hierarchical, depend heavily on an effective management system for their research and pedagogical success (Qi & Lin, 2020). Within this structure, as Baltaru and Soysal (2018) suggest, administrative staff emerge not only as the backbone supporting efficient university operation but also as pivotal in enhancing research impact, societal engagement, and overall student support.

In the late 19th century in China, administrative staff in universities began to emerge as a professional group, and later with the development of higher education, this group began to slowly expand. It is the case that from 1999 to 2022, the number of administrative staff in Chinese universities steadily increased (Figure 1.1), indicating that the workload of administrative staff is rising year after year. At present, research on administrative staff in universities in China mainly focuses on the classification of

administrative staff, essential qualities, pressures they face, and how to improve their enthusiasm and commitment to their work. Administrative staff constitute an important group in universities. Whether they can exert their enthusiasm and initiatives for their work duties directly affects the quality of university education and the level of administrative efficiency (Zhu & Chu, 2023).

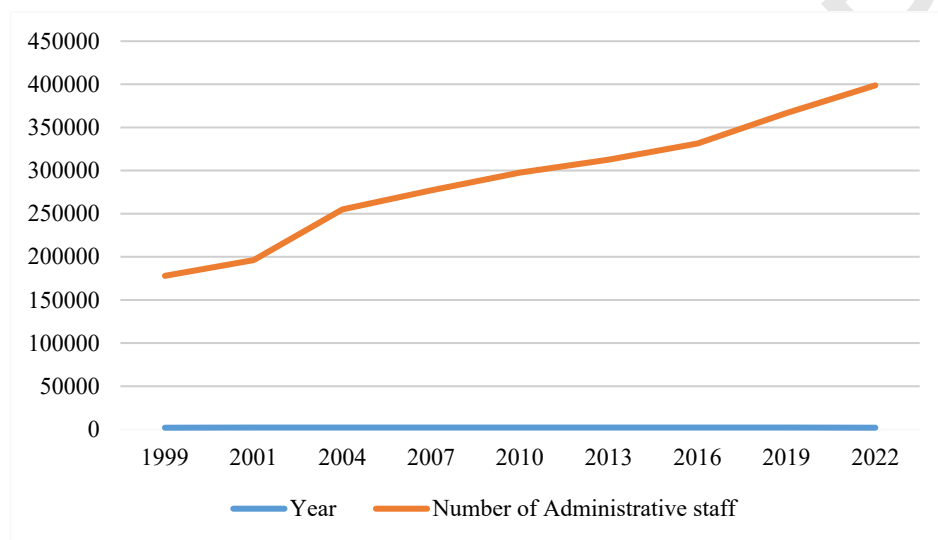


Figure 1.1: Number of Administrative Staff from 1999 to 2022 (China Statistical Yearbook, 2022)
(Source: Author's Creation)

University administrative staff have fundamental responsibilities for ensuring the effective operation of university policies and procedures, and are regarded as the backbone of tertiary education's management and operational purpose. Administrative staff coordinate communication among stakeholders and meet the needs of teachers, students, and other external entities. Their responsibilities are not limited to managing the implementation of policies, compliance with institutional or government rules, and coordinating with strategic goals (Chi, 2021). The number of administrative staff in China, especially in Jiangsu Province, is sharply increasing due to the rapid development of higher education there. As pointed out by Gu et al. (2020), this region

is a good example of the increased pressure caused by rising enrollment rates, higher academic expectations, and increased complexity of university operations. In response, emotional labour is increasingly falling on the shoulders of already overburdened administrative staff, and the demand for advanced stress management and maximising work output is also increasing.

This study attempts to answer this question by mediating the importance of emotion regulation strategies in the relationship between emotional job demands, colleague support and job burnout in the case of university administrative staff's challenges. Cognitive and behavioural efforts to regulate emotional responses that the individual makes to maintain professional composure and resilience in high stress environments (Gross, 2015). The aim of this study is to examine the indirect mechanisms via which emotional job demands, and colleague support contribute to burnout, focusing instead on mediation, rather than moderation. Mediation illustrates how emotion regulation directly mediates between these variables and how to reduce burnout. This is consistent with previous research that emotion regulation is an adaptive reaction to stress rather than it serving as a conditional moderator of the strength of linkages between job demands and outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Instead, moderation implies that emotion regulation only modulates the strength of these relationships underscoring the important role that emotion regulation plays in removing as much as possible the detrimental effect of stressors.

Emotional job demands and colleague support represent the two independent variables reflecting the dual pressures experienced by administrative staff in their professional role. Emotional job demands are the psychological effort which is needed to deal with

complex interpersonal interactions, as well as to manage conflicts or fulfil expectations from the organisation (Yin et al., 2018). Such demand is especially extreme in Chinese universities, where, regularly, administrative staff assume a role of mediation between students and institutional policies characterised by high expectations and emotional strain (Wang, 2019). On the other hand, colleague support is an important resource which can buffer the effect of these demands. Supportive peers served as an emotional outlet, practical help, and understanding with which to practice resilience against stress-led burnout (Lei et al., 2023). Yet in China, hierarchical workplace structures and the cultural expectation of harmony can impede the dynamics of colleague support and subsequently may diminish its protective function (Chung et al., 2024).

The dependent variable, job burnout, is a multi-factorial construct consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and lowered personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). High expectations for efficiency and service along with constraining institutional framework and resource constraints in China have further aggravated burnout among university administrative staff. In particular, the rapid development of higher education in Jiangsu Province has resulted in ever increasing workload and work complexity (Gu et al., 2020). Emphasised is the function of emotion regulation strategies as a crucial coping mechanism that may minimise the impact of emotional job demands and substitute the void created by lack of colleague support. This study helps fill some knowledge gaps between university administrative staff members' well-being and effectiveness by exploring these relationships.

According to Measures for the Administration of Staffing in Higher Education Institutions (Ministry of Education, 2007), it is generally believed that the staff of

Communist Party and government departments, administrative management, teaching management, scientific research management, mass organisations and functional departments in colleges and universities, as well as all kinds of personnel engaged in management work in secondary colleges, belong to the category of administrative staff in colleges and universities. Structurally, it is divided into high-level (decision-making level), middle-level (executive level) and grassroots (operation level) operations (Ministry of Education, 2017). Although their positions are different, their job responsibilities and nature are the same.

Generally, administrative staff members play many roles in Chinese universities, such as executors of daily administrative management work, coordinators in the process of executing plans, and processors of daily affairs (Liu, 2020). Wang (2019) believes that administrative staff in universities must possess a sense of professionalism, service, staff, public relations, teamwork, and innovation in their work. These features are all required in order to better serve the teaching and research tasks of teachers and students.

While not all administrative staff will actively engage in teaching and scientific research activities, the obligations of the posts they serve must be closely integrated with those of teaching and research in order to meet the position's requirements (Ou & Chen, 2022). As well, they are not merely there to support the academic staff or the students, but also function in terms of being charge of professional administration, which includes establishing and maintaining all of the circumstances necessary for the accomplishment of the objectives of university education (Gu et al., 2020).

For meeting the complexity of the education goals of Chinese universities, the main functions of these institutions are gradually increasing. Generally, universities can utilise their three main functions of teaching, research, and community participation (Figure 1.2) as tools for implementing development strategies. However, according to what is happening in China, universities have five main functions (Figure 1.3). In addition to the three mentioned earlier, they have added two major functions which are referred to as cultural inheritance and international cooperation and exchange. The implementation of university functions requires the support of administrative staff, which demonstrably increases their workload. The prevalence of job burnout is high in part because of these expectations.



Figure 1.2: The Three Main University Functions
(Adopted from Askari and Refae 2018)

To achieve institutional goals and social needs, three main functions are required, namely relying on universities, teaching, research, and community participation. Universities are built on the foundation of teaching and learning, disseminating knowledge, promoting critical thinking, and cultivating the skills required for personal growth and professional activities. The goal of this feature is to provide students with theoretical knowledge and practical skills to help them cope with the many complexities of modern civilisation. Secondly, research has created a place for innovation, knowledge creation, and intellectual progress. The research conducted in

universities is the result of scientific exploration and technological progress, contributing to the world's knowledge base to address urgent societal challenges (Askari & Rafae, 2018).

The third core function of universities is community participation, which symbolises the active role of universities in development. Through partnerships, outreach programs, and public initiatives, universities strive to significantly bridge the gap between academia and society by enriching society, economy, and culture (Askari & Refae, 2018).

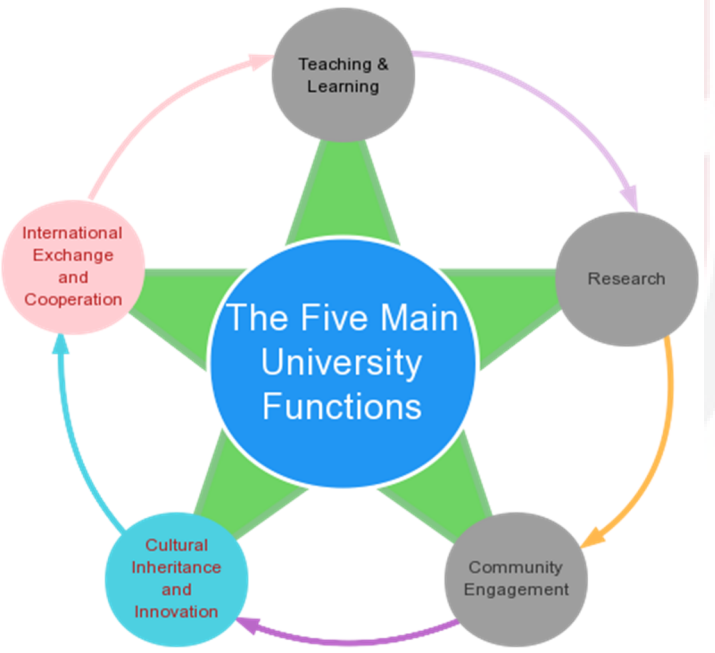


Figure 1.3: The Five Main University Functions in China, adopted from Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Universities under the New Situation (The State Council of China, 2017)
(Source: Author’s Creation)

Yet, with the evolution comes pressure. The worldwide race to profit from a globalised industry and the quest for internationalisation of local universities add to the strain felt

by staff members, with academic and administrative staff experiencing intense burnout or feelings of exhaustion (Asfahani, 2024). While academic staff grapple with the rigours of teaching and research (Graça et al., 2021), data from China Statistical Yearbook highlights that administrative staff, making up about 15% of university personnel as of 2022, have often been overlooked. Repetitive and tedious work, complex interpersonal relationships, unexpected work tasks, and limitations on completing them due to managerial policies are thrust into a high intensity "white+black, 5+2" work pattern. This essentially translates into long hours, spanning days and nights, regularly throughout the week. This intensified workload, arguably more expansive than their academic counterparts, underscores the gravity of administrative staff members' burnout.

Moreover, evidence from Jiangsu province's higher education institutions resonates with this national trend, pointing to widespread burnout among university administrative staff. The ramifications are manifold: studies like those by Bakker and Demerouti (2017) and Dinibutun et al. (2020) have discovered links between burnout and declining job performance, dissatisfaction, deterioration of interpersonal relationships with academics and students, and a negative environment that can ripple through the university's management system. The aftermath affects not just individual staff but the entire education system. Central to this burnout phenomenon are the emotional job demands arising from constant interpersonal interactions and contacting clients of all kinds (Baek et al., 2023). The burgeoning diversity in administrative tasks amplifies the likelihood of negative outcomes tethered to these demands, which often manifest as emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). It is imperative to understand the intricate nexus between job burnout and these emotional job demands.

The workplace ambience is further affected by the attitudes and support of colleagues. A positive, supportive environment can act as a buffer, reducing the onset of burnout (Lei et al., 2023). Conversely, a lack of colleague support could exacerbate stress-related disorders. The depth of research on workplace burnout, while expansive, often glosses over the nuances at the institutional and individual levels. For universities, creating an enabling environment, tailoring roles based on individual strengths, and offering growth opportunities become paramount. On the individual front, it is crucial for administrative staff to harness effective emotion regulation strategies. This is one aspect that encompasses several dimensions like cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Gross, 2015).

This study aims to bridge these gaps, delving deeper into the root causes of administrative burnout in the context of Chinese universities and crafting solutions that prioritise both the organisation and individual levels. The questions that need to be answered constitute the core issues of burnout among administrative staff, the empirical evidence for this in Jiangsu province, the broader implications of burnout, the stakeholders involved, the effect of university management and the role of emotion regulation in this intricate equation.

1.3 Problem Statement

In the latest revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11, 2019), the World Health Organization (WHO) officially designates burnout as an occupational disease, cautioning against its application to describe experiences outside of the workplace. Study such as those by Maslach and Leiter (2022) defined job

burnout from the psychosocial perspective; they see it as a chronic stress-related syndrome that leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation or cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment or inefficacy. Belji Kangarlou et al. (2022) further argued that in severe cases, it could lead to medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cardiovascular risk factors, and depression. Goh et al. (2016) quantified this, indicating that almost a quarter of the U.S. workforce experiences burnout, translating to an astounding annual medical expenditure of US\$190 billion. Herein lies a challenge for policymakers and corporate leaders: is it more economical to invest in preventive measures now or manage the astronomical costs later?

Studies prove that job burnout creates many problems for higher education, affecting the overall performance and efficiency of university management. For instance, burnout can erode cooperative dynamics, fostering a workplace environment marred by diminished self-respect, resilience and the onset of psychological and physical ailments (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Zaid, 2019). Such detrimental conditions invariably increase, leading to compromised job performance (Corbeanu et al., 2023; Lemonaki et al., 2021), dwindling job satisfaction (Srivastava et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2021), and overall reduced organisational achievements (Agarwal, 2022; Jun et al., 2021). The repercussions can be so significant that they result in heightened absenteeism and a revolving door of staff turnover (Al Sabei et al., 2020; Duan et al., 2019). Moreover, such burnout-induced stress and emotional challenges further debilitate the well-being of the staff (Marsh et al., 2023; St-Louis et al., 2021). The above literature can prove the negative impact of burnout on the development of universities.

Statistics is also another way to prove the prominent burnout in Jiangsu Province. From 2018 to 2022, each administrative staff member who serves academics and students with an increasing workload has been steadily rising (China Statistical Yearbook, 2022). Indicated here is that the management workload of administrative staff is increasing year by year (Tables 1.1 and 1.2). Although the academics-administrators ratio declined in 2021, the MoE (Ministry of Education) explained that due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many recruitments were delayed or simply cancelled, but the proportion has returned to its highest value in 2022.

On one hand, the students-administrators ratio in Jiangsu Province is over 70%, significantly exceeding the national average by 40% (China Statistical Yearbook, 2022). On the other hand, study shows that the desirable academics-administrators ratio is 3:1 (Rogers, 2012), yet the ratio in Jiangsu is close to 5:1. These two statistics clearly demonstrate the increasing pressure on administrative staff to serve other personnel year by year. As well, studies reveal that pressure is the main cause of burnout (Bunjak et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2019), indicating that the burnout of administrative personnel in Jiangsu Province is quite prominent. For this reason, it is important to investigate job burnout in the higher education context to address the challenge effectively.

Table 1.1: Students-Administrators Ratio in Jiangsu Province

	NUS	NAS	RATIO
2018	1806277	24648	73.28
2019	1874084	25516	73.45
2020	2014698	26157	77.02
2021	2110805	27064	77.99
2022	2219114	27667	80.21

Key: NUS=Numbers of Enrolled Students in Universities

NAS=Numbers of Administrative Staff in Universities

(Source: Author's Creation)

Table 1.2: Academics-Administrators Ratio in Jiangsu Province

	NUA	NAS	RATIO
2018	116350	24648	4.72
2019	120599	25516	4.73
2020	126013	26157	4.82
2021	126615	27064	4.68
2022	133856	27667	4.84

Key: NUA=Numbers of Academic Staff in Universities
NAS=Numbers of Administrative Staff in Universities
(Source: Author's Creation)

With this backdrop in mind, while abundant research has dissected burnout from various perspectives across a range of professions (Ghasemi et al., 2023; Sandrin et al., 2022; Upadaya & Salmela-Aro, 2020), there is a clear lack of understanding of the experience of administrative staff, especially in China. An intriguing aspect warranting exploration is the interplay between job burnout and the emotion regulation strategies that individuals employ, predominantly reappraisal and suppression. Prior research has often treated job burnout as an isolated phenomenon, concentrating primarily on its symptoms (Atmaca et al., 2020). Such a narrow lens, however, overlooks the multifaceted nature of burnout, especially its intricate relationship with individual emotion regulation and broader organisational environments.

Currently, the theoretical connection between colleague support, emotional job demands, and job burnout with administrative staff members' emotion regulation strategies as mediators has – to the best of this thesis author's knowledge - not been established by previous scholars. Prior studies established the relationship between each of the variables independently on job burnout. However, the present study assesses the influence of the variables under a mediating role of a selected context among administrative staff (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Lupşa et al., 2020). The reason for the study is to document emotion regulation strategies and relationships between and among emotional job demands, colleague support, and job burnout in universities.

1.4 Research Objective

The study's main objective is to examine the mediating effect of emotion regulation strategies on the relationship between emotional job demands, colleague support, and job burnout among administrative staff in Jiangsu Province, China.

1.4.1 Specific Objectives

1. To determine the level of emotional job demands, colleague support, emotion regulation strategies and job burnout among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province.
2. To determine the relationship between emotional job demands, colleague support, emotion regulation strategies and job burnout among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province.
3. To determine the emotion regulation strategies as mediators in the relationship between emotional job demands, colleague support and job burnout in Jiangsu Province.

1.5 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and hypotheses guided this study:

RQ1. What is the level of emotional job demands, colleague support, emotion regulation strategies and job burnout among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province?

RQ2. What is the relationship between emotional job demands, colleague support, emotion regulation strategies (i.e. reappraisal, suppression) (Gross, 2015) and job burnout among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province?

- H1: Emotional job demands are positively related to their job burnout among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province.
- H2: Colleague support is negatively related to their job burnout among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province.
- H3: Emotional job demands are negatively related to reappraisal among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province.
- H4: Emotional job demands are positively related to suppression among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province.
- H5: Colleague support is positively related to reappraisal among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province.
- H6: Colleague support is negatively related to suppression among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province.
- H7: Reappraisal is negatively related to job burnout among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province.
- H8: Suppression is positively related to job burnout among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province.

RQ3. What is the mediating effect of emotion regulation strategies (i.e. reappraisal, suppression) in the relationship between emotional job demands, colleague support and job burnout?

- H9: Emotion regulation strategies are mediators between emotional job demands and job burnout.
- H10: Emotion regulation strategies are mediators between colleague support and job burnout.

1.6 The Significance of the Study

This study on the impact of emotion regulation strategies as mediators in the correlation between emotional job demands, colleague support, and job burnout among administrative staff in Jiangsu Province, China will contribute to knowledge in

the following ways. Firstly, it fills a gap in the existing literature by focusing on administrative staff in higher education in Jiangsu Province, China. The insights derived from understanding the emotion regulation strategies of 'reappraisal' and 'suppression' with reference to job burnout can offer a fresh perspective and enrich the academic discourse.

Secondly, this study can enrich the application of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model in higher education, by identifying specific emotion regulation strategies and their interplay with job burnout in a specific context. Under the models, if administrative staff members' emotion regulation strategies mediate emotional job demands, colleague support and job burnout, then policymakers should adjust their employees' career planning strategies and focus on enhancing personnel well-being. Thirdly, this study provides preliminary data for future local and international research. Reliable and effective data helps to showcase trends and dynamics within the higher education system. This is crucial for helping managers predict and plan education policies, employee health, and ensuring that the university management operates at its most efficient.

Fourthly, the present study addressed emotion regulation strategies as mediators between colleague support and emotional job demands as independent variables while job burnout functions as the dependent variable. Using emotion regulation strategies as mediators will help to provide a group of administrative staff members with stable work environments, more promising career prospects, and better outcomes. Checking administrative staff members' emotion regulation strategies as mediators, can help to alleviate emotional stress within the university and help reduce burnout. Emotion

regulation strategies as mediators help to explain how emotional job demands and colleague support are associated with job burnout. It will help readers to understand the underlying medium for reducing burnout to enhance the literature review of all the variables.

Fifthly, regarding the policies, this study's findings will have significant implications for higher education institutions, not just in Jiangsu Province but other places as well. Administrative leaders and policymakers can utilise the insights to draft effective strategies and interventions aimed at reducing burnout and promoting a healthy work environment. For education policymakers in Jiangsu Province and throughout China, reducing burnout to ensure the good physical and mental health of employees and the effectiveness of university management is of great significance. This will remind them to reduce job demands in reducing burnout. It will also lead to job resources being deployed to areas that have a marked positive impact on university management. Similarly, it will become a field of professional development that not only reduces burnout, but also ensures that they better adapt to constantly changing education needs and challenges.

Sixthly, it is important to note that job burnout is closely linked to various health issues, both physical and mental. Addressing the root causes and mitigating burnout can significantly help administrative staff to have a clearer understanding about the job burnout and think more rationally about measures to cope with individual burnout from emotional and interpersonal perspectives. Administrative staff will have better knowledge of what factors to focus more on and how to concentrate on those factors to reduce job burnout. It will enable university administrative staff to pay attention to

the consequences of burnout, handle the burnout issues caused by employees' fraught interpersonal relationships and emotional issues more appropriately, and administrative staff will have a clearer understanding of how to avoid burnout.

In summary, the significance of this study lies in its potential to transform workplace environments in higher education institutions, promote employee well-being, and contribute valuable insights to the broader academic community.

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

1.7.1 Scope

The respondents of this research comprised the administrative staff who are working in universities in Jiangsu Province, China. The sample size was calculated by using the sample size determination equation which was proposed by The Research Advisor (2006) and Krejcie and Morgan (1970) in order to obtain a reliable and valid representative for this research. Stratified random sampling method was employed to select the respondents. This study identifies the level of emotional job demands, colleague support, emotion regulation strategies and job burnout in Jiangsu Province, China. As well, this study investigates the relationship between emotional job demands, colleague support, emotion regulation strategies and job burnout. Moreover, the mediating effect of emotion regulation strategies on the relationships between emotional job demands, colleague support and job burnout among university administrative staff in Jiangsu Province, China will be identified.

1.7.2 Limitation

Every research endeavour is inevitably affected by certain constraints or limitations. Recognising and acknowledging these limitations ensures the reliability and integrity of the study. The limitations on job burnout among administrative staff in higher education institutions in Jiangsu Province, China include the geographical limitation. Jiangsu's economy is at the forefront of China, and due to its economy, the university resources in this province are abundant compared to other provinces. In that context, the findings may not be directly applicable to administrative staff in other provinces or countries with different cultural, economic, or institutional dynamics.

This study collects self-reported data. As with many studies in the social sciences, this thesis may rely on self-reported data from participants. Such data might be subjected to biases, for instance social desirability bias or recall bias, which could affect the accuracy of the results. This study uses cross-sectional design. If the study adopts a cross-sectional design, it captures the data at a specific point in time, which may not reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of job burnout and its associated factors. When collecting data, it is difficult to accurately control the invitation link, which may result in an excess of sample size in the data. This study lacks depth and limited variables which rely on a small set of items.

It is essential for researchers and readers alike to consider these limitations when interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions. Recognising these constraints also provides avenues for future research to address and explore these limitations or other variables further.

1.8 Operational Definitions

Definitions of terms for dependent, independent, and mediator variables were clarified to provide a better comprehension of what this study seeks to achieve. The other major terms are covered below.

1.8.1 Job Burnout

Job burnout is a prolonged response to stressors in the workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). For the purposes of this investigation, job burnout refers to three dimensions and these specifically are emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and low personal achievement. The job burnout questionnaire devised by Maslach and Leiter (2022) was used to measure the level of job burnout.

1.8.2 Emotional Job Demands

Emotional job demands are a term explained as the emotional pressures and challenges that employees face as part of their day-to-day responsibilities (Yin et al., 2018). These demands can include situations where employees must regulate their emotions to meet the expectations of their duties, deal with emotionally charged interactions with clients or colleagues, or cope with stressful or challenging circumstances in the workplace. The Emotional Job Demands Scale - which was devised by Yin (2015) incorporates four items, i.e. emotions, behaviour, relationship and environment - served to measure the level of emotional job demands in this research.

1.8.3 Colleague Support

Colleague support typically refers to the provision of assistance, encouragement, and resources by co-workers within an organisation. This support can take various forms, including practical help with tasks, emotional support during difficult times, or social companionship in the workplace (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In this research it refers to support among administrative staff. The level of colleague support was measured based on five items, these being benevolence, reliability, honesty, competence, openness as mentioned by Yin et al. (2013).

1.8.4 Emotion Regulation Strategies

Emotion regulation strategies refer to the process by which individuals influence the intensity, duration, and expression of their emotions. It includes a variety of methods and approaches that individuals employ to control their emotional experiences for fulfilling their objectives, adjusting to their surroundings, and preserve their mental health (Yin et al., 2018). This study refers to emotion regulation strategies used by administrative staff in the workplace. The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire developed by Gross and John (2003) was used for this study under two dimensions - reappraisal and suppression.

1.9 Summary

This chapter introduced the topic that was covered in this study. It highlights the background of higher education in China and its status in university management. The importance of job burnout was especially noted for Jiangsu Province to address the

problems that are inherent in its universities. Emotion regulation strategies were proposed as mediators of addressing job burnout issues if emotional job demands can be reduced and support from colleagues can be obtained. Research objectives were stated and the precise questions and hypotheses were formulated. The importance of the study was pointed out and the limitations of the research were noted. Key terms of the study were explained.



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