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High-Performance Work Systems and Employee Performance in Public Universities: The Mediating Role of Burnout Management and Moderating Effect of Workload

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) on Employee Work Performance (EWP) in public sector universities in Pakistan, with a focus on the mediating role of Burnout Management (BM) and the moderating effect of Workload (WL). Drawing on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theories, we propose an integrated model that addresses the psychological and organizational mechanisms linking HR practices to performance outcomes. Using a sample of 350 teaching faculty members from 13 public universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, we employ a cross-sectional survey design with validated scales for HPWS, EWP, BM, and WL. Results from correlation, regression, mediation, and moderation analyses reveal that: (1) HPWS has a strong positive association with EWP ($r = 0.768$, $p < 0.01$); (2) BM partially mediates the HPWS-EWP relationship (indirect effect = 0.18, 95% CI 0.12, 0.25) and (3) WL significantly moderates this relationship, with the positive effect of HPWS diminishing under high workload conditions ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < 0.01$). These findings contribute to strategic HRM literature by demonstrating how psychological well-being and job demands interact with HR systems to influence performance in resource-constrained academic environments. Practical implications for university administrators and policymakers are discussed.

KEYWORDS: High-Performance Work Systems, Employee Work Performance, Burnout Management, Workload, Public Universities, Pakistan

1. INTRODUCTION

The performance of teaching faculty has become an important topic for research in the recent years. It gains more attention when looking at public sector universities in developing countries. Unlike the corporate settings there exist bureaucratic weaknesses and resource constraints, however demand for academic excellence is rising (Rehman et al., 2023). In Pakistan, it has become a common culture to assign additional administrative responsibilities along with their teaching responsibilities to teachers which lead to burnout and diminished performance (Iqbal et al., 2023). This opens a discussion for quality of work life (QWL) for academic staff so that teaching faculty experience job stability, respect as well as institutional reputation.

In corporate setting High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) have been extensively studied as coping strategy to boost employee capabilities and organizational outcomes (Jiang et al., 2022). This remains unexplored in academic institutions particularly in developing countries.

Recent meta-analyses report gaps in HPWS research (Bakker et al., 2024). HPWS generally intensify job demands, improves performance but on the other side improves employee stress (Salvagioni et al., 2024). Hence there is a need to look deep in these psychological and contextual mechanisms i.e., burnout and workload and how HPWS decodes them in required performance. To critically observe this phenomenon this study addresses this gap by investigating the mediating role of Burnout Management (BM) and the moderating effect of Workload (WL) in the HPWS-Employee Work Performance (EWP) relationship within Pakistani public universities. To look into these unique challenges like scarcity of resources, teacher evaluation systems and increased faculty student ratios (KP-HEC, 2023).

To develop conceptual framework we have integrated Resource Based View (Barney, 1991) with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). RBV advocates for uniqueness and high value of HPWS that enhance and develop human capital develop that ultimately leads to better employee performance. Alongside JD-R model supports this viewpoint by explaining how workload and HPWS practices interact to affect the employee well-being and performance. We can say job demands and job resources interact to positively affect psychological factors as well as behavioral outcomes.

Hence, it is proposed that

1. HPWS directly improves EWP by enhancing employees' skills, motivation, and opportunities (AMO framework; Appelbaum et al., 2000).
2. BM mediates this relationship by reducing the emotional exhaustion and cynicism associated with burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).
3. WL moderates these effects, with excessive demands attenuating the benefits of HPWS.

This study contributes to existing literature in three ways: firstl, the High performance work systems have not been studied in the context of public sector studies in Pakistan, particularly in KP province. As working styles are entirely different from western corporate world. Second, the mediating role of BM is to address the gap between HR practices and performance (Peccei et al., 2022). Third, this paper reveals how workload moderates the effectiveness of HPWS to understand the internal mechanism and to identify why and when these systems fail.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) and Employee Work Performance (EWP)

HPWS encompass interrelated HR practices designed to enhance employee skills, motivation, and opportunities for contribution (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2022). In academic settings, these may include selective hiring of qualified faculty, ongoing professional development, performance-based promotions, and participatory decision-making (Takeuchi et al., 2007). Meta-analytic evidence confirms that HPWS generally improves both individual and organizational performance (Jiang et al., 2012), though most studies focus on corporate sectors.

The AMO framework (Appelbaum et al., 2000) explains HPWS effects through three pathways:

1. **Ability-enhancing** practices (e.g., training) develop faculty competencies in teaching and research.
2. **Motivation-enhancing** practices (e.g., merit-based rewards) align individual goals with institutional objectives.
3. **Opportunity-enhancing** practices (e.g., shared governance) empower faculty to apply their skills meaningfully.

Consistent with RBV, HPWS create competitive advantage by developing human capital that is valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate (Barney, 2022). In universities, this translates to improved teaching quality, research output, and institutional reputation. We hypothesize:

H1: HPWS is positively associated with EWP in public sector universities.

2.2 The Mediating Role of Burnout Management (BM)

Burnout—characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001)—is prevalent among university faculty worldwide (Leiter et al., 2023). In Pakistan, 40% of faculty report performance declines due to burnout (KP-HEC, 2023). HPWS may mitigate burnout through:

- **Resource provision:** Training and support enhance coping capacities (Hobfoll, 2002).
- **Stress reduction:** Participative practices increase job control (Karasek, 1979).
- **Meaning restoration:** Performance feedback reinforces accomplishment (Demerouti et al., 2010).

Conversely, poorly implemented HPWS may exacerbate burnout by increasing job demands without adequate support (Kroon et al., 2009). Effective BM—through counseling, workload adjustments, and recognition programs—can sustain the performance benefits of HPWS by maintaining employee well-being (Jyoti & Rani, 2019). Thus:

H2: BM mediates the positive relationship between HPWS and EWP.

2.3 The Moderating Role of Workload (WL)

WL represents a critical job demand that may strengthen or weaken HPWS effects (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). The JD-R model suggests that:

- Under **moderate WL**, HPWS resources (e.g., skills, autonomy) help faculty manage demands, enhancing performance.
- Under **high WL**, demands may overwhelm available resources, diminishing HPWS benefits (Biron & de Reuver, 2013).

In Pakistani universities, faculty often teach large classes while meeting stringent research quotas —a "publish or perish" culture compounded by bureaucratic tasks (Rehman et al., 2023). We propose:

H3: WL moderates the HPWS-EWP relationship, with the positive effect weakening as WL increases.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present research intends to study faculty members working in public sector universities of KP to observe High-Performance Work Systems and Employee Performance in Public Universities: The Mediating Role of Burnout Management and Moderating Effect of Workload. This research was conducted by employing survey design. It relied on quantitative research procedures for data collection and analysis. To obtain the data, a questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire is based on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 represents Strongly Agree and 5 represents Strongly Disagree. This questionnaire helped to collect the data and perform detailed analysis.

3.1 Sample and Procedure

To capture a comprehensive picture of the teaching faculty's experiences in public sector universities across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, we carefully selected a sample of 350 participants. This number was determined using the Yamane formula, a statistical method that ensures the sample size is both manageable and representative of the total population of 2,134 teaching staff.

The selection process was designed to reflect the diversity of the faculty across different universities and academic ranks. Instead of a random approach, we used **stratified random sampling**, which divides the population into distinct groups (or strata) and then randomly selects participants from each group. This method ensures that every subgroup—whether lecturers, assistant professors, or associate professors—is proportionally represented. For example, the University of Peshawar, with its larger faculty size, contributed 73 participants, while smaller institutions like the Women University of Swabi contributed 15. This balanced approach guarantees that the findings are not skewed toward larger or more prominent universities but instead reflect the broader academic landscape of KP.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (N = 350)

Variable	Category	%
Gender	Male	70.3%
	Female	29.7%
Qualification	PhD	44.6%
	Master's	43.4%
	BS (Hons)	12.0%

Variable	Category	%
Experience	1-5 years	42.9%
	6-10 years	36.0%
	11-20 years	18.9%
	21-30 years	2.3%

3.2 Measures

Data Collection: A Hands-On Approach

Collecting data from busy academics required a thoughtful and respectful approach. The researcher personally visited the participating universities to administer structured questionnaires. This face-to-face method not only improved response rates but also allowed for immediate clarification of any questions participants might have had.

The questionnaire was designed with care, incorporating validated scales to measure key variables like High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS), Employee Work Performance (EWP), Burnout Management (BM), and Workload (WL). Each scale was adapted from well-established studies to ensure reliability and relevance to the academic context of KPK. For instance, the HPWS scale, borrowed from Cai et al. (2019), included 16 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, while the Burnout Management scale, adapted from Demerouti et al. (2010), comprised 9 items.

Variables	Items	A	Adapted from
HPWS	16	0.87	Cai et al. (2019)
EWP	5	0.89	Cai et al. (2019)
BM	9	0.89	Demerouti et al. (2010)
WL	6	0.86	Hoonakker et al., 2011)

3.3 Pilot Testing: Refining the Tool

Before rolling out the full survey, we conducted a **pilot test** with 40 teaching faculty members who were not part of the final sample. This step was crucial for identifying any ambiguities or biases in the questionnaire. Feedback from the pilot helped us refine the wording, simplify complex questions, and ensure the tool was culturally and contextually appropriate. The pilot also confirmed the questionnaire's reliability, with Cronbach's alpha scores exceeding 0.85 for all scales—indicating strong internal consistency.

3.4 Ensuring Data Quality

Out of 370 distributed questionnaires, 350 were fully completed and returned—a remarkable

response rate of nearly 95%. Incomplete or inconsistent responses were excluded to maintain data integrity. To further ensure accuracy, we screened the data for outliers and verified that it met the assumptions of normality, a prerequisite for the statistical analyses we planned to conduct.

4. Analysis: Unraveling the Relationships

The data analysis was a multi-step process:

1. **Descriptive Statistics**: We began by summarizing the demographic and professional characteristics of the participants, providing a clear snapshot of who they were.

2. **Correlational Analysis**: Using Pearson's *r*, we explored the baseline relationships between variables, such as how HPWS might correlate with workload or burnout.

3. **Regression and Mediation Analysis**: Advanced techniques, including linear regression and Hayes' PROCESS Macro, helped us test our hypotheses—for example, whether HPWS directly influences EWP or if burnout mediates this relationship.

4.1 Analytical Approach

Data analysis included:

1. **Descriptive statistics and correlations** (Table 2).
2. **Regression analysis** testing H1 (HPWS → EWP).
3. **Mediation analysis** (PROCESS Model 4) testing H2 (HPWS → BM → EWP).
4. **Moderated mediation** (PROCESS Model 7) testing H3 (WL as moderator).

5. Results

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. HPWS	3.42	0.62	-		
2. EWP	3.87	0.71	.768**	-	
3. BM	4.15	0.58	.632**	.664**	-
4. WL	3.65	0.83	.727**	.670**	.719**

**p < .01

5.1 Hypothesis Testing:

H1: HPWS is positively associated with EWP in public sector universities.

DV	IV	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Beta	Sig.
EWP	Constant	0.768[a]	0.590	0.589	501.558		0.000
	HPWS					0.758	**0.000**

- The results strongly support **Hypothesis 1 (H1)**, confirming that **High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) have a significant positive impact on Employee Work Performance (EWP) (β = 0.76, p < .001)** among teaching faculty in public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. HPWS alone explains **59% of the variation in EWP**, which is a **very strong effect** in social science research. This suggests that **more than half of the differences in faculty performance** can be attributed to how effectively HPWS (e.g., structured training, performance incentives, supportive work environments) are implemented. The **F-statistic (501.56)** is extremely high, and its significance ($p < .001$) confirms that the regression model is a **good fit** for the data. This means the relationship between HPWS and EWP is **not just statistically significant but also practically meaningful** in real-world academic settings.

H1: Supported. HPWS positively predicted EWP ($\beta = 0.76$, $p < .001$), explaining 59% variance ($R^2 = 0.59$, $F = 501.56$, $p < .001$).

H2: Burnout management (BM) mediates the positive relationship between high-performance work systems (HPWS) and employee work performance (EWP).

Table : Mediation Analysis

Relationship	R	R^2	F-statistic	β-coefficient	p-value
HPWS → BM	0.63	0.40	231.66	0.65	<0.001
BM → EWP	-	-	-	0.29	<0.001
HPWS → EWP (Direct)	0.77	0.59	501.55	0.76	<0.001
HPWS → EWP (Total)	0.80	0.64	312.64	0.57	<0.001

The data reveals a meaningful insight - about 18% of HPWS's positive impact on faculty performance comes through reducing burnout. This isn't just a statistical relationship; it reflects the real experiences of educators. When universities implement supportive HR practices, they don't just directly improve performance - they also help faculty avoid the exhaustion that undermines their work.

For Pakistani universities facing resource constraints, this finding is particularly relevant. It shows that burnout management isn't just about employee welfare - it's a strategic tool that amplifies the benefits of good HR systems. The confidence interval [0.12, 0.25] confirms this isn't random - it's a consistent pattern worth acting on.

Essentially, supporting faculty wellbeing isn't separate from improving performance - it's part of the same solution. When universities address burnout, they're not just helping their staff cope; they're unlocking additional performance gains that would otherwise be lost to exhaustion.

- **H2:** Supported. BM partially mediated the HPWS-EWP relationship (indirect effect = 0.18, 95% CI [0.12, 0.25]).

H3: Workload (WL) moderates the relationship between High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) and Employee Work Performance (EWP), such that the positive effect of HPWS weakens as workload increases.

5.2 Moderation Analysis Results

Table: Moderating Effect of Workload on HPWS and EWP Relationship

Variable	Effect (β)	p-value	Interpretation
HPWS (Main Effect)	0.98	<0.001	Strong positive effect on EWP
Workload (WL)	0.72	<0.001	Higher WL generally associates with higher EWP
HPWS × WL	**-0.13**	**<0.001**	**Significant negative interaction**: HPWS's boost to EWP diminishes as WL rises

Model Fit:

- **$R^2 = 0.64$** (64% of EWP variance explained)
- **Interaction adds 2% explanatory power ($\Delta R^2 = 0.02$)**

Conditional Effects at Workload Levels:

Workload (WL)	Effect of HPWS on EWP	95% CI	p-value
Low (3.01)	0.60*	[0.51, 0.69]	<0.001

Workload (WL)	Effect of HPWS on EWP	95% CI	p-value
Moderate (3.72)	0.51*	[0.41, 0.61]	<0.001
High (4.43)	0.42*	[0.30, 0.54]	<0.001

Note: All effects remain significant, but the strength of HPWS's impact declines as WL increases.

The data reveals a nuanced reality: while **HPWS consistently improves performance (EWP)**, its **effectiveness is eroded by high workloads**. Specifically: firstly, **HPWS boosts performance** ($\beta = 0.98$, *p* < 0.001), confirming its standalone value. Secondly, **Workload matters**: The negative interaction term ($\beta = -0.13$, *p* < 0.001) shows that as WL climbs, HPWS's positive impact shrinks, suggesting at **low workload**, a 1-unit HPWS increase lifts EWP by **0.60 units**. While at **high workload**, the same HPWS improvement only raises EWP by **0.42 units**—a **30% weaker effect**. It shows Under heavy workloads, even well-designed HR systems (e.g., training, incentives) may struggle to offset fatigue or stress, blunting their performance benefits.

The analysis supports Hypothesis 3: workload significantly moderates the HPWS-EWP relationship. While HPWS universally enhances performance, its impact diminishes under high workload conditions-a critical insight for institutions balancing HR reforms with faculty wellbeing.

H3: Supported. WL moderated the HPWS-EWP link ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < .01$), with simple slopes analysis showing weaker HPWS effects at high (+1 SD) versus low (-1 SD) WL (Figure 1).

6. Discussion

- The findings paint a compelling picture of how performance systems operate in Pakistan's public universities - a context where bureaucratic hurdles and resource constraints often overshadow faculty potential ((Masood et al., 2021, Iqbal et al., 2023). Our results confirm that High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) significantly boost employee performance ($\beta = 0.76$), aligning with recent meta-analytic evidence (Bakker et al., 2024), but with two critical caveats: burnout management acts as a hidden catalyst, while excessive workload quietly undermines these benefits (Adeel et al., 2025).
- The strong direct effect of HPWS gains unique relevance in Pakistan's academic setting. As Rehman et al. (2023) documented, faculty juggle teaching, research and administrative duties with minimal support. Our study shows structured HR practices - like professional development and merit-based rewards - help bridge institutional goals and individual performance, supporting Appelbaum et al.'s (2000) AMO framework. However, the mediation analysis reveals a deeper layer: about 18% of improvement occurs because HPWS reduces burnout, echoing Maslach et al.'s (2001) assertion that emotional exhaustion critically impacts performance.
- The moderation finding is equally telling. While HPWS helps, its impact shrinks by nearly 30% under high workloads - a reality for Pakistani faculty (KP-HEC, 2023). This supports

the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017): when demands overwhelm resources, systems falter. As Salvagioni et al. (2024) found globally, universities cannot just "install" HPWS; they must concurrently tackle workload imbalances.

Conclusion

This study makes three key contributions to contemporary literature. First, it confirms HPWS can transform performance in resource-limited universities (Jiang et al., 2022), but only when implemented holistically. Second, burnout management isn't peripheral - it's a strategic lever, as Peccei et al. (2022) recently argued. Third, workload is a system-wide barrier requiring policy attention (Biron & de Reuver, 2022).

For university leaders, the message is clear: invest in faculty support systems while ensuring realistic workloads. Future research should explore context-specific HPWS adaptations (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2022) for developing-world academia. Ultimately, as Leiter et al. (2023) emphasize, treating faculty as humans - not just employees - remains the highest-performance strategy.

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