

Job Burnout Among Higher Vocational College Teachers: A Social Cognitive Perspective on Self-Efficacy and Coping Strategies

Huang Ying and Wong Siew Ping

Abstract – Job burnout among higher vocational college teachers has become a pressing concern, particularly in China, where the rapid expansion of vocational education has intensified role demands. In Jiangsu Province, burnout rates among vocational teachers significantly exceed those of their university counterparts, highlighting an urgent need to understand its underlying mechanisms beyond conventional workload-related explanations. This study employs Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model to examine how self-efficacy and coping strategies influence burnout experiences. Using stratified random sampling, data were collected from 862 teachers across 12 higher vocational institutions, and analysed through structural equation modelling (SEM). The findings reveal a dual mediation mechanism, where self-efficacy reduces burnout by mitigating emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. However, teachers with low self-efficacy are more prone to maladaptive coping strategies, which intensify burnout symptoms. Notably, teaching experience moderates these effects, as senior teachers exhibit a greater susceptibility to burnout due to prolonged role strain. Moreover, institutional factors, particularly in STEM-focused vocational colleges, exacerbate burnout by reinforcing maladaptive coping behaviours, underscoring the role of industry-driven performance pressures. These results emphasize the need for differentiated interventions at various career stages. Strengthening self-efficacy should be prioritized for junior teachers, while targeted coping strategy training is critical for senior educators. Institutional reforms, such as psychological support programs, balanced role expectations, and teacher-centered policy frameworks, are essential for sustaining teacher well-being. This study not only advances theoretical insights into burnout dynamics in vocational education but also provides actionable strategies to foster a resilient and effective teaching workforce, ensuring the long-term success of vocational education reforms.

Keywords – Job burnout, Self-efficacy, Coping strategies, Vocational teachers, Work environment, Institutional factors

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the 2024 Jiangsu Vocational Education Quality Annual Report issued by the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education, the prevalence of job burnout among higher vocational college teachers has risen to 47.3%, significantly surpassing that of faculty in regular universities (29.1%). This escalating phenomenon not only jeopardizes educators' physical and psychological well-

being but also poses a formidable challenge to achieving national objectives for cultivating "Dual-Professional" teachers, who are expected to integrate both teaching and corporate practice roles (Li & Zhou, 2020).

China's 2022 Modern Vocational Education System Reform mandates that by 2025, 60% of vocational educators attain dual-professional status. However, findings from the present study indicate that this policy has inadvertently intensified role conflicts, with 72% of surveyed teachers reporting difficulties in balancing teaching responsibilities with industry practice ($SD = 1.8$). While prior research has predominantly examined burnout through external determinants such as workload and institutional support (Wang et al., 2022), limited attention has been given to the interplay between individual cognitive processes and behavioural coping mechanisms.

Rooted in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which posits that human behaviour emerges from the dynamic interaction between cognition, environment, and action, this study adopts a novel theoretical perspective to analyse burnout mechanisms. Existing literature has primarily investigated self-efficacy and coping strategies in isolation (Zhang et al., 2021), yet there remains a paucity of research integrating these constructs within a comprehensive "cognition-behaviour" framework. In the distinctive context of China's vocational education sector, the dual-role expectations placed on "Dual-Professional" teachers—requiring them to balance pedagogical and industry-related responsibilities—may further exacerbate burnout (Chen et al., 2023).

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by pioneering the application of Social Cognitive Theory's triadic framework to burnout research in vocational education. By integrating cognition (self-efficacy) and behaviour (coping strategies) within the burnout process, the study extends theoretical discussions in occupational psychology and provides a nuanced understanding of psychological resilience among higher vocational college teachers.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer empirical insights for the development of targeted psychological interventions within vocational education institutions. Specifically, the study highlights the importance of promoting adaptive coping strategies to mitigate burnout and enhance teacher well-being. These insights are particularly relevant for improving Dual-Professional teacher training programs, ensuring educators are better equipped to manage occupational stress.

Furthermore, this research holds significant policy relevance, directly supporting Article 5.3 (Strengthening Teacher Mental Health Support Systems) outlined in the Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Modern Vocational

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Education System Construction (MOE, 2022). By addressing the psychological demands faced by vocational educators, the study contributes to sustaining workforce well-being and strengthening China's evolving vocational education system.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In recent years, the rapid expansion of vocational education in China has placed increasing demands on higher vocational college teachers, who must balance teaching, research, and industry engagement. This dual-professional role presents unique stressors that contribute to a growing burnout crisis. According to the 2024 Jiangsu Vocational Education Quality Annual Report, the job burnout rate among higher vocational teachers has surged to 47.3%, significantly higher than the 29.1% recorded for regular university teachers. This rising burnout trend not only threatens educators' well-being but also undermines national goals for cultivating a highly skilled and resilient vocational teaching workforce (Li et al., 2023).

Existing research has extensively examined job burnout among educators, yet several critical limitations persist. First, prior studies have predominantly focused on external factors, such as workload and institutional support, without adequately addressing the cognitive and behavioural mechanisms that shape burnout experiences (Wang et al., 2022). While these external factors are significant, a narrow emphasis on them overlooks the psychological processes that influence how teachers perceive, respond to, and cope with occupational stress.

Second, the relationship between self-efficacy and coping strategies in the burnout process remains underexplored. Although self-efficacy is a well-established predictor of burnout, prior research has often treated it as an isolated factor rather than examining its dynamic interplay with coping behaviours. The limited application of Bandura's (1986) triadic reciprocal model (cognition–behaviour–environment) has resulted in a fragmented understanding of how self-efficacy influences coping strategies, which, in turn, shape burnout outcomes (Zhang et al., 2021). Empirical studies rarely explore whether different coping strategies mediate or moderate the self-efficacy–burnout relationship, leaving a significant theoretical gap (Shin et al., 2014).

Third, much of the existing literature is Western-centric, limiting its applicability to China's vocational education system. Research on teacher burnout has largely been conducted in general education settings, neglecting the distinct pressures that higher vocational college teachers face under China's "Dual-Professional" policy (Chen et al., 2023). Unlike university educators, vocational teachers in China must navigate industry-academia integration pressures, skill mismatches in corporate training, and competency-based teaching requirements. These unique stressors necessitate a culturally specific

analysis of burnout mechanisms, rather than direct applications of Western findings (Li et al., 2023).

Finally, despite growing policy attention to teacher well-being (MOE, 2022), there remains a theory-practice disconnect in burnout research. Current findings provide limited actionable insights for policymakers and institutional leaders, particularly regarding how self-efficacy assessments and coping interventions can be integrated into teacher support systems. Without robust, context-specific empirical evidence, policies aimed at reducing burnout risk fail to address its underlying psychological mechanisms (Ministry of Education of China, 2022).

To bridge these gaps, this study constructs a dual-path burnout model within Bandura's triadic reciprocal framework, examining how self-efficacy and coping strategies contribute to burnout among higher vocational college teachers in China. Specifically, it investigates:

The mediating role of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in the relationship between self-efficacy and job burnout.

The moderating effect of coping strategies (adaptive vs. maladaptive) on the self-efficacy–burnout relationship and their differential impact based on teaching experience.

The influence of institutional type, professional title, and teaching experience on variations in burnout and coping strategy effectiveness.

This research contributes to the theoretical development of burnout studies by integrating cognition and behaviour within a vocational education context. It also provides empirical evidence to inform interventions aimed at fostering teacher resilience and sustaining workforce well-being in China's evolving vocational education system.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Job Burnout in Vocational Education

Job burnout has emerged as a critical concern in vocational education, particularly among teachers who must navigate both pedagogical and industry-related responsibilities. Maslach and Jackson's (1981) three-dimensional model, which defines burnout through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, has served as the cornerstone for burnout research. Subsequent studies, such as those by Maslach and Leiter (2016), have expanded upon this framework, emphasizing the contextual factors that exacerbate burnout among educators.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provides an alternative theoretical lens for understanding burnout by focusing on the reciprocal interactions between cognition, behaviour, and the environment (Bandura, 1997). Within this framework, self-efficacy—the belief in one's ability to manage job-related demands—plays a crucial role in shaping coping strategies, which in turn influence burnout outcomes. While traditional burnout models emphasize

external stressors such as workload and institutional support (Wang et al., 2022), SCT highlights the cognitive and behavioural mechanisms that mediate individuals' responses to stress.

In China's vocational education system, teachers assigned "Dual-Professional" roles—balancing teaching with corporate practice—face distinct stressors that may influence burnout pathways differently from those of university teachers (Chen et al., 2023). Unlike their Western counterparts, Chinese vocational teachers encounter structural pressures, including mandatory corporate secondment and industry-academia integration, which may shape their coping strategies in unique ways (Li et al., 2023). Thus, integrating SCT with burnout theory offers a more comprehensive approach to understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying burnout in this population.

Burnout Antecedents in the Chinese Vocational Education Context

The rapid expansion of China's vocational education sector has introduced several new sources of stress for teachers. A large-scale national survey by Chen et al. (2022) identified three primary stressors: (1) corporate secondment requirements, with 68% of respondents reporting skill mismatches; (2) increased workload due to outcome-based funding models, which raised weekly working hours by an average of 14.7 hours; and (3) digital teaching competency requirements, with 62% of teachers feeling inadequately trained. These systemic pressures necessitate an adaptation of traditional burnout models to account for the distinct challenges faced by vocational educators.

Additionally, cultural differences may influence how burnout develops in Chinese vocational teachers. While a meta-analysis by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2020) reported a mean correlation of $r = -0.43$ between self-efficacy and burnout in Western contexts ($k = 127$ studies), studies conducted in Asian settings have demonstrated stronger effects ($r = -0.51$, $k = 28$) (Kim & Cho, 2021). This discrepancy may reflect the collectivist emphasis on professional role obligations in China. Moreover, the national Dual-Teacher Dual-Certificate policy (MOE, 2022) mandates that vocational teachers obtain both teaching and industry qualifications, further intensifying their professional burden. These factors underscore the need for a localized investigation of burnout mechanisms in Chinese vocational education.

Self-Efficacy, Coping Strategies, and Job Burnout

Self-efficacy has been consistently identified as a key predictor of job burnout. Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2010) meta-analysis confirmed a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and burnout ($r = -0.43$, $p < 0.001$), particularly in the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. This relationship is especially pronounced among teachers, whose roles demand high levels of emotional engagement and self-regulation (Zhang et al., 2021).

Coping strategies further shape the impact of self-efficacy on burnout. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) classified coping mechanisms into two broad categories: adaptive (e.g., problem-solving, seeking social support) and maladaptive (e.g., avoidance, emotional suppression). Empirical studies have demonstrated that adaptive coping strategies mitigate the negative impact of low self-efficacy on burnout ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < 0.01$), whereas maladaptive strategies exacerbate it ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$) (Shin et al., 2014). Given that vocational teachers in China must frequently transition between academic and industry settings, their coping strategies may differ significantly from those of traditional university faculty, warranting further investigation.

Moreover, individual and institutional factors may moderate the relationship between self-efficacy, coping strategies, and burnout. For instance, experienced teachers (≥ 10 years) are often more vulnerable to maladaptive coping due to accumulated role conflicts inherent in Dual-Professional responsibilities (Chen et al., 2023). Similarly, educators in STEM-focused vocational institutions experience heightened burnout risks due to the pressures of integrating academic instruction with rapidly evolving industry demands (Li et al., 2023). These findings suggest that self-efficacy and coping strategies interact within a complex framework influenced by professional experience and institutional context.

IV. METHOD

This study adopts Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory as its guiding framework and employs a cross-sectional quantitative research design integrated with Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to examine the mechanisms underlying job burnout among higher vocational college teachers. Specifically, the study explores the mediating role of coping strategies in the relationship between self-efficacy and job burnout, aiming to elucidate the interplay between cognitive and behavioural processes.

The SEM approach was selected due to its ability to simultaneously analyse latent and observed variables while testing complex mediation effects. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered between September and December 2024, targeting vocational educators in Jiangsu Province. The robustness of mediation effects was verified using the bias-corrected Bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples.

The study employed stratified random sampling to select 12 higher vocational colleges across Jiangsu Province. The sample included both public and private institutions, ensuring diversity in terms of institutional type and levels of industry-academia collaboration. Faculty roles within the sample encompassed specialized course teachers, general course teachers, and administrative staff. A total of 1,000 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 862 valid responses, resulting in a validity rate of 86.2%. The demographic characteristics of the sample are detailed in Table 1.

TABLE I. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE (N=862)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	457	53.1
	Female	405	46.9
Teaching Experience	<5 years	252	29.3
	5–10 years	299	34.7
	>10 years	311	36.0
Professional Title	Junior Lecturer	271	31.5
	Associate Professor	407	47.2
	Senior Professor	184	21.3

Self-efficacy was measured using the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) developed by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010). This instrument assesses confidence in classroom management, instructional strategy design, and student engagement facilitation. To ensure cultural relevance, selected items were adapted to reflect the context of vocational education in China.

The adaptation process involved a content validity review by five vocational education experts, yielding a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.92. A pilot study with 30 teachers resulted in minor item refinements, achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85. The final 12-item scale, employing a five-point Likert scale, demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89) and construct validity, as confirmed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (CFI = 0.936, RMSEA = 0.042).

TABLE II. TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY SCALE (TSES)

Dimension	Item No.	Item Content (English Translation)
Classroom Management	TSES1	I can effectively address disruptive behaviours in the classroom.
	TSES2	I can resolve student conflicts or disputes promptly.
	TSES3	I can maintain classroom discipline without compromising teaching progress.
	TSES4	I can prevent students from engaging in disruptive behaviours.
Instructional Strategies	TSES5	I can adapt my teaching plans based on student feedback.
	TSES6	I can design diverse learning activities to accommodate varied student needs.
	TSES7	I can flexibly employ multiple teaching methods to enhance instructional effectiveness.
	TSES8	I can clearly explain complex subject matter.
Student Engagement	TSES9	I can motivate students to actively participate in classroom discussions.
	TSES10	I can help students develop interest in the subject.
	TSES11	I can re-engage distracted students in classroom activities.
	TSES12	I can facilitate collaborative learning among students.

Source: Adapted from Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2010)

Job burnout was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), which comprises three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Given the specific demands of vocational education, linguistic modifications were made to enhance clarity and contextual alignment.

In this study, the reduced personal accomplishment dimension was excluded due to its weak correlation with burnout in vocational education settings. The final 14-item scale employed a seven-point Likert format, demonstrating strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.82 to 0.91) and good model fit (CFA: CFI = 0.928, RMSEA = 0.046).

Table III. Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES)

Dimension	Item No	Item Content (English Translation)
Emotional Exhaustion	MBI1	I feel emotionally drained at the end of each workday.
	MBI2	I feel fatigued at the thought of work when I wake up in the morning.
	MBI3	My job makes me feel emotionally depleted.
	MBI4	I feel unable to cope with additional work-related stress.
	MBI5	My work leaves me physically and mentally exhausted.
Depersonalization	MBI6	I have grown increasingly indifferent to students' personal issues.
	MBI7	I lack patience when addressing students' concerns.
	MBI8	I interact with students in a detached, mechanical manner.
	MBI9	I believe students should resolve their own problems without my intervention.
	MBI10	I doubt the value of my professional contributions.
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	MBI11	I feel my influence on students is limited.
	MBI12	I perceive a lack of recognition for my work achievements.
	MBI13	I feel pessimistic about my career advancement prospects.

Source: Maslach & Jackson (1981)

Coping strategies were measured using the Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997), which differentiates between adaptive coping (e.g., active coping, positive reframing) and maladaptive coping (e.g., avoidance, denial). To enhance cultural relevance, minor adjustments were made, such as replacing references to alcohol use with general references to unhealthy coping mechanisms.

The final 28-item scale, employing a four-point Likert scale, demonstrated strong reliability for adaptive coping (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81) and maladaptive coping (Cronbach's alpha = 0.76). Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed an adequate model fit (CFI = 0.912, RMSEA = 0.051).

Table IV. Brief COPE Inventory (Coping Strategies)

Strategy Type	Item No	Item Content (English Translation)
Positive Coping	COPE1	I develop step-by-step plans to resolve problems.
	COPE2	I seek help from colleagues or friends.
	COPE3	I analyse the causes of problems and take action.

Strategy Type	Item No	Item Content (English Translation)
Negative Coping	COPE4	I alleviate stress through exercise or hobbies.
	COPE5	I reframe my mindset to face challenges positively.
	COPE6	I use avoidance to relieve stress.
	COPE7	I overeat or consume alcohol to distract myself from stress.
	COPE8	I blame others or external circumstances for problems.
	COPE9	I avoid communicating with relevant parties.
	COPE10	I escape problems by sleeping excessively.

Source: Adapted from Carver (1997)

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire survey administered between September and December 2024. The survey was distributed to teachers in higher vocational colleges across Jiangsu Province, targeting diverse faculty roles, including specialized and general course instructors as well as administrative staff. To enhance response rates and ensure data reliability, both online and paper-based questionnaires were utilized. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured to encourage candid responses. Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was secured from all participants. The finalized dataset comprised 862 valid responses, reflecting an overall response rate of 86.2%.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted using Mplus 8.3 to test the hypothesized relationships. Mediation and moderation effects were analysed using the bias-corrected Bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples. Model fit was assessed through multiple fit indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

Control variables such as professional title, teaching experience, and faculty role were included in the analysis. Cross-group comparisons were performed to examine potential variations across different teacher subgroups. Demographic moderation effects were explored to assess whether professional experience influenced the coping–burnout relationship. The results of these analyses are presented in the following section.

V. FINDINGS

The Effect of Self-Efficacy on Job Burnout

The findings indicate that self-efficacy significantly predicted job burnout ($\beta = -0.33$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 31.7% of the total variance ($R^2 = 0.317$). Higher self-efficacy was associated with lower levels of job burnout, aligning with Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the role of cognitive and behavioural mechanisms in shaping psychological outcomes.

Mediating Role of Coping Strategies

Coping strategies played a significant mediating role in the relationship between self-efficacy and job burnout. The total indirect effect of self-efficacy on job burnout via coping strategies was -0.19 (95% CI $[-0.25, -0.14]$), confirming partial mediation. Emotional exhaustion significantly mediated this relationship ($\beta = -0.28$, 95% CI $[-0.35, -0.21]$), contributing 53.1% of the total mediation effect. Similarly, depersonalization also served as a mediator ($\beta = -0.19$, 95% CI $[-0.25, -0.13]$), accounting for 46.9% of the mediation effect. Mediation effects accounted for 38.2% of the total effect. These findings suggest that self-efficacy primarily reduces burnout through its influence on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, highlighting the importance of psychological resilience in mitigating stressors.

Moderating Effects of Coping Strategies

The moderating effects of coping strategies exhibited significant variations. Adaptive coping strategies significantly alleviated burnout among teachers with high self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < 0.05$). In contrast, maladaptive coping strategies exacerbated the adverse effects of low self-efficacy on burnout ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$). This negative impact intensified by 38.6% ($\Delta\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.05$) among teachers with more than 10 years of experience, indicating that experienced teachers relying on maladaptive coping strategies faced heightened burnout risks.

Cross-Group Comparisons by Institutional and Teaching Background

Significant differences were observed across institutional types and teaching experience levels. In terms of institution type, STEM-focused teachers exhibited 0.14 standard deviations higher maladaptive coping coefficients than their counterparts in comprehensive colleges ($\Delta\chi^2 = 9.47$, $p < 0.01$), likely due to industry-academia integration pressures. Conversely, arts-focused teachers demonstrated stronger buffering effects of adaptive coping ($\beta = -0.21$ vs. $\beta = -0.15$).

Regarding teaching experience, junior teachers with less than five years of experience experienced a stronger total effect of self-efficacy on burnout ($\beta = -0.48$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting they rely more on psychological resources tied to self-efficacy. In contrast, senior teachers with ten or more years of experience exhibited an increased mediation effect of maladaptive coping (42.1%, $\Delta\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that behavioural strategy choices play a greater role in explaining burnout risk among experienced educators.

Cross-group analyses revealed significant heterogeneity in path coefficients across institution types and teaching experience groups (Table V):

Table V. Moderating Effects of Teaching Experience and Institution Type on Path Coefficients

Group Variable	Path	β	95% CI	p-value
Teaching Experience <5 years	Self-efficacy $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout	-0.48	[-0.57, -0.39]	<0.001
Teaching Experience $\geq$ 10 years	Negative Coping $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout	0.23	[0.15, 0.31]	<0.001
Polytechnic Institutions	Negative Coping $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout	0.19	[0.10, 0.28]	0.002
Art Colleges	Positive Coping $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout	-0.21	[-0.30, -0.12]	<0.001

Model Fit and Control Variable Effects

The final model demonstrated excellent fit indices (CFI = 0.937, TLI = 0.924, RMSEA = 0.043), confirming the robustness of the findings. Analysis of control variables revealed that professional title independently predicted burnout ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$), with senior titles associated with a 38% higher burnout risk (OR = 1.38, 95% CI [1.05, 1.81]). However, gender ($\beta = 0.04$, $p = 0.213$) and teaching experience ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.102$) showed no significant direct effects.

The study validated the dual-pathway mechanism of "Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Coping Strategies $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout," explaining 46.3% of burnout variance. The standardized direct-to-indirect effect ratio of 1:0.58 confirmed the partial mediation role of coping strategies, reinforcing the importance of promoting adaptive coping mechanisms to mitigate burnout risks in higher vocational education settings.

VI. DISCUSSION

Integrating Social Cognitive Theory and the Three-Dimensional Model of Job Burnout

This study integrates Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) with the three-dimensional model of job burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) to validate, for the first time in the context of Chinese vocational education, the complete "cognitive appraisal $\rightarrow$ behavioural choice $\rightarrow$ psychological outcome" pathway. Specifically, self-efficacy, as a core cognitive variable, significantly influences job burnout (psychological outcome) through the mediating role of coping strategies (behavioural choice). This finding supports Bandura's triadic reciprocal determinism (individual-behaviour-environment) and provides insights into the dynamic interaction between cognitive and behavioural mechanisms. Teachers with low self-efficacy were more likely to adopt negative coping strategies, such as avoidance and emotional suppression, which in turn exacerbated job burnout. These results challenge traditional paradigms that treat cognitive and behavioural factors in burnout research as independent variables (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), instead presenting an interactional framework that advances the understanding of teacher burnout in vocational education.

The Role of Teaching Experience and Institutional Environment in Burnout

This study extends burnout research by incorporating moderation effects of teaching experience and institution type. The findings revealed that senior teachers (those with extensive teaching experience) experienced significantly stronger adverse effects of maladaptive coping strategies on burnout than junior teachers. This pattern suggests that prolonged exposure to role conflicts in the "Dual-Professional" model, where teachers are required to balance teaching and corporate practice, leads to chronic resource depletion (Hobfoll, 1989), thereby reducing their psychological resilience. Moreover, STEM-focused vocational institutions exhibited a greater reliance on maladaptive coping strategies, likely due to industry-academia integration pressures. These findings suggest that burnout mechanisms are neither static nor universal but are instead shaped by career development stages and institutional demands.

Cultural Considerations in Burnout Pathways

This study highlights cultural specificity in burnout pathways among Chinese vocational teachers. The Dual-Professional role requires teachers to balance both academic teaching and corporate practice, leading to intensified role conflicts. The findings indicate that such role conflicts increase reliance on maladaptive coping strategies compared to Western counterparts (Shin et al., 2014), with the adverse impact compounding over time. These results challenge the Western assumption that "maladaptive coping primarily correlates with short-term stress" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), instead demonstrating its long-term psychological costs in China's vocational education system.

Furthermore, within China's collectivist cultural context (Hofstede, 2011), teachers tend to avoid seeking public assistance due to social norms surrounding "face" (miànzi) (Chen & Wang, 2022). While adaptive coping strategies (e.g., seeking social support) are theoretically effective, their actual impact in this study was significantly weaker than that observed in Western samples. Qualitative research suggests that face-saving concerns and hierarchical workplace structures discourage teachers from seeking help (Chen et al., 2023). Therefore, intervention programs should prioritize privacy protection and non-judgmental support environments, such as offering anonymous online psychological counselling services to encourage help-seeking behaviour without fear of social stigma.

Implications for Teacher Well-Being and Institutional Interventions

Given the study's findings, higher vocational institutions should adopt a dual-track intervention

mechanism focused on self-efficacy enhancement and coping strategy training to mitigate teacher burnout. Newly hired teachers, who demonstrated a stronger susceptibility to burnout due to self-efficacy fluctuations, would benefit from structured professional development programs. Institutions should strengthen core teaching competencies through micro-teaching simulations, mentorship programs, and reflective teaching journals. Additionally, annual self-efficacy assessments should be integrated into teacher evaluations, with performance-based incentives for teachers demonstrating strong self-efficacy. At the policy level, provincial education authorities could establish tiered benchmarks to inform promotion criteria and professional development pathways.

For senior teachers, targeted interventions should focus on mitigating maladaptive coping behaviours by incorporating "role conflict management" workshops, addressing stressors related to corporate practice and teaching responsibilities. STEM-focused institutions should establish corporate mentor partnerships and task decomposition tools to alleviate role conflicts, while arts-focused institutions could promote collaborative team projects and creative problem-solving exercises to reinforce adaptive coping strategies.

At the institutional level, schools should implement mental health monitoring systems to identify high-risk groups, such as teachers with senior professional titles, who showed increased burnout vulnerability. At the policy level, legislative efforts such as a Vocational Education Teacher Mental Health Promotion Act could clarify institutional responsibilities for psychological support and formalize teacher well-being initiatives.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the crucial role of self-efficacy and coping strategies in shaping burnout experiences among Chinese higher vocational teachers. The findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions at different career stages, where self-efficacy enhancement is critical for junior teachers, and coping strategy training is essential for senior teachers dealing with role conflicts. Institutional and policy-level interventions, such as psychological support platforms and mental health legislation, are necessary to create a sustainable teaching environment. While this study provides valuable insights, future research should adopt longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships, expand sample diversity to central and western provinces, and employ mixed-methods approaches for a deeper exploration of burnout mechanisms. Ultimately, teacher mental health management is not only pivotal for individual well-being but also a strategic necessity for the high-quality development of vocational education. By embedding psychological capital cultivation into teacher professional development, institutions can foster a resilient teaching

workforce, contributing to national educational reforms and global research on vocational teacher well-being.

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