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Role of Self-Efficacy and Belongingness in Mitigating Teacher Burnout: Evidence from Shandong Province Private Universities

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Abstract. Guided by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, Social Cognitive Theory, and Social Support Theory, this study investigates how teacher self-efficacy and sense of belonging associated with occupational burnout among faculty in private universities in Shandong Province, China. A cross-sectional survey was carried out for 250 full and part-time instructors across several private universities. Data were collected using adapted versions of the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, and the Maslach

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Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey. The data was analyzed through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression in SPSS. Measures captured levels of self-efficacy, belongingness, and burnout to test their relationships. Results revealed a positive association between teacher self-efficacy and sense of belonging, and both were significantly and negatively related to burnout. Personal and social resources are associated with teacher burnout, underscoring their synergistic role. Together, these findings highlight the importance of integrating individual psychological resources and social-contextual factors when examining faculty well-being. The findings enrich theoretical models of faculty well-being and offer practical guidance for interventions that strengthen self-efficacy and belongingness to enhance retention in the growing private higher-education sector.

Keywords: Belongingness; well-being; educational governance; self-efficacy; teacher attrition; teacher burnout

1. Background

Faculty burnout has become a pervasive global issue in the higher education context, with its dimensions manifesting as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional achievement. Among faculty members in private universities, specific unfavorable working conditions, such as unwarranted employment conditions, excessive workloads, and lack of institutional support (Wei et al., 2025), represent widespread structural stressors that have disproportionately adverse effects on them. These issues also loom large in China's surging private higher education sector, in which market-led governance frequently contributes to these stressors experienced by the teaching staff (Cao et al., 2025).

What has long been known from research conducted around the world concerning teacher burnout has not been well applied to the work context of faculty in Chinese private colleges and universities. Private-sector faculty members' work situations are very underrepresented in prior empirical research on teacher burnout (Eren et al., 2025; Barjesteh et al., 2025). Most of the existing research comes from public universities or K-12 settings, which enjoy more stable work environments and far greater levels of support. By contrast, private faculty are more burdened by uncertain work contracts, heavier work duties and unequal access to professional development, and yet empirical research on their well-being is very sparse (Gebresilase et al., 2025; Agyapong et al., 2022).

Besides, lacking contextual specificity, studies mostly adopt Western-centric models of burnout neglecting a critical assessment of culturally embedded dynamics in play such as how collectivist values are associated with institutional belonging and relational well-being. In places such as Shandong, where the private university sector is burgeoning and yet loosely regulated, such cultural and institutional specificity deserves foregrounded research (Xu & Jia, 2022). The study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on a hitherto neglected population of private university faculty in Shandong, China.

In China, the development of private universities has led to extensive research being done on the faculty's mental health. Comparative studies have suggested that private university teachers present higher levels of burnout than public university teachers, largely owing to their lack of decision-making power and institutional recognition (Dinibutun et al., 2020). In such contexts, personal and social resources such as self-efficacy and belongingness have been considered as protective factors (Rasool et al., 2024). While self-efficacy and belongingness both independently predict burnout and their relationship remains underexplored in private universities in Shandong Province.

Faculty members in China's private universities remain a relatively unexplored demographic. Meta-analyses consistently show that educators in the Chinese education system score among the world's highest on measures of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Sun & Yin, 2025). Faculty members from privately funded institutions are disproportionately affected, citing regulatory pressure, unsatisfactory career progression and institutional neglect to deliver industry-standard teaching as primary causes for burnout (Pakdee et al., 2025).

Moreover, most past studies focused on K-12 or public university teachers, ignoring the unique precarity for faculty in the private sector. This study attempts to fill these gaps by examining the correlation between self-efficacy and belongingness among private university faculty of Shandong Province. The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the relationship between self-efficacy and occupational burnout among teachers in private universities?
2. What is the relationship between belongingness and occupational burnout among teachers in private universities?
3. What is the correlation between self-efficacy and belongingness?

1.1 Research Hypotheses

H1: Self-efficacy is negatively correlated with teacher burnout. The higher self-efficacy, the lower the teacher's burnout level.

H2: A sense of belonging is negatively correlated with teacher burnout. The higher the sense of belonging, the lower the teacher's burnout level.

H3: Self-efficacy is positively correlated with a sense of belonging. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to feel a strong sense of belonging.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Teacher Burnout in Higher Education

Teacher burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment as described by Maslach & Jackson (1981) in their Burnout Inventory, is a long-researched topic, primarily in the context of K-12 education and certain healthcare professions; yet, it is a newly-recognized and troubling phenomenon within the world of higher education, especially for faculty in under-resourced private institutions Hussein, et al. (2024). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model by Demerouti et al. (2001) conceptualizes burnout as the result of a mismatch between job demands and job resources.

Studies from Australia and the U.S. point to how institutional stressors, from performance scores to administrative workloads, contribute to high levels of turnover intentions and declining teacher well-being (Taddese et al., 2025). In these cases, faculty in private HEIs are vulnerable because they are not only denied public funding (as in Australia and the United States) but also because of heavier teaching load, sometimes alongside limited research incentives, and precarious contracts which leave them vulnerable to emotional and professional exhaustion (Wei et al., 2025).

2.2 Self-Efficacy and Burnout: A Psychological Resource

Derived from Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is a widely used construct which refers to individuals' beliefs in their ability to perform specific tasks successfully. In school settings, teachers' self-efficacy levels contribute to better instruction-related behaviors as well as emotional control and persistence (Eren et al., 2025). Several studies have consistently demonstrated that these attributes of self-efficacy are associated with lower levels of burnout. Such protective characteristics include better control of emotions, active coping and endurance as well as less fear of negative consequences (Doménech et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2023).

In China, university faculty with strong self-efficacy report higher levels of professional engagement and lower levels of emotional exhaustion (Xu & Jia, 2022). Moreover, institutional cultures, particularly leadership style and collegial trust, appear to moderate the development of such efficacy beliefs [9]. However, private universities, as a rule, are deficient in such supportive institutional cultures. In the private colleges and universities of Shandong Province, for example, teachers are reported to experience high levels of job stress for the same reasons (Zhu et al., 2020). Thus, personal resources such as self-efficacy become extremely important for prevention of burnout.

2.3 Belongingness in Academic Workplaces

Belongingness, defined here as the felt perception that one is an accepted and valued member of one's community, is increasingly being recognized as fundamental to faculty wellbeing (Allen et al., 2024; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Among faculty in higher education, it is typically associated with collegiality, institutional acknowledgement, and shared governance (Wilson et al., 2025). Feelings of inclusion, respect and support by peers have also been linked to both greater job satisfaction and less burnout (Fenizia & Parrello, 2025).

The JD-R model posits that belongingness serves as a social resource to buffer job demands and enhance motivation and emotional regulation (Acoba, 2024; Garmendia et al., 2023). In China, the collectivist social cultural norm of harmony and interpersonal interdependence highlights the unique power of sense of belonging to an institution in shaping faculty morale (Pei et al., 2022); nevertheless, the organizational structure of private universities tends to reduce faculty members' access to participation in decision-making, contributing to a sense of alienation and psychological withdrawal (Srinivasan et al., 2024; Coşkun et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This research draws on Social Cognitive Theory, Social Support Theory, and Burnout Theory that together account for the ways in which social and personal resources shape teachers' vulnerability to occupational burnout.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) lays the foundation for understanding self-efficacy as a personal resource. Bandura's principle of *reciprocal determinism* expounds that an individual's belief in their "capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1977), determines their response to demanding work environments. In education contexts, teaching self-efficacy determines acts of emotional resilience, choices regarding instruction, and the ability to problem-solve (Yang & Zhou, 2025; Shengyao et al., 2024). Faculty with higher sense of self-efficacy manage job stress better, invest greater efforts in student engagement, and bounce back from job frustrations, which is especially significant in the context of private universities in China as faculty work under high pressure and low job autonomy and thus teachers' sense of professional competence becomes an important protective factor against burnout (Ooi et al., 2025; Xu & Jia, 2022).

Complementing this personal resource perspective is belongingness, a social resource explained by Social Support Theory (Cao & Zhang, 2022). In the cross-sectional design of this study, belongingness is examined as the perceived care, esteem, and inclusion that are associated with reduced psychological stress. This perception is related to individuals' sense of inclusion and esteem, and the relationship observed reflects concurrent associations rather than causal effects. A strong sense of belongingness is positively associated with individuals' perceptions of acceptance, esteem, care, and regard, and is related to better general mental health, even in the presence of stressors such as loss (Shin & Park, 2022). In the academic workplace, collegial respect, participatory governance, and mentorship can help lessen emotional exhaustion, increase job satisfaction, and develop professional identity (Allen et al., 2024). These effects are pronounced in cultural settings such as China, where aspects of relational harmony and group affiliation are central to occupational well-being (Pei et al., 2022).

Burnout Theory by Freudenberger & Richelson (1980) integrates these resource-based explanations by clarifying the outcomes. Burnout, consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lower personal accomplishment Maslach et al. (1997), emerges when an individual's resources fall short of job demands. By drawing on this theoretical framework, the study situates self-efficacy and belongingness as two important resources that work together to reduce teacher burnout, acknowledging that burnout is not solely caused by individual or organizational traits but by the interdependent interplay between teachers' internal beliefs and their socio-institutional environment.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The study follows the following conceptual map for the research:

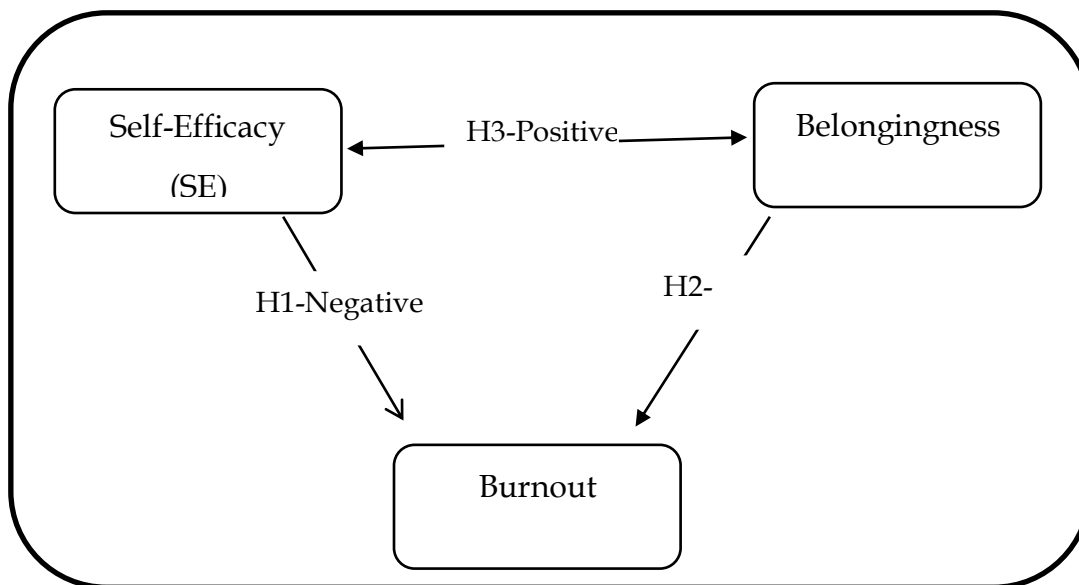


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

As shown in Figure 1, self-efficacy and belongingness are the independent variables that are hypothesized to correlate with the Burnout levels negatively. Furthermore, the independent variables are expected to be positively correlated with each other.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research was a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design with an aim to examine the correlation of teacher self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and occupational burnout among instructors at private colleges in Shandong Province, China. The study population included full-time and part-time teaching staff working in various private colleges and universities, including those that are attached to state-owned institutions and separately opened universities. Teachers from varied subject areas and grades were selected to obtain a large-scale institution representation.

3.2 Sample and Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling method was first used to select 20 private universities in the Shandong Province; later, simple random sampling was employed within each selected university to determine participants. The selected participants were invited to join WeChat platform, with a final sample of 250 participants. G*Power 3.1 was used to determine the sample size for Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses, with consideration for a medium effect size and an alpha level of 0.05. Table 1 shows the gender distribution of participants, Table 2 presents the age distribution of participants, Table 3 shows academic rank of

participants, and Table 4 presents departmental affiliation of participants. Figure 2 illustrates the length of their employment tenure within their respective universities.

Table 1: Gender Distribution

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Female	140	56.0
	Male	110	44.0
	Total	250	100.0

The descriptive analysis of the demographic data showed that the majority participants were female and between ages of 31-35 years (20%).

Table 2: Age Distribution

Age	Frequency	Percent
25-30	39	15.6
31-35	50	20.0
36-40	46	18.4
41-45	35	14.0
46-50	37	14.8
51-55	30	12.0
>55	13	
Total	250	100.0

The participants belonged to various departments and held varied ranks within their respective institutions, with the majority (40.8%) working as Lecturers.

Table 3: Rank Distribution

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Associate	44	17.6
	Adjunct	20	8.0
	Assistant	26	10.4
	Lecturer	102	40.8
	Professor	58	23.2
	Total	250	100.0

Table 4: Department Distribution

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Arts & Design	30	12.0
	Business	30	12.0
	Education	36	14.4
	Engineering	37	14.8

Humanities	36	14.4
Natural Sciences	40	16.0
Social Sciences	41	16.4
Total	250	100.0

Moreover, the majority participants marked that they had teaching experience of 4-6 years in the current university (24%).

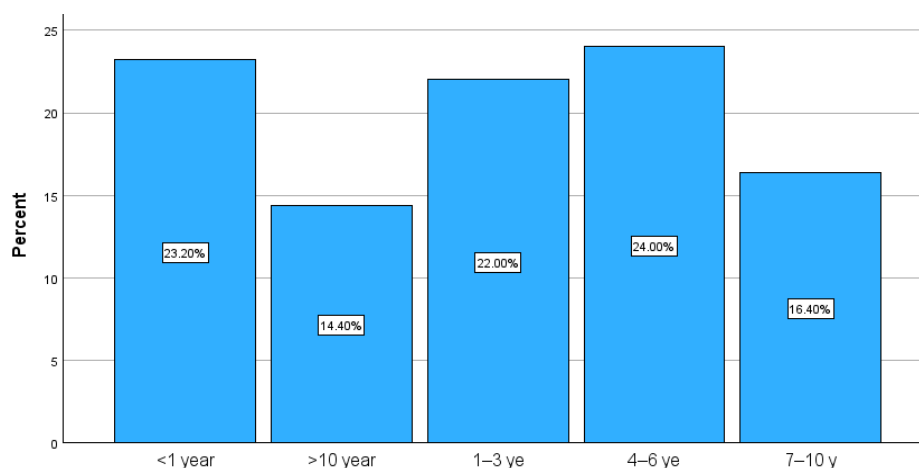


Figure 2: Employment Period in Current University

3.3 Research Instrument and Data Collection

The questionnaire for this study was adapted from three established and psychometrically validated scales. First was a 5-item version of Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale that intended to measure self-efficacy, assessing confidence in instructional capability and classroom management Tsai et al. (2014). The items target reflecting instructional confidence and classroom management. Second, five items were adapted from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support to assess the sense of belonging, specifically perceived emotional support and the sense of connectedness at institution (Zimet et al., 1988). The items were reframed to capture institutional connectedness rather than general social support. Third, a 10-item version of Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey was adapted in order to measure burnout in three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All items were measured on 5- to 9-point Likert scales, consistent with the original form of the scales.

The scales were administered to participants in their original English version via WeChat, keeping in view the participants' routine use of English in academic work, research activities, and organizational communication modes. However, all the mentioned scales were culturally adapted through expert review to ensure adherence to the Chinese context. Three experts reviewed the items to confirm that the items were conceptually and contextually relevant. Additionally, a pilot study with 10 faculty members further confirmed that the items were clearly understood. Table 5 and Table 6 presents information related pilot study and instrument reliability

Table 5: Reliability Analysis

Subscale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Self-Efficacy	.992	5
Belongingness	.986	5
Burnout	.987	10

The reliability coefficients were extremely high for all subscales, indicating strong internal consistency. However, such elevated values may also reflect substantial conceptual overlap among items. While this supports internal reliability, it may also reduce discriminant validity among constructs and suggests that the measures capture closely related dimensions. This issue is considered in interpreting subsequent correlation and regression analyses.

Table 6: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.755
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1729.185
	df	3
	Sig.	<.001

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.755 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1729.19$, $p < .001$), confirming sampling adequacy and factorability.

3.4 Descriptive Statistics and Normality

Descriptive analysis indicated that all values in skewness are close to zero which indicates that all variables' distribution is nearly symmetrical with slight rightward skew. Similarly, the negative kurtosis values show that the data does not have outliers, and the distributions are platykurtic, meaning that flatter than normal. For Self-Efficacy, the mean was 4.58 while *SD* was 2.66; the minimum and maximum values were between 1 and 9. For Sense of Belonging, *M* was 2.82 while *SD* was 1.50; the minimum and maximum values lay between 1 and 5. In Teacher Burnout dimensions, Emotional Exhaustion had the value of *M* = 2.85, *SD* = 1.87, Personal Accomplishment scored *M* = 2.88, *SD* = 2.00, while Depersonalization was ranked as *M* = 3.03, *SD* = 1.94.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research is conducted with a strong commitment to upholding the highest ethical standards and safeguarding the rights and well-being of all participants. All data was collected anonymously through self-administered online questionnaires. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality of responses was assured. Informed consent was also taken upon survey submission. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage if they wanted to do so (Zimet et al., 1988;

Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, participation was entirely voluntary, and care was taken to safeguard the participants' rights. The study did not pose any apparent risks to the participants. In all reports or publications, data is anonymized to protect the confidentiality of personally identifiable information. Moreover, this research was conducted following the ethical clearance obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of INTI International University on 16 July 2025 (Ref. No. IIU-39-580-25).

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS 29.0. Descriptive statistics were used to assess the distributions, meaning, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis, and normality of variables. Pearson correlation analyses tested bivariate relationships among self-efficacy, belongingness, and burnout. Multiple linear regression was then used to examine the predictive effects of self-efficacy and belongingness on burnout. The model reported the overall explanatory power (R^2) along with the standardized regression coefficients (β) and significance levels (p). All of the major assumptions of the multiple regression analysis were interpreted before the actual regression was conducted.

A variance inflation factor (VIF) and Tolerance were used to evaluate whether or not there was multicollinearity in the data set. The normality of the residuals was evaluated using standard residual histograms and the Shapiro-Wilk normality test. The linearity of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and the homoscedasticity were evaluated by using the scatterplot of the standardized residuals against the predicted values. As all assumptions were satisfied, the data set was considered viable for conducting a Multiple Regression analysis. Multicollinearity diagnostics were examined using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance statistics. The results indicated very high VIF values, reflecting substantial overlap between self-efficacy and belongingness. Therefore, regression coefficients were interpreted with caution.

4. Findings

4.1 Effect of self-efficacy on the occupational burnout of teachers in private universities

H1: Self-Efficacy and Teacher Burnout

There was a strong, negative correlation between self-efficacy and burnout ($r = -.979, p < .001$) as presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Self-Efficacy & Teacher Burnout Correlation

		Self-Efficacy	Teacher Burnout
Self-Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	1	-.979**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	250	250
Teacher Burnout	Pearson Correlation	-.979**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	250	250

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

This result confirmed that higher self-efficacy is associated with lower burnout levels in teachers.

4.2 Belongingness and Burnout (H2)

Sense of belonging also showed a strong negative correlation with burnout ($r = -.970, p < .001$) as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Sense of Belonging & Teacher Burnout Correlation

		Teacher Burnout	Sense of Belonging
Teacher Burnout	Pearson Correlation	1	-.970**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	250	250
Sense of Belonging	Pearson Correlation	-.970**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	250	250

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

The results indicate that faculty with greater belongingness report lower burnout.

4.3 Self-Efficacy and Belongingness (H3)

The correlation coefficient between self-efficacy and belongingness is shown to be 0.989 (Table 4.6). The relationship between self-efficacy and belongingness was strongly positive ($r = .989, p < .001$). See table 9.

Table 9: Sense of Belonging & Self-Efficacy Correlation

		Sense of Belonging	Self-Efficacy
Sense of Belonging	Pearson Correlation	1	.989**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	557.982	981.670
	Covariance	2.241	3.942
	N	250	250
Self-Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.989**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	981.670	1766.675
	Covariance	3.942	7.095
	N	250	250

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

Table 10: Sense of Belonging, Self-Efficacy & Teacher Burnout Correlation

		Sense of Belonging	Self-Efficacy	Teacher Burnout
Sense of Belonging	Pearson Correlation	1	.989**	-.970**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	557.982	981.670	695.731
	Covariance	2.241	3.942	2.794
	N	250	250	250
Self-Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.989**	1	-.979**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	981.670	1766.675	1249.579
	Covariance	3.942	7.095	5.018
	N	250	250	250
Teacher Burnout	Pearson Correlation	-.970**	-.979**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	695.731	1249.579	913.459
	Covariance	2.794	5.018	3.669
	N	250	250	250

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

Table 10 presents the correlations among self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and teacher burnout. The correlations were unusually high, with self-efficacy and belongingness strongly positively related ($r = .989$, $p < .001$), and both strongly negatively related to burnout ($r = -.970$ and $r = -.979$, $p < .001$). These results are reported descriptively, and the unusually high correlations suggest overlapping variance among constructs, which should be interpreted with caution.

4.4 Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the predictive power of self-efficacy and belongingness on teacher burnout as shown in table 11.

Table 11. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	.979 ^a	.959	.959	.37492	.959	2900.429	2	247	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Sense of Belonging, Self Efficacy

b. Dependent Variable: Burnout

The overall model was statistically significant and explained 95.9% of the variance in burnout scores ($R^2 = .959$, $F(2, 247) = 2900.43$, $p < .001$), indicating an excellent fit.

Table 12: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
		Beta				
1	(Constant)	6.235	.055		112.937	<.001
	Self-Efficacy	-.627	.060	-.904	-10.528	<.001
	Sense of Belonging	-.094	.106	-.076	-.885	.377

a. Dependent Variable: Teacher Burnout

As shown by table 12, Self-Efficacy and Sense of Belonging were negatively associated with burnout. However, only self-efficacy was a statistically significant predictor in the regression model (Beta = -0.904, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that though belongingness is associated with burnout, its predictive effect becomes non-significant when self-efficacy is accounted for.

The VIFs for self-efficacy and belongingness were both very high (44.61) and therefore exhibit severe multicollinearity and correlate strongly ($r = .989$). Consequently, because of the degree to which the variables shared variance, belongingness could not provide a unique predictive contribution to the model; however, self-efficacy and belongingness both displayed strong zero-order correlations to burnout. Thus, caution should be taken when interpreting regression results given the considerable overlap of the predictors in this sample. Regression assumptions were checked through the use of residual diagnostics.

The standardized residuals were approximately normally distributed based on the histogram and Q-Q plot; furthermore, the scatterplot of standardized residuals versus standardized predicted values showed no evidence of any particular pattern, thereby supporting the assumptions of linearity and homogeneity of variances. Standardized residuals were less than three, and no extreme outliers were found in the boxplots. The above findings provide evidence for the adequacy of the regression model used in this study. See table 13 for details.

Table 13: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	815.408	2	407.704	2900.429	<.001 ^b
	Residual	34.720	247	.141		
	Total	850.128	249			

a. Dependent Variable: Teacher Burnout

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Efficacy, Sense of Belonging

The ANOVA in table 13 tests whether the overall regression equation predicting teacher burnout using self-efficacy and sense of belonging as predictors is significant. The sum of squares regression (815.408) is the explained variation in the model, and the residual sum of squares (34.720) is the unexplained variation. The mean square for regression is 407.704, and for residuals, it is 0.141. The F -

value 2900.429 with $p < 0.001$ indicates that the model predicts Teacher Burnout significantly. This guarantees that collectively, Self-Efficacy and Sense of Belonging measure reliably a vast majority of the variance in Teacher Burnout.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Potency of Self-Efficacy

The findings confirmed that self-efficacy is the most influential psychological resource that alleviated burnout of teachers in private universities. Specifically, this variable exhibited a strong relationship with the burnout ($r = -.979$) and was proven to be a significant predictor of teacher burnout in regression analysis. The evidence supports the view of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977) which highlights that self-efficacy plays a central role in motivation, affect, and performance. Faculty teachers with higher self-efficacy are more likely to respond to challenging situations with optimism and market operation and manage to appraise stressful conditions as less threatening (Li, 2023).

This finding is also consistent with the Job Demands-Resource (JD-R) model, which identifies self-efficacy as one of the personal resources underlying the mediation mechanism between job demands and burnout. In Chinese private universities, where teachers are overworked, struggle with unclear career development paths and face insufficient research incentives (Körkkö et al., 2024), this self-efficacy offers the internal strength necessary for continued professional commitment. This is consistent with Woodcook et al.'s (2022) claim that efficacy beliefs are fundamental to alleviating emotional exhaustion and enhancing teacher well-being.

5.2 Belongingness as a Social Anchor

Belongingness did not independently predict burnout in the regression model ($p = .377$), but it demonstrated strong negative correlation with burnout ($r = -.970$) and strong positive correlation with self-efficacy ($r = .989$). These associations suggest overlapping relational resources rather than distinct independent contributions. These findings reflect Social Support Theory (Cobb, 1976), where perceived connectedness to a social environment is associated with greater emotional stability and lower vulnerability to stress.

Belongingness seems to strengthen the effect of self-efficacy rather than work independently, a relationship that has also been described by Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1986). When teachers feel included and respected at their school, they are more likely to have the confidence to persevere in meeting job demands and vice versa (Oh, 2023). Belongingness is especially relevant to faculty burnout in private universities which often exhibit hierarchical organizational structures that limit faculty involvement in decision-making and opportunities for professional growth (Li et al., 2025). However, due to the cross-sectional design and the presence of multicollinearity, the data does not permit conclusions about indirect, buffering, or reinforcing mechanisms.

When teachers feel that their presence is recognized and their work valued, they are more likely to remain emotionally engaged in their jobs when under pressure

(Holmström et al., 2023). This indicates that social support and belongingness are strongly associated with reductions in burnout, often exerting their influence through indirect relationships rather than functioning as independent direct predictors (Duru & Balkis, 2017; Park & Shin, 2020). Research within educational and organizational psychology has revealed that a sense of belonging can increase an individual's positive psychological resources (self-efficacy, emotional stability, or professional identity) and consequently decrease an individual's chances of experiencing burnout (Hunderfund et al., 2024; Bjorklund et al., 2020). The finding supports the interpretation that personal and social resources are strongly associated with lower burnout and may operate as overlapping dimensions of faculty well-being in private university contexts.

In China, as a country where collectivism places an emphasis on maintaining relationships through harmony, respect and loyalty to an organization; therefore, the concept of belonging directly correlates more uniquely to each individual's experiences via a more internalized psychological mechanism (Pei et al., 2022; Sze & Bao, 2025). The present study supports these findings and suggests that within Shandong's private universities, belongingness is most likely experienced by faculty as a social resource that is associated with higher levels of self-efficacy. Because belongingness is also related to feelings of burnout, the results illustrate that self-efficacy demonstrates a much stronger relationship with faculty burnout than belongingness, underscoring its role as the more influential protective factor. As such, educational leaders should not dismiss social immersion as secondary since it is a bedrock on which self-efficacy might flourish.

5.3 Implications

The results of this study bear several implications for institutional leadership and policy in the context of China's growing private university sector. Firstly, our findings demonstrate that higher levels of self-efficacy and belongingness are strongly associated with lower burnout among faculty in Shandong private universities. This suggests that interventions aimed at strengthening these resources can have measurable effects on reducing burnout. These suggest that interventions aimed at strengthening faculty confidence in teaching and fostering collegial connectedness with burnout levels.

Second, while belongingness did not uniquely predict burnout, its strong associations with self-efficacy and burnout highlight the importance of an inclusive institutional culture. Universities should prioritize initiatives that foster trust, collegiality, and inclusive governance, for example, weekly faculty forums for open feedback, peer mentoring programs pairing new faculty with the experienced ones, and input on curriculum decisions. An awareness of how the culture limits and enables change should also underpin interventions.

Finally, the findings demonstrate the interdependent nature of personal and social resources which suggests that integrative, two-pronged approaches toward faculty support are required. Decision makers and university leaders should develop faculty well-being intervention strategies that are both intrapersonal

(self-efficacy building) and systemic (relational belonging and recognition), like flexible workloads and recognition awards.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

The study has valuable contributions, but some limitations should also be recognized. First, a cross-sectional design prevents causal inference. While strong associations were observed in the findings, longitudinal studies are required to monitor how self-efficacy and belongingness develop over time and whether they have long-term association with burnout trajectories. Second, data were gathered solely through self-report tools, which are vulnerable to response bias. As participation relied on voluntary online responses, potential self-selection bias may limit the generalizability of findings. Future studies need to add qualitative methods, like interviews or focus groups, to investigate the subtle lived experiences of the statistical trends as well as clarify the contribution of context and identity in shaping burnout.

Third, the sample was geographically limited to Shandong Province. Future research could utilize comparative designs within multiple provinces or types of institutions (e.g., public vs. private) in order to generalize findings and isolate contextual moderators. Lastly, the extremely high correlations among constructs raise the possibility of construct overlap or common method bias. The very high internal consistency coefficients further suggest limited discriminant validity among the measured constructs. Future research should employ confirmatory factor analysis or structural equation modeling to more rigorously test construct distinctiveness.

6. Conclusion

This study advances the understanding of faculty burnout in Chinese private universities by underscoring the pivotal role of self-efficacy and the strong association of belongingness with burnout. Both self-efficacy and belongingness were significantly and negatively related to burnout, with self-efficacy emerging as the stronger predictor in the regression model. These findings suggest that faculty members who perceive themselves as capable and effective are better equipped to cope with work-related stressors, even in resource-constrained or highly competitive institutional contexts. Moreover, a strong sense of belonging appears to function as an emotional buffer that mitigates feelings of isolation and exhaustion. This highlights the importance of self-efficacy as an essential psychological resource in emotionally demanding jobs while also demonstrating that belongingness is closely linked to faculty well-being.

The study contributes theoretically, contextually, and practically by studying an underrepresented population in the burnout literature. It highlights that burnout is not simply a matter of institutional failure or individual weakness, but the result of how teachers interpret their professional competence and their sense of connectedness within the work environment. Thus, the findings suggest that educational institutions support the development of teachers' professional confidence and the cultivation of supportive academic communities where everyone truly feels they belong.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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