



## A Study on Work Stress and Job Satisfaction Among University Faculty and Staff

Jing Shizhong<sup>1</sup>, Chan Saikong<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD in Business Administration, <sup>2</sup>Professor, Faculty of Business, Information and Human Sciences, Kuala Lumpur University of Science & Technology (KLUST)Malaysia

(formerly known as Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur (IUKL)), Selangor, Malaysia.

Corresponding Author: Jing Shizhong, 188816835@qq.com

Date of Submission: 08-01-2026

Date of Acceptance: 20-01-2026

**ABSTRACT:** Under the dual background of the popularization of higher education and the development with an emphasis on quality, the work pressure and job satisfaction of university faculty members have become the core factors affecting educational quality and organizational effectiveness. Based on the "stress - assessment - coping" theory, transformational leadership theory, and resource conservation theory, this paper constructs a stress source analysis framework covering six dimensions, systematically explaining the mechanisms by which professional responsibilities, power relations, role burdens, interpersonal pressure, capability deficiencies, and environmental challenges affect job satisfaction. The research shows that each dimension of work pressure has a differentiated correlation pattern with job satisfaction, among which role burdens, environmental challenges, and power relations constitute the three core predictive variables affecting satisfaction. From the perspectives of organizational ecology and occupational psychology, this paper proposes to comprehensively enhance the job satisfaction and career happiness of faculty members through systematic intervention strategies such as constructing a strategic work design system, improving the organizational support network, innovating leadership development models, and establishing a lifelong learning-oriented career development system. The research results not only enrich the theoretical system of educational organizational behavior but also provide an operational management paradigm for university human resource management practices.

**KEYWORDS:** University faculty and staff; Work pressure; Job satisfaction; Stressor; Organizational support; Leadership

### I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development and functional diversification of higher education institutions have placed faculty and staff in increasingly complex work environments with heightened professional demands. Beyond fulfilling multiple responsibilities in teaching, research, and community service, they must also navigate pressures stemming from organizational management, interpersonal interactions, and career development. Persistent work stress that remains unmanaged can lead to diminished job satisfaction, professional burnout, and even talent attrition, ultimately undermining the enhancement of higher education quality and its sustainable development.

Although previous studies have preliminarily explored the relationship between teachers' work stress and job satisfaction, most have focused on the basic education stage or specific occupational groups (such as teaching secretaries), lacking systematic analysis of the higher education faculty and staff cohort. Li Zhen and Xu Yanming (2025) found a negative correlation between work stress and satisfaction among teaching secretaries in vocational colleges, though it did not reach statistical significance. This suggests the need to further explore the types of stressors and their pathways of



influence. Therefore, this study examines university faculty and staff, combining theoretical and empirical research to delve into the intrinsic connection between their work stress and job satisfaction, and proposes targeted management recommendations.

## **II. THEORETICAL BASIS OF WORK STRESS AND SATISFACTION**

### ***A. Stress - Appraisal - Coping Theory***

The “Stress-Appraisal-Coping” theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) provides a crucial framework for understanding the formation and management of work-related stress. This theory posits that individuals undergo a primary appraisal (assessing whether a situation poses a threat) and a secondary appraisal (evaluating their own coping capabilities) when confronted with environmental demands. When faculty and staff perceive their workload to exceed their available resources and capabilities, they experience stress, which subsequently impacts their job satisfaction.

### ***B. Transformational Leadership Theory***

Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory emphasizes that leaders enhance employees' intrinsic motivation and professional identity through visionary inspiration, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. In higher education settings, transformational leadership alleviates role stress and interpersonal tension among faculty and staff while strengthening their sense of work control and job satisfaction.

### ***C. Resource Conservation Theory***

Hobfoll (2022) proposed the resource conservation theory, which explains the formation mechanism of work stress from the perspective of resource balance. This theory is based on two core principles: first, individuals have the basic motivation to acquire, retain, protect and cultivate the

resources they value; second, the psychological impact of resource loss is stronger than that of resource gain. The resources that teachers value include material resources (such as equipment, funds), condition resources (such as job security, promotion opportunities), personal resources (such as time, energy, skills) and energy resources (such as social support, respect), etc.

According to this theory, the work pressure of university teachers essentially stems from actual or potential threats of resource loss. For instance, excessive workload leads to exhaustion of time resources, role conflicts result in depletion of psychological energy, and insufficient capabilities cause a threat to self-efficacy. When teachers perceive the risk of resource loss or actually experience it, they will experience stress. Conversely, when the organization provides adequate resource support (such as reasonable salaries, career development opportunities, leadership support, and colleague assistance), teachers can effectively meet work demands, maintain resource balance, and thus maintain a high level of job satisfaction. The resource conservation theory provides a solid theoretical foundation for us to systematically understand the mechanism of various stressors and design resource replenishment-based intervention strategies.

## **III. THE MECHANISM OF WORK STRESSORS ON WORK SATISFACTION**

### ***A. Professional Responsibilities and Job Satisfaction***

Empirical studies have shown that the impact of job-related stress on job satisfaction is significantly moderated by work resources. Teachers who have sufficient teaching autonomy, a research support system, and reasonable time allocation can maintain high job satisfaction even when facing high job demands. On the contrary, in resource-poor environments, the same job demands may lead to emotional exhaustion and job burnout. This finding suggests that university administrators, while clearly defining teachers' responsibilities, must also provide corresponding resource support systems and promote synergy among different responsibilities through



reasonable work design, rather than simply adding them together.

### ***B. Power Relations and Job Satisfaction***

Transformational leadership behavior plays a crucial role in building positive power relationships. Leaders with transformational traits can enhance teachers' psychological empowerment and organizational identification by sharing the leadership vision, encouraging participation in decision-making, and providing developmental feedback. Research shows that in academic teams with a strong transformational leadership atmosphere, teachers not only exhibit higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment, but also demonstrate stronger innovation willingness and knowledge sharing behavior. This positive leadership-member exchange relationship becomes an important resource for teachers to cope with work challenges.

### ***C. Role Burden and Job Satisfaction***

The impact of role burden on job satisfaction is mainly achieved through three pathways: Firstly, it leads to continuous time pressure and work-family conflicts, thereby reducing the quality of life and happiness of teachers; Secondly, it forces teachers to frequently switch between multiple tasks, causing distraction and a decline in work efficiency, resulting in a sense of failure in achievement; Thirdly, through the accumulation of long-term pressure, it triggers symptoms of occupational burnout such as emotional exhaustion, de-personalization, and reduced personal sense of achievement. It is worth noting that the influence of role burden varies significantly among individuals. Teachers who have strong time management skills, clear career positioning, and good social support systems tend to be better able to cope with the challenges brought by role burden.

### ***D. Interpersonal Pressure and Job Satisfaction***

As knowledge-intensive organizations, universities rely heavily on effective collaboration and knowledge sharing among their members for

their operations. This makes the quality of interpersonal relationships an important factor influencing teachers' job satisfaction. The interpersonal pressure in universities mainly stems from three aspects: the tense relationships among colleagues due to the competitive research environment, communication barriers and value conflicts in interdisciplinary cooperation, and the inconsistent expectations and lack of support between superiors and subordinates.

Healthy and supportive interpersonal relationships can provide teachers with emotional support, informational support and instrumental support, and are important resources for coping with work challenges. Trust, respect and mutual assistance among colleagues not only directly enhance the sense of pleasure in the workplace, but also enhance teachers' professional capabilities and work efficiency by promoting knowledge exchange and experience sharing. Research shows that high-quality colleague relationships and positive leader-member exchange relationships can significantly buffer the negative impact of work stress on satisfaction, and are important predictors of teachers' organizational identification and career commitment.

### ***E. Capability Deficiencies and Job Satisfaction***

The impact of ability deficiencies on job satisfaction is mainly achieved through the mediating mechanism of self-efficacy. When teachers perceive that their own abilities do not match the job requirements, they will experience strong professional insecurity and self-doubt, which will reduce their confidence and enthusiasm in completing tasks. This decrease in self-efficacy will further affect the teachers' level of work engagement and goal setting, forming a vicious cycle of "insufficient ability - decreased performance - confidence - reduced engagement". Especially when facing major career challenges such as teaching reforms and shifts in research paradigms, the pressure of ability adaptation is particularly prominent.

It is worth noting that the perception of ability deficiencies is highly subjective and context-dependent. The same gap in ability may be seen as an opportunity for development in a supportive organizational environment, but may be



perceived as a career threat in a competitive one. Therefore, when universities aim to alleviate the pressure on teachers' ability deficiencies, they not only need to provide systematic professional development support, but also should focus on creating a learning-oriented organizational culture that encourages experimentation and tolerates failure. Establishing a multi-level ability support network including mentorship, teaching consultation, and research collaboration can effectively help teachers transform ability challenges into growth opportunities, enhancing their professional confidence and job satisfaction.

#### ***F.Environmental Challenges and Job Satisfaction***

The working environment of university faculty members is a complex system that encompasses physical environment, technological environment, and institutional environment. The quality of the environment directly affects the work efficiency and psychological experience of teachers. The current environmental challenges faced by universities are mainly manifested as follows: physical environment pressure caused by outdated hardware facilities and insufficient space, technological environment pressure resulting from the lag in information technology construction, and institutional environment pressure arising from rigid management systems and unfair resource allocation.

The final conceptualized research model for this study is illustrated below in Figure 1.

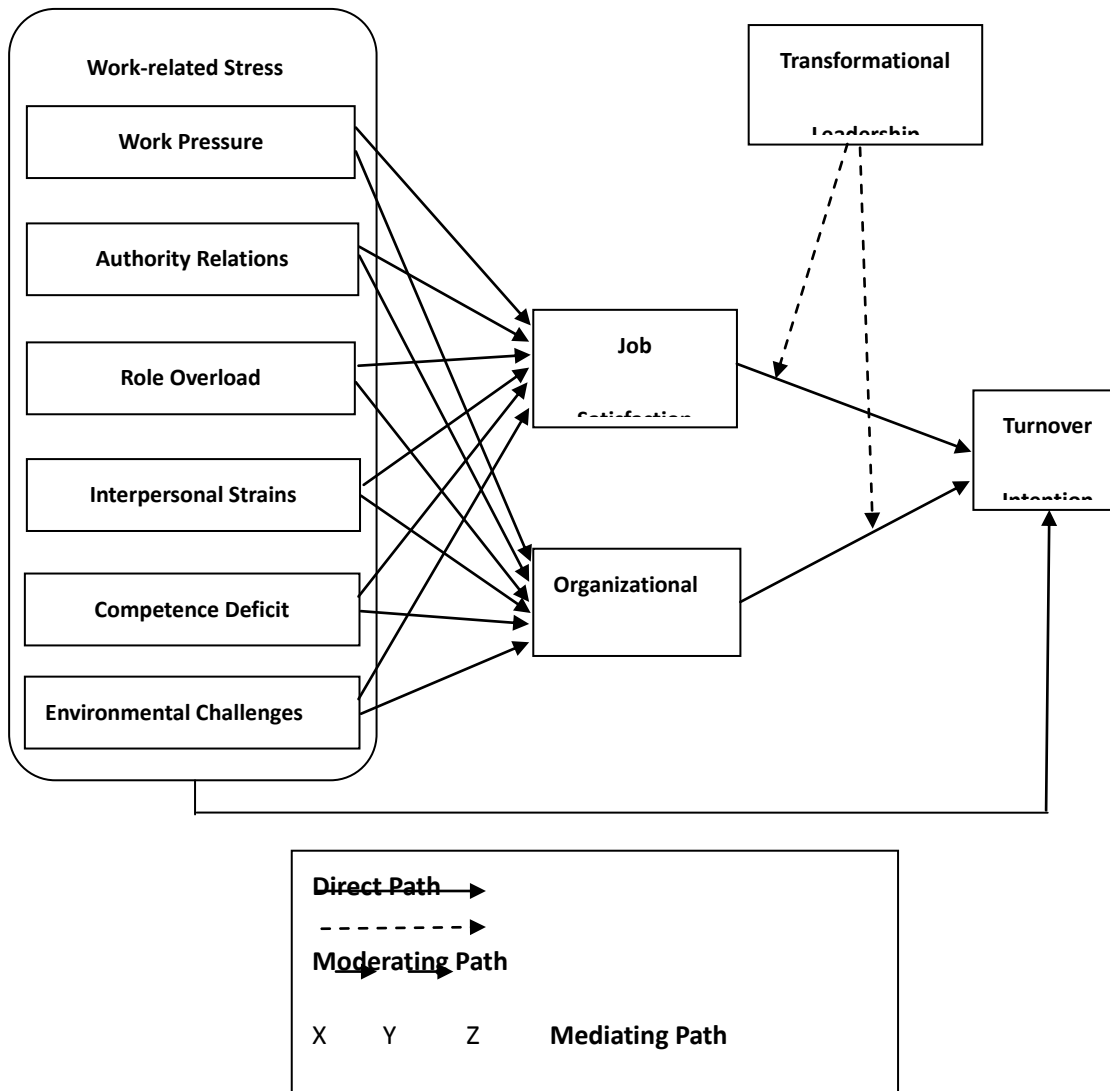


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

#### IV. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES PROPOSALS

Based on the theoretical analysis and empirical research presented above, this paper formulates the following research hypotheses, aiming to systematically reveal the complex relationship between the work stress and job satisfaction of university faculty members through testable propositions:

- H3a: Workload exerts a significant negative effect on job satisfaction.
- H3b: Power relations exert a significant positive effect on job satisfaction.
- H3c: Role burden has a significant negative effect on job satisfaction.
- H3d: Interpersonal pressure has a significant negative effect on job satisfaction.



- H3e: Competency deficits have a significant negative effect on job satisfaction.
- H3f: Environmental challenges have a significant negative effect on job satisfaction.

## **V.SUGGESTIONS ON RESEARCH METHODS**

To scientifically test the above research hypotheses and comprehensively understand the complex relationship between the work stress and satisfaction of university faculty members, it is recommended to adopt a mixed research method design. By leveraging the complementary advantages of quantitative and qualitative research, the reliability and depth of the research conclusions can be ensured.

### ***A.Research Subjects and Sampling Strategy***

The research sample should include full-time teachers, researchers, and teaching management personnel from various types of universities (research-oriented, research-oriented teaching, and teaching-oriented). It is necessary to ensure that the sample has good representativeness in terms of academic fields, professional title structure, age group, and working years. A combined strategy of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling is adopted to ensure the statistical analysis ability of the sample and also to obtain in-depth experiences from key information providers. The sample size should be determined through statistical power analysis based on the number of items of the measurement tool and the expected effect size. Generally, it is recommended to be no less than 300 people to meet the requirements of advanced statistical methods such as structural equation modeling.

### ***B.Research Tools and Data Collection***

For quantitative research, standardized scales that have been verified for reliability and validity should be used: The work stress scale should cover six dimensions: professional responsibilities, power relationships, role burdens, interpersonal pressure,

capability deficiencies, and environmental challenges, and should be scored on a 7-point Likert scale; the measurement of work satisfaction can draw on the "Job Descriptive Index" (JDI) developed by Smith et al., and be contextualized and revised in light of the characteristics of universities, covering core dimensions such as salary, promotion, job content, security, interpersonal relationships, and working conditions; at the same time, scales related to organizational support, leadership behavior, and self-efficacy should be introduced to test mediating and moderating effects.

### ***C.Data Analysis Strategy***

Quantitative data analysis should employ multi-level statistical methods: Firstly, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are used to grasp the basic characteristics and initial relationships of the variables; subsequently, confirmatory factor analysis is employed to test the structural validity and discriminant validity of the measurement tools; then, through hierarchical regression analysis and structural equation modeling, the direct influence of each stressor on job satisfaction, as well as the mediating effect and moderating effect, are examined; finally, through latent profile analysis, the differentiated patterns of the relationship between teachers' stress and satisfaction can be identified, revealing the group heterogeneity.

## **VI.DISCUSSION AND MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the aforementioned theoretical and empirical analysis, the management of work stress and satisfaction among university faculty and staff should shift from fragmented interventions to systematic governance, and a multi-level support system covering individuals, teams, organizations and institutions should be established.

### ***A.Establish a strategic work design system***

Colleges and universities should go beyond the traditional approach of job analysis and conduct strategic work design based on the characteristics and



psychological needs of the teaching profession. Firstly, through the clarification of responsibilities and boundary delineation, determine the reasonable proportion and evaluation criteria for teaching, research, and service activities, reducing role conflicts and task ambiguity. Secondly, implement an elastic work task system, allowing teachers to adjust their work priorities within a certain range according to their own strengths and career stages, achieving personalized duty allocation. Finally, establish a task integration mechanism, promoting mutual promotion rather than competition among different duties through project-based work models such as integration of teaching and research and collaboration between science and education.

#### ***B.Improve the organizational support network***

Organizational support, as a key resource for buffering the negative impacts of work pressure, should be systematically constructed from two dimensions: instrumental support and emotional support. Instrumental support includes providing advanced teaching and research facilities, adequate financial support, efficient administrative services, and flexible work arrangements, which directly enhance teachers' ability to cope with tasks. Emotional support is reflected in aspects such as leadership care, mutual assistance among colleagues, organizational identification, and fair treatment, meeting teachers' relational needs and respect needs.

#### ***C.Innovative Leadership Development Model***

The leadership capabilities of university administrators directly affect the organizational atmosphere and the teaching experience of faculty members. Therefore, the leadership level should be systematically enhanced through three aspects: selection, training, and evaluation. In the selection process of leaders, in addition to assessing academic achievements and management experience, their potential for transformational leadership should also be evaluated, including soft qualities such as the ability to shape visions, empathy, and the inclination to stimulate intelligence. Implementing the tenure system and job rotation system for managers can prevent rigid leadership behaviors and fixed thinking patterns.

#### ***D.Establish a lifelong learning-oriented career development system***

In the face of the rapidly changing academic environment and knowledge system, universities should establish a career development system that supports teachers' lifelong learning. This system should break away from the traditional training model and integrate formal learning and informal learning, internal resources and external networks, professional development and personal growth, providing teachers with comprehensive capability support throughout their career.

#### ***E.Creating a supportive organizational culture***

Organizational culture, as a deep factor influencing teachers' work experience, should be systematically shaped from three aspects: values, behavioral norms, and interpersonal atmosphere. At the value level, strengthen the core values of academic orientation, pursuit of excellence, and inclusiveness. Through various carriers such as ceremonies, role models' promotion, and cultural symbols, internalize them into the common beliefs of teachers. At the behavioral norms level, establish a management system based on trust and responsibility, reduce unnecessary control and intervention, and grant teachers full professional autonomy and academic freedom. At the interpersonal atmosphere level, advocate open communication, cooperation and mutual assistance, and constructive feedback, creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive psychological environment.

## **VII.CONCLUSION**

A complex and multidimensional relationship exists between work stress and job satisfaction among university faculty and staff. Drawing on theoretical frameworks and empirical research, this paper systematically elucidates the mechanisms through which professional responsibilities, power dynamics, role burdens, interpersonal pressures, competency deficits, and environmental challenges influence job satisfaction, while proposing corresponding management



strategies. Future research may expand sample sizes, incorporate longitudinal tracking or cross-cultural comparisons to deepen understanding of the stress-satisfaction dynamic. Higher education administrators should prioritize faculty and staff mental health and career development. Through institutional optimization and cultural development, they should collaboratively build a supportive and satisfying higher education work environment.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. ,2001. The job demands-resources model of burnout. *\*Journal of Applied Psychology\**, 86(3), 499–512.
- [2] Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. ,1976. Motivation through the design of work: Test of a theory. *\*Organizational Behavior and Human Performance\**, 16(2), 250–279.
- [3] Hobfoll, S. E. ,2022. Conservation of resources theory: Its implication for stress, health, and resilience. In *\*The Oxford Handbook of Stress, Health, and Coping\**. Oxford University Press.
- [4] Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S.,(1984. *\*Stress, Appraisal, and Coping\**. Springer.
- [5] Smith, P. C., Kendall, L. M., & Hulin, C. L. ,1969. *\*The Measurement of Satisfaction in Work and Retirement\**. Rand McNally.
- [6] Li, Z., & Xu, Y. M. ,2025. Research on the Work Stress and Job Satisfaction of Teaching Secretaries in Higher Vocational Colleges. *\*Science, Education and Culture Review\**, 16, 158–161.
- [7] Chen, Y. Y., & Sun, S. B. ,1994. Research on the Measurement of Teachers' Job Satisfaction. *\*Psychological Science\**, 3, 146–149.
- [8] Yang, X. W., Li, M. W., & Zhang, G. L. ,2005. An Empirical Study on the Job Satisfaction of University Teachers and Its Relationship with the Tendency of Vocational Education. *\*Journal of Dalian University of Technology (Social Science Edition)\**, 4, 66–69.
- [9] Zhang, J. ,2010. Research on the Professional Information Status and Countermeasures of Teaching Secretaries in Higher Education Institutions. Master's Thesis, Tianjin University.
- [10] Wang, C. Y. ,2004. Some Thoughts on Doing a Good Job as a Teaching Secretary in Higher Education Institutions. *\*Heilongjiang Institute of Education Research\**, 3, 95–96.