



Original Article

Role Conflict and Burnout among Administrators in Higher Institutions of Education in Uganda

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The purpose of this study was to find out the relationship between role conflict and burnout among administrators in higher education institutions in Uganda. There have been a number of studies on academicians in universities, but not much research has been done on administrators, especially in Uganda. The respondents included midlevel administrators such as deans, directors, heads of department, heads of sections, academic registrars, librarians, directors of services and human resource officers. This was a survey research design carried out on administrators in universities. The questionnaire, which was a combination of role conflict questions and Maslach burnout inventory, was administered to the administrators who had been randomly selected from universities. The findings indicated that role conflict was not a predictor of burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion, cynicism and professional efficacy; however, coupled with demographics, the results changed, and there was a positive significant relationship, especially with age on emotional exhaustion. It was recommended that university top administrators should be interested in the mental state of their staff because, as earlier noted, emotional exhaustion was the most significant burnout dimension predicted by role conflicts.

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INTRODUCTION

Universities are expected to operate in peaceful environments with high levels of understanding, tolerance, and compromise among administrators, other staff, and students (Duze, 2012). Administrators' workload is multifaceted, which includes handling students' concerns, dealing with fellow staff and attending to clients from the wider community. They work under high levels of work pressure, which is linked to negative health outcomes, including psychological strain and exhaustion (Sonntag & Frese, 2003). Role conflict and role overload among employed adults are connected to reduced job satisfaction and performance, as well as increased absenteeism, job turnover, depression, and burnout (Gignac et al., 2011). University staff experience work burnout, but those in administrative positions may experience higher levels of burnout due to the demands associated with leadership positions (Hambrick, Finkelstein & Money, 2005). In Uganda, higher education staff showed signs of burnout, with 60% having high levels and 38% very high levels of burnout (Kabunga, 2020)

However, despite these incidences of burnout among administrators in higher education institutions) much research on staff burnout focuses on academic staff (Rothmann & Barkhuizen, 2008; Barkhuizen, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2014; Ishaq & Mahmood, 2017), and few studies have been done on administrators (Owusu & Tawiah, 2014). If unexamined, the university administrator is therefore more vulnerable and susceptible to burnout than lecturers. Therefore, the study sought to fill the gap by examining the link between role conflict and burnout among administrators since they interact with students, staff, and the public.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role conflict is a major cause of stress in organisations including higher education institutions. This happens when an individual's capacity is hampered while trying to fulfil a number of roles (Hecht, 2001). Role conflict is associated with a range of strains and negative

outcomes (Jex & Britt, 2008). University administrators directly affect the smooth progress of various activities in the universities; however, due to the burdensome work of administrators, they are prone to fatigue. In addition, they are paid minimal wages, resulting in certain psychological gaps and, eventually, burnout (Meng, 2022)

According to Shen (2018), burnout is widespread among university administrators who are implementers of modernised management in universities. Their work includes complex work schedules, indefinite time, and high work pressure, but they have low status and treatment. El Amin (2015) says burnout is influenced by factors which include role conflict, role overload and role ambiguity.

According to Du (2020), there is a vast difference between the responsibilities of administrators and those of teachers in colleges and universities, but their wage is lower than for teachers. In addition, there are not enough opportunities for administrators in scientific research. Even when college and university administrators have put much effort into their work, they might not receive high scores or leadership appreciation upon evaluation, thus leading to job burnout as they erroneously believe that no matter how much effort they put into work, the result is the same.

According to Garcia et al. (2020), higher education is one of the areas with the highest prevalence. This has been attributed to high psychological demands, low reward rewards, mental overload, and the high demand to educate people at different stages of their vital development (Adil & Kamal, 2018)

More than half of the educators in high-income countries suffer from burnout, which has detrimental effects on educators' wellbeing and the effectiveness of higher institutions of learning (Moczydłowska, 2016). In Uganda, although suspected due to high reported levels of absenteeism, reduced productivity, poor physical and psychological health, problematic interpersonal relations, and academic staff

turnover, there is limited evidence of burnout among university academic staff (Haynes, 2014;).

According to Katsapis (2012), in a study on types of stressors self-reported by university research administrators (URAs), she found out that role ambiguity was associated with debilitating strain, while role overload was associated with mild levels of stress.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. The study sampled 99 administrators from two public universities in Uganda. From one university, there were 61 and another one, 38 administrators, and all were used in the study. The proposed area of study was purposefully selected, and this included two large public universities in the central region of Uganda. The researcher selected these specific public universities because they have a larger number of students, staff, and academic programmes. The assumption here is that more numbers mean more workload. The other reason for focusing on the public universities was for purposes of comparison between an oldest public university and a newly formed university. This was to find if there would be any differences in the roles and how they affect the administrators. Therefore, studying these

universities was done to produce generalizable results across all universities.

The respondents were selected using stratified random sampling. The questionnaire, which was a combination of role conflict and Maslach burnout inventory, was used to get responses from the administrators. Role conflict is divided into three constructs- Time-based, strain-based and Behaviour-based constructs. Burnout is divided into emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy. To address this research objective, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether role conflict constructs were significant predictors of burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy in administrators.

RESULTS

Role Conflict

The mean score for all three role conflict constructs was above the average based on the Likert scale of 1 to 2. For instance, the 1.5 mean score for time-based is above and over the average of 1-2. Strain-based and behaviour-based scored 1.8 mean and 1.85 mean respectively meaning administrators were experiencing role conflict.

Table 1: Role Conflict

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Average- time-based	99	1.5253	.50190
Average strain-based	99	1.8081	.39581
Average Behaviour	99	1.8485	.36037

Burnout

The burnout constructs were generated from a Likert scale of 1-7. Findings indicate that all three burnout constructs scored a mean that was above and over the average of 3.5 mean. For instance,

emotional exhaustion scored 3.6 mean, cynicism scored 4.01, and professional efficacy scored 3.9 mean. All three attributes had high mean scores. This meant that the respondents strongly agreed that they were experiencing burnout.

Table 2: burnout constructs

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
EE-Final	99	3.6162	.75196
Average CY scores	99	4.0808	.77823
Average scores	99	3.8687	.66465

The results of the multiple regressions were not statistically significant in the first section; R^2 was 0.077 and improved in model 2 to $R^2 = 0.114$. The relationship further drifted away from 0 with the introduction of role conflict constructs in section 2 of the model ($P=0.182$ to $P= 0.293$, respectively). Further, the results in *Table 1* demonstrated that 7.7% of the variation in emotional exhaustion of administrators is explained by demographic factors (Length of service in the university, gender of respondents, marital status of the respondents, highest level of education and age of the respondent). Coupled

with role constructs (Average- time-based, Average Behaviour and Average strain-based), in Model 2, the value for R Square increased by 0.114 (11.4 %) of the variance in emotional exhaustion at work. The implication is that role constructs contribute 3.7% of the variance in emotional exhaustion of administrators. The statistical relationship in both models was not significant, implying collectively that demographic characteristics and role constructs are not significant predictors of emotional exhaustion among non-academic administrators.

Table 3: Role Constructs as Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion among Administrators

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.277 ^a	.077	.027	.17680	.077	1.549	5	93	.182
2	.338 ^b	.114	.035	.17607	.037	1.259	3	90	.293

a. Predictors: (Constant), Length of service in the university, Age of the respondent, Gender of respondents, Marital status of the respondents, Highest level of education

b. Predictors: (Constant), Length of service in the university, Age of the respondent, Gender of respondents, Marital status of the respondents, Highest level of education, Average strain-based, Average- time-based, Average Behaviour

c. Dependent Variable: EE

The results in *Table 2* below indicate the Sig column contains the p-values for each of the independent variables. The hypothesis being tested for each is the coefficient (B) is 0 after controlling for the other variables. For example, the effects of Level of Education and Length of service in the university are removed before assessing the relationship between the contribution of other demographic characteristics and burnout. Age ($P = 0.030$) for control 1 was a significant predictor of Emotional Exhaustion among administrators. However, all the other independent variables, including the gender of respondents, marital status of the respondents, and role conflict constructs, were not significant predictors of Emotional Exhaustion among Administrators.

Role Constructs as Predictors of Cynicism in Administrators

To address cynicism as a burnout dimension among administrators, a multiple regression

analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between role conflict constructs and administrators’ cynicism at work. The analysis examined the predictive power of demographic characteristics, and role conflict constructs with regard to the cynicism burnout component. Prior to analysis, the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were tested to ascertain the association between role conflict constructs and cynicism among administrators.

The results of the multiple regression analysis were not statistically significant. In the first section, R^2 was 0.066 and improved to $R^2 = 0.089$ in Model 2. The relationship further drifted away from zero with the introduction of role conflict constructs in section 2 of the model ($P = 0.263$ to $P = 0.527$, respectively). See *Table 3*.

In *Table 3*, Model 1 exhibits an R Square value of .066, indicating the combined scores of Lengths of service in the university, gender of respondents,

Marital status of the respondents, Highest Level of Education, and Age of the respondent account for 6.6% of the variance in cynicism at work among non-academic administrators. However, this influence is not statistically significant ($p = .263$). Model 2, which incorporates demographic factors and role constructs (Age of the respondent, Average- time-based, Average Behaviour, Average strain-based), shows an increased R Square value of .089 (8.9%) in explaining the variance in cynicism at work. The R square change of 2.3% suggests the addition of demographic characteristics and burnout constructs contributes only minimally to the variance in cynicism at work. The lack of statistical significance ($p = .527$) implies that, when other factors are controlled, role conflict has limited predictive power in relation to cynicism at work among non-academic administrators.

In *Table 4*, the Sig column presents p-values for each independent variable. The hypothesis being tested for each is that the coefficient (B) is 0 while controlling for other variables. For instance, the relationship between the contribution of a role construct and cynicism is evaluated with other factors held constant. Neither demographic factors nor role conflict constructs prove to be statistically significant predictors of cynicism among non-academic administrators in Models 1 and 2 ($p > .05$). This leads to the rejection of the hypothesis, indicating that the coefficients of role constructs significantly differ from 0.

Role Constructs as Predictors of Professional Efficacy in Administrators

The cumulative outcomes of the multiple regression did not yield statistically significant results. Notably, the relationship diverged further from the null hypothesis with the inclusion of role conflict constructs in section 2 of the model ($p = 0.540$ to $p = 0.626$, respectively). Refer to *Table 5*

Table 4: Coefficients for predicting emotional exhaustion in administrators

Coefficients		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.356	.126		2.826	.006		
	Age of the respondent	.005	.002	.229	2.208	.030	.920	1.086
	Gender of respondents	.048	.038	.132	1.269	.207	.924	1.082
	Marital status of the respondents	-.023	.041	-.060	-.571	.570	.910	1.098
	Highest level of education	-.055	.042	-.154	-1.305	.195	.711	1.407
	Length of service in the university	.012	.019	.080	.655	.514	.670	1.493
2	(Constant)	.415	.255		1.625	.108		
	Age of the respondent	.004	.002	.190	1.666	.099	.758	1.319
	Gender of respondents	.058	.040	.159	1.443	.152	.811	1.233
	Marital status of the respondents	-.039	.042	-.100	-.928	.356	.856	1.169
	Highest level of education	-.052	.044	-.147	-1.193	.236	.649	1.541
	Length of service in the university	.014	.024	.090	.592	.555	.426	2.345
	Average- time-based	.078	.043	.219	1.814	.050	.674	1.483
	Average strain-based	-.057	.049	-.126	-1.165	.247	.836	1.196
	Average Behaviour based	-.027	.060	-.074	-.443	.659	.356	2.811

a. Dependent Variable: EE

Source: Primary data (2022)

Table 5: Role Constructs as Predictors of Cynicism among Administrators

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		df1	df2	Sig. F Change
					R Square Change	F Change			
1	0.257	0.066	0.016	0.18827	0.066	1.319	5	93	0.263
2	0.298	0.089	0.008	0.18904	0.023	0.747	3	90	0.527

Table 6: Coefficients for Predicting Cynicism among Administrators

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients	Std. Error	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.388	.134	.005
	Age of the respondent	-.004	.002	.075
	Gender of respondents	-.057	.040	.161
	Marital status of the respondents	.037	.044	.397
	Highest Level of Education	.031	.045	.494
	Length of service in the university	.016	.020	.427
	2	(Constant)	.439	.197
Age of the respondent		-.004	.002	.126
Gender of respondents		-.071	.042	.091
Marital status of the respondents		.045	.044	.315
Highest Level of Education		.027	.046	.557
Length of service in the university		.007	.024	.774
Average- time-based		-.065	.048	.177
Average strain-based		.093	.108	.393
Average Behaviour	-.054	.122	.657	

a. Dependent Variable: CYFinal

Table 7: Role Constructs as Predictors of Professional Efficacy in Administrators

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics
1	.209	.044	-.008	.05507	.044, F (5, 93) = .847, p = .520
2	.249	.062	-.022	.05544	.018, F (3, 90) = .585, p = .626

a. Predictors: (Constant), Length of service in the university, Age of the respondent, Gender of respondents, Marital status of the respondents, Highest Level of Education b. Predictors: (Constant), Length of service in the university, Age of the respondent, Gender of respondents, Marital status of the respondents, Highest Level of Education, Average strain-based, Average- time-based, Average Behaviour c. Dependent Variable: PE

Results from *Table 5* reveal Model 1 showcases an R Square value of .044, suggesting that the aggregated scores of Lengths of service in the university, gender of respondents, Marital status of the respondents, Highest Level of Education, and Age of the respondent collectively account for 4.4% of the variance in professional efficacy among non-academic administrators. With the introduction of role constructs in Model 2, the R Square value increases to .062 (6.2%) in explaining the variance

in professional efficacy. The marginal change in R square underscores a negligible augmentation of 1.8%, indicating the inclusion of demographic characteristics alongside burnout constructs contributes minimally to the variance in professional efficacy among non-academic administrators. Notably, neither model ($p = .520$, $p = .626$) exhibits statistical significance in the relationship between professional efficacy and the considered variables.

Table 8: Coefficients for Determining Professional Efficacy of Non-Academic Administrators

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients	Std. Error	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.703	.039	.000
	Age of the respondent	.000	.001	.863
	Gender of respondents	.007	.012	.527
	Marital status of the respondents	-.016	.013	.215
	Highest Level of Education	.019	.013	.161
	Length of service in the university	-.007	.006	.255
2	(Constant)	.705	.058	.000
	Age of the respondent	-.007	.001	.913
	Gender of respondents	.006	.012	.604
	Marital status of the respondents	-.013	.013	.313
	Highest Level of Education	.016	.013	.244
	Length of service in the university	-.007	.007	.340
	Average- time-based	-.011	.014	.428
	Average strain-based	-.020	.032	.528
	Average Behaviour	.028	.036	.439

a. Dependent Variable: PEF

Table 6 provides p-values (Sig.) for each independent variable, indicating the hypothesis the coefficient (B) equals zero while controlling for other variables. The relationship between the contribution of a role construct or demographic factor and Professional Efficacy is examined with other factors held constant. In both models 1 and 2, the relationship between professional efficacy and all variables lacks statistical significance ($p > .05$), leading to the rejection of the hypothesis and indicating the coefficients significantly differ from zero.

DISCUSSION

The findings, as demonstrated in 1, 3, and 5, indicated role constructs predict 3.7%, 2.3% and

1.8% of the variation in emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Professional efficacy, respectively, among university administrators. This finding supports role conflict theory by Kahn (1964) and Greenhouse & Beutell (1985); when an individual is engaged in multiple roles, there arises burnout (emotional exhaustion). These findings also agree with Bianchi 2018; and Shanafelt et al. (2017), burnout is associated inherently with work factors and personality factors and Maslach & Leiter (2008), who assert that any mismatch or imbalance between the individual and organisational risk factors of the job may intensify the likelihood of burnout. Similarly Zábrodská, Mudrák, Šolcová, Květon, Blatný, & Machovcová, (2018). (2018) revealed that work-family conflict was a stronger

predictor of burnout among faculty members and university administrators. Like results in this study, role constructs and failure to appreciate demographic factors like length of service, level of education and age predict burnout among non-academic administrators in universities. Contrary to the negative influence of role conflict, as many studies re-echo, Ortqvist and Wincent (2006) argued role conflict leads to creativity as individuals resolve differences; this is likely to facilitate adaptation to changing circumstances and contributes to administrative flexibility.

The findings also demonstrated role constructs were not statistically significant predictors of burnout (Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism, and professional efficacy). Results revealed there was no statistically significant relationship ($P=0.230$, $P=0.527$ and $P=0.626$). These results corroborated the findings of previous researchers who reported the three factors included in the burnout phenomenon (emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and lack of personal accomplishment) are independent and cannot be summed to produce one central burnout score. Cherniss (1989) also felt the three patterns do not necessarily co-occur. In this study, while role constructs predicted emotional exhaustion, there was no significant relationship between cynicism and professional efficacy.

The findings, as demonstrated in *Table 2*, showed other factors to be constant; the average time role construct was a statistically significant predictor of emotional exhaustion ($P=0.050$). The implication is administrators spend time on activities within one role, which denies time to roles; this causes burnout among administrators in universities. The findings are in agreement with Liu (2020) and Zhang (2019), who found university administrators experience mental fatigue, which leads to job burnout. Similarly, Fisher (2001) earlier reported within educational institutions, non-academic administrators face role conflict, which is a major source of burnout.

It is pertinent to point out that role constructs cannot account for or entirely explain the variations in burnout among administrators. Other factors therefore, play a significant role; for example, combined with demographic factors, the prediction results were better, as demonstrated in *Table 1* (11.1%), 3(8.6%) and 5 (6.2%); however, there is a huge gap that is not explained by results of this study. This finding is in support of Schaufeli and Leiter (2016), whose research indicated individual factors do not have a significant explanatory power in burnout levels. Chang (2013) also concurs there has been a shift from examining merely individual and organisational factors to transactional factors. Similarly, Bergman and Lundh (2015), in the holistic approach to diagnosing the complex mechanisms of human Behaviour, claim the complex combination of individual, psychological, and environmental factors underlies burnout.

CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to investigate the contribution of role conflict constructs on burnout among the different categories of administrators in universities in Uganda. The results reveal that, indeed, role conflict is a predictor of burnout dimensions, most especially emotional exhaustion on administrators across universities. However, the hold of demographic factors in the prediction of all burnout dimensions was more significant than role conflict constructs alone. This is stressful since it is easier to control or change job-related conditions causing stress than personal characteristics.

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