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## **Exploring Administrative Burden Encountered by Assistant Professors in Academic Institutions**

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### **Abstract**

Teaching remains a vital pillar of societal advancement, guiding future generations and instilling crucial skills and values. The study aimed to identify, analyze, and understand the administrative obstacles that assistant professors encounter in academic institutions. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research method used in the current study to understand the participants' lived experiences. The study was conducted on a sample of 9 participants selected through purposive sampling. The study revealed six master themes, twenty superordinate themes, and sixty-three subordinate themes. IPA showed six master themes reflecting factors of administrative burden experienced by assistant professors, including (i) Administrative as an Extra Responsibility, (ii) Administrative Responsibilities, (iii) Research-Related responsibilities, (iv) Benefits of Administrative Responsibilities, (v) Drawbacks of Immense Administrative Responsibilities, and (vi) Management of Administrative Burden. A mutual effort is necessary to ensure that university teachers can accomplish their academic roles without being overwhelmed by administrative demands, ultimately resulting in the advancement of higher education in the country.

**Keywords:** administrative burden; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; assistant professors

### **Introduction**

Teaching is a noble profession that shapes the minds of future generations. Educators serve as architects of knowledge, cultivating academic excellence and fostering essential life skills and values. In the intricate tapestry of society, teachers play a pivotal role in guiding students toward enlightenment and empowerment (Choong et al., 2020). In higher education, educators frequently motivate students to approach their subject matter and practice in novel ways. They want their students to reflect as accountants, approach patients' care as nurses, solve chemical problems as chemists, and deal with behavioral issues as psychologists (Zaman, 2015). They expect students to attain specific knowledge and skills and aim to broaden and deepen their experience in their field. They enable the students to be involved in practice in a knowledgeable way, which is the characteristic of experienced practitioners (MacBeath, 2012).

Nowadays, the education sector is required to undertake more significant challenges in fulfilling the global demands and expectations of the 21st century (Johari et al., 2018). The education sector has continuously transformed to improve teaching and learning

standards in higher education institutions (Rasheed et al., 2016). Pakistan is a country where several improvements are required to address the development challenges. These changes can originate from universities that can serve as the engines of growth within the knowledge-driven economy (Murtaza & Hui, 2021). The most important resource is the university's teaching faculty, who are required to perform three types of duties: teaching courses, conducting research in their respective fields, and performing administrative duties.

Numerous factors adversely influence the performance of teachers, such as the cumulative influence of administrative burden on teachers (Rockwell, 2009), workload and job performance (Johari et al., 2018), research responsibilities and teaching quality (García-Gallego et al., 2015), more time allocation to administrative duties over teaching quality (Woelert, 2022), and workplace buoyancy and emotional exhaustion (Collie, 2021). In the context of Asia, teachers complained about high administrative tasks (Ghulamudin, 2020), less teaching time, reduction of communication with students, and less job satisfaction (Chen & Zhao, 2022), teaching and research development pressures (Meng & Wang, 2018).

In Pakistan, the studies reflected that a high workload on teachers makes it impossible for them to carry out research activities and continue their teaching with total efficiency and dedication (Rasheed et al., 2016). There is an immense need to catapult the level of education standard in the country, for which the role of teachers should be continuously enhanced as they are the main pillars of the sector. Generally, teachers, especially assistant professors, assume various duties, such as record keeping, bulk photocopying, filing, exams photocopying, maintaining attendance data, processing exam results, administering exams, research supervision, and academic advising without having any research assistant. The thorough analysis reflected the need to explore the administrative burden imposed on assistant professors.

## **Material and Methods**

### ***Research Objective***

To identify, analyze, and understand the specific administrative burden encountered by assistant professors in academic institutions

### ***Research Question***

What are the major administrative burdens encountered by assistant professors in academic institutions?

### ***Sample***

A sample of 9 assistant professors with a minimum of 1 year of experience were selected from public and private sector universities using a purposive sampling technique. Semi-structured interviews were conducted till saturation from assistant professors of different private and public sector universities of Lahore.

### ***Instrument***

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to collect data from the research participants. An interview guide was based on various open-ended questions prepared from the existing literature review as per the guidelines of Smith et al. (2009). Interviews were audio-recorded through a portable voice recorder and kept in the password-protected computer with the consent of research participants.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The American Psychological Association's (APA) code of conduct was followed to maintain ethical consideration in the study. Permission was taken from the concerned

authorities to pursue the research. The significance of the study and the nature of the interview guide was explained to the study participants.

**Analysis**

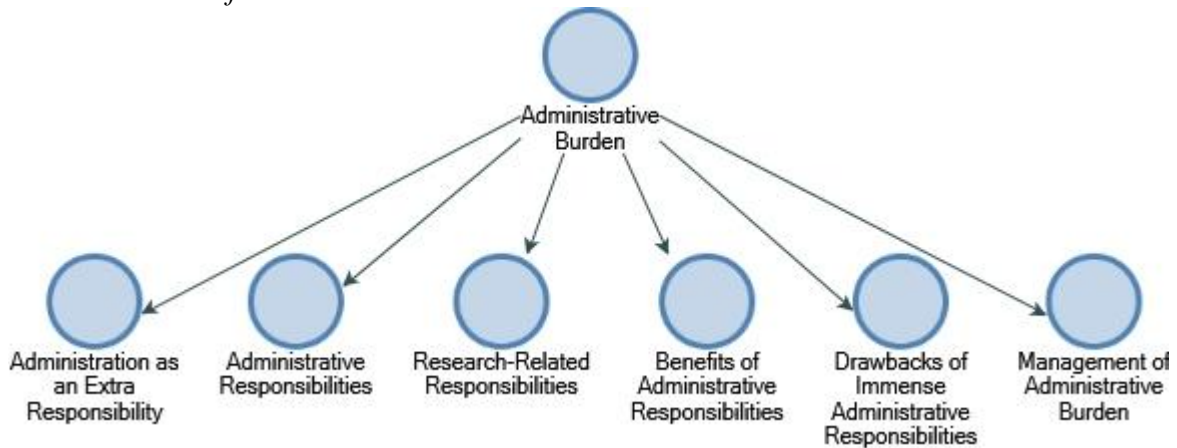
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research method used in the current study to understand the participants' lived experiences. It was used in the survey to identify themes or patterns within the qualitative data.

**Results**

The study result reflected that the study participants were having age (M=37.66, SD=3.08), gender (Male=55.6%; Female= 44.4%), experience (M=6.05, SD=2.37) and university sector (Private= 55.6%; Public= 44.4%). The study findings comprised six master themes, twenty superordinate themes, and sixty-three subordinate themes. Master themes are given below (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

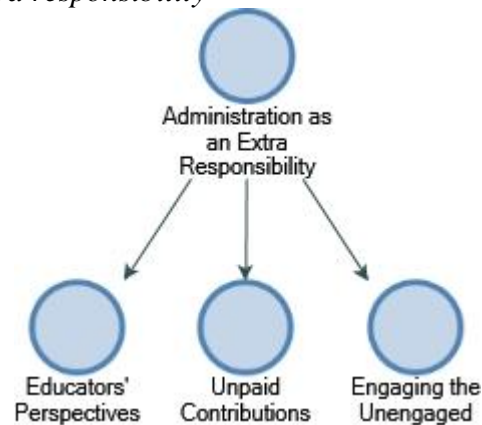
*Master Themes of Administrative Burden*



**Master Theme I: Administration as an Extra Responsibility**

Within the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, university teachers, especially assistant professors, juggle multifaceted roles and responsibilities, one of which is administration. The primary mission of academia is teaching and research, while administrative duties become an extra responsibility that educators must perform. Administrative came across a wide range of duties, from student advising and curriculum development to committee participation and implementation of policies. Though crucial for the effective functioning of academia, these tasks sometimes alter the focus away from research and teaching (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

*Administration as an extra responsibility****Superordinate Theme 1: Educators' Perspective***

Educators' perspective on administration is considered an additional duty that offers vital insights that impact teaching and learning. The educator can give a frontline understanding of how administrative tasks can maximize or hinder their ability to provide quality education. The feedback of educators is precious for making policies that can balance administrative demands with pedagogical needs, resulting in improved academic experience. As the participants stated during the interview:

*"...Means, being an assistant professor, our esteem desire is to deliver a lecture, and if we are not doing this, then this job is worthless for us..."*

*(p.8)*

***Superordinate Theme 2: Unpaid Contributions***

The unpaid contribution made by educators to managerial and administrative tasks is an ongoing concern. The primary roles revolve around research and teaching. The educators are highly burdened with the multitude of various non-academic duties. These contributions are vital for institutional functioning and often go uncompensated and unrecognized. It not only strains the workload but also influences morale and job satisfaction. In the participant's own words:

*"...Another astonishing fact is that teachers do not have helper even who can help them to manage all these tasks..."* (p.9)

***Superordinate Theme 3: Engaging the Unengaged***

Engaging the unengaged reflects that the educators are enthusiastic about teaching; therefore, they opt for the teaching career. When assigned with the administrative duties, they are unable to give their best to the administrative tasks. They have limited interest in functions other than teaching and want to continue their career by using multifaceted ways to provide intellectual knowledge to the students. The participants reported:

*But it is the fact that only two to three members in the groups are motivated to perform additional administrative tasks..."* (p.3)

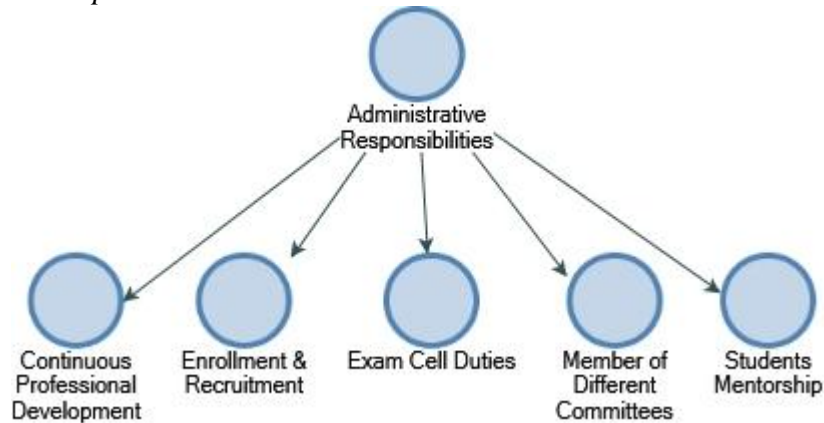
***Master Theme II: Administrative Responsibilities***

Administrative responsibilities imposed on university teachers, especially assistant professors, may encompass various non-academic duties and tasks beyond their central teaching and research roles. Administrative responsibilities involve program assessment, curriculum development, and course planning, in which structure, content

design, and learning outcomes are included for all academic programs. Most of the time, the faculty members offer guidance and advice to students and address students' needs and concerns (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

*Administrative Responsibilities*



*Superordinate Theme 1: Continuous Professional Development*

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) university programs involve structured initiatives and activities to support staff and faculty members' ongoing learning, growth, and skill development. These programs are tailored to maximize administrative and academic personnel's competencies, knowledge, and effectiveness. These program offerings often include seminars, workshops, conferences, training sessions, and other learning opportunities that deal with best practices, current trends, and emerging technologies within the respective fields. The participants articulated their viewpoints like this:

*"...I am the head of Career Management Cell (CMC). Means within our school, students have to place in internships, brings companies over here, government placements, alumni associations..." (p.3)*

*Superordinate Theme 2: Enrolment and Recruitment*

Teachers at the university level often take on the crucial responsibility of enrollment and recruitment. Beyond their classroom roles, they attract prospective students, provide insights into academic programs, and contribute to recruitment events. Teachers may engage in promotional activities, share their expertise, and play a pivotal role in shaping the university's image. Their involvement in recruitment extends to assessing applications, conducting interviews, and guiding students through enrollment. One of the participants reported

*"...Even though teachers are strictly involved in analyzing attendance data and updating the software regularly after the class..." (p.9)*

*Superordinate Theme 3: Exam Cell Duties*

University teachers shoulder significant duties within the Exam Cell, ensuring the smooth execution of examinations. They contribute to question paper preparation, aligning it with curriculum objectives. Teachers manage exam logistics, overseeing the conduct, supervision, and evaluation processes. They play a crucial role in addressing students' queries and concerns and maintaining the integrity of the assessment system. Grading and result declaration fall within their purview, demanding meticulous attention to detail. According to the firsthand account of the participant:

"... Exam-related things should be solely separated, similar to the fee collection tasks..." (p.3)

*Superordinate Theme 4: Member of Different Committees*

Teachers play a pivotal role as members of various committees within the university, contributing their expertise to diverse aspects of academic life. Whether serving on curriculum development, assessment, or research committees, educators bring valuable insights. Their participation in administrative committees influences policy-making and institutional development. Balancing membership on various university committees imposes a significant administrative burden on teachers, leading to time constraints and potential role conflict (Lee & Smith, 2019). The participant stated:

"...I have to collaborate with international universities, MoUs, collaboration with industries, job placement, facilitate students in industries, internships, link with other universities and our schools..." (p.4)

*Superordinate Theme 5: Student Mentorship*

Student mentorship is a cornerstone responsibility for university teachers, extending their influence beyond lectures. As mentors, teachers guide students in academic pursuits, career choices, and personal development. They provide valuable insights, support, and encouragement, fostering a positive learning environment. This role involves offering advice on coursework research projects and navigating the complexities of university life. The participant articulated that:

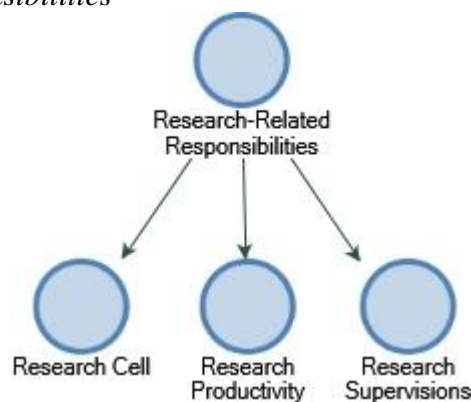
"...The teachers are also supposed to counsel the students when required for their personal or practical issues..." (p.9)

**Master Theme III: Research-Related Responsibilities**

University teachers shoulder vital research-related responsibilities integral to academic excellence. They engage in scholarly inquiries, pushing the boundaries of knowledge in their respective fields. This pursuit advances their understanding and enriches classroom discussions, infusing courses with cutting-edge insights. Research involvement also nurtures critical thinking among students, inspiring a culture of curiosity and innovation. Teachers disseminate findings through publications, contributing to the academic community's collective wisdom (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

*Research-Related Responsibilities*



*Superordinate Theme 1: Research Cell*

Active participation in the research cell is a vital responsibility for university teachers. This dedicated cell fosters a culture of research excellence within the academic institution. Teachers contribute by initiating and conducting innovative research



projects, publishing scholarly articles, and collaborating with peers. The research cell allows educators to stay current with advancements in their field and enrich their teaching with cutting-edge knowledge. The participants stated

*"...Besides, academic advertising, workshops arrangements, seminars, and conferences are the administrative responsibilities of the teachers..." (p.7)*

*"...I did arrange an international conference at the university level..." (p.6)*

***Superordinate Theme 2: Research Productivity***

Research productivity is paramount for university teachers, reflecting their commitment to advancing knowledge and academic excellence. Teachers strive to publish in reputable journals, present at conferences, and contribute to their field's scholarly discourse. This dedication extends beyond the classroom, driving educators to engage in impactful research projects, securing grants, and collaborating with peers globally. The participant reported

*"...Although, we have some collaborations of research work as well with other universities..." (p.3)*

***Superordinate Theme 3: Research Supervisions***

Research supervision is a fundamental duty for university teachers, encompassing mentorship and guidance for students pursuing advanced studies. Beyond traditional teaching, educators nurture the next generation of researchers, overseeing thesis projects and dissertations. This role demands personalized attention, constructive feedback, and fostering a supportive academic environment. The study participant articulated:

*"...they have to go along with the students to the venues and give lectures to the students and help students to prepare reports..." (p.9)*

***Master Theme IV: Benefits of Administrative Responsibilities***

Administrative responsibilities form the backbone of organizational efficiency. They ensure streamlined operations, fostering a cohesive work environment. Effective administration cultivates clear communication, timely task execution, and resource optimization. It promotes accountability as individuals adhere to established protocols. Administrative roles are also pivotal in risk management, maintaining compliance, and adapting to evolving challenges (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

*Benefits of Administrative Responsibilities*



*Superordinate Theme 1: Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers*

Professional development opportunities for teachers are essential catalysts for educational advancement. These programs provide avenues for continuous learning, equipping educators with the latest pedagogical techniques, technology integration skills, and subject knowledge. Workshops, conferences, and online courses empower teachers to stay abreast of evolving methodologies, fostering dynamic and engaging classrooms. Collaboration with peers during such initiatives encourages the exchange of best practices. In the words of the study participant:

*"...By administrative tasks, your affiliation is created..." (p.1)*

*Superordinate Theme 2: Streamlined Processes*

Administrative responsibilities imposed on university teachers yield the invaluable benefit of streamlined processes. These duties, including curriculum design, assessment standardization, and scheduling, bring coherence to academic operations. Administrators ensure uniformity in grading, fostering fairness and transparency. Standardized procedures simplify course planning and delivery, enhancing overall educational efficiency. The study participant reported:

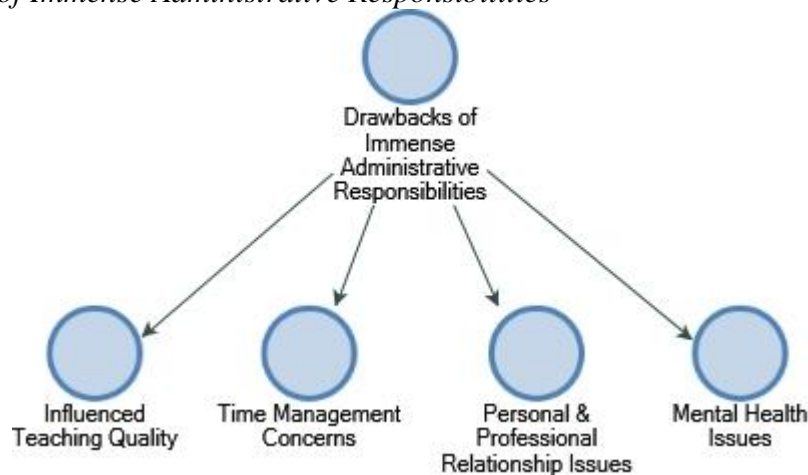
*"...Within administrative responsibilities, there are some sort of disciplinary responsibilities that teachers can better manage..." (p.1)*

**Master Theme V: Drawbacks of Immense Administrative Responsibilities**

Immense administrative responsibilities, while essential, come with inherent drawbacks. The burden can lead to burnout among administrators, affecting decision-making and overall effectiveness. Overloaded schedules may hinder strategic long-term planning, causing a reactive rather than proactive approach. The focus on paperwork and bureaucratic processes might divert attention from innovative initiatives. Excessive responsibilities may also strain interpersonal relationships within the administrative team, impacting collaboration (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

*Drawbacks of Immense Administrative Responsibilities*



*Superordinate Theme 1: Influenced Teaching Quality*

The drawback of immense administrative responsibilities extends to the potential detriment of teaching quality. When administrators are overloaded with tasks, their ability to provide adequate support and resources to educators diminishes. It can lead to inadequate professional development opportunities, limited mentorship, and insufficient feedback mechanisms. Ultimately, the compromised support structure can influence teaching quality negatively, underscoring the delicate balance needed between



administrative responsibilities and maintaining a high standard of education. The study participant mentioned:

*"...I think teachers should be kept flexible so that they can give best to their teaching, which is their major responsibility..." (p.9)*

*Superordinate Theme 2: Time Management Concerns*

Multiple administrative responsibilities pose significant drawbacks, notably time management concerns. Burdened with administrative tasks, teachers grapple with limited time for essential aspects like lesson planning and student interaction. The demand for meticulous paperwork and bureaucratic duties can result in rushed or delayed educational activities. Effective time management, critical for delivering quality education, becomes a challenge. The participant reported

*"...I think I cannot give proper time to the teaching due to the administrative and research duties..." (p.9)*

*Superordinate Theme 3: Personal and Professional Relationship Issues*

The burdens of administrative responsibilities can strain personal and professional relationships. The time-intensive nature of administrative tasks may lead to educators spending extended hours at work, reducing the time available for personal commitments. This imbalance can contribute to stress, affecting relationships outside the workplace. The participant stated:

*"...not as such because we do spend our whole weekend time with the family. But yes, in the other weekdays, we cannot give time to the family." (p.8)*

*Superordinate Theme 4: Mental Health Issues*

The administrative burden on university teachers can precipitate mental health issues, imposing significant stress and strain. Copious paperwork, meeting demands, and additional responsibilities augment the workload, leading to burnout and anxiety. The pressure to balance research, teaching, and administrative duties intensifies the challenges. Diminished personal time exacerbates these issues, affecting overall well-being. The toll on mental health compromises the quality of education, research output, and academic experience. According to the narrative provided by the participant:

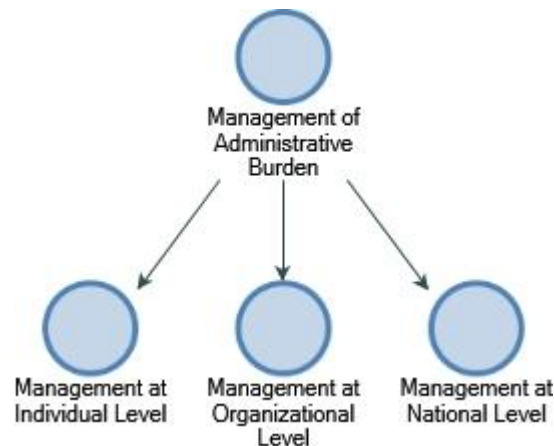
*"...Constantly juggling administrative tasks, teaching, and research has led to burnout. I'm emotionally exhausted, and the joy I once found in academia is fading as the administrative pressures continue to mount..."(p.8)*

**Master Theme VI: Management of Administrative Burden**

Efficient management of administrative burdens on university teachers is imperative for a thriving academic environment. Implementing streamlined processes, leveraging technology for paperwork reduction, and delegating tasks can alleviate the workload. Establishing clear communication channels between administrators and educators fosters transparency and mutual understanding of expectations. Prioritizing a healthy work-life balance through supportive policies completes a comprehensive approach to managing administrative burdens, promoting a more sustainable and fulfilling academic experience (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

*Management of Administrative Burden*



*Superordinate Theme 1: Management at the Individual Level*

Managing administrative burdens for university teachers individually involves strategic time allocation and prioritization. Teachers can implement efficient organizational systems, leverage technology for administrative tasks, and set realistic goals. Effective communication with colleagues and administrators helps clarify expectations, reducing ambiguity. Embracing delegation when possible and seeking support when needed fosters collaboration. According to the narrative provided by the participant:

*"...As in the foreign countries, they have made divisions based on the persons' motivation, interest, and even performance..." (p.7)*

*"...Also, we can prioritize different tasks such as my priority is teaching then administrative tasks because we are evaluated as per our teaching by the students..." (p.2)*

*Superordinate Theme 2: Management at the Organizational Level*

At the organizational level, managing the administrative burden for university teachers demands a strategic approach. Implementing efficient workflows, leveraging technology, and establishing clear communication channels streamline administrative processes. Adequate support structures, such as administrative assistants, can handle routine tasks, easing the load on educators. Regular reviews of policies ensure they align with educational goals without overwhelming faculty. Cultivating a culture that values work-life balance completes the organizational strategy, creating an environment where administrative efficiency supports, rather than hinders, the core mission of teaching and research. According to the narrative provided by the participant:

*"...If we get teacher assistant, then we can get help in various official tasks such as data arrangement, visual, check quizzes, or practical demonstration or assistant in various other tasks..." (p.2)*

*Superordinate Theme 3: Management at the National Level*

At the national level, managing the administrative burden for university teachers requires coordinated efforts. Establishing standardized administrative practices, utilizing digital platforms for streamlined communication, and creating national guidelines can harmonize processes across institutions. National funding for administrative support and professional development ensures equitable resources. By promoting a unified, efficient, and supportive system, the national level can significantly alleviate administrative burdens on university teachers, contributing to a more effective and cohesive higher education landscape.

The participant expressed:

*"...On these factors, there is the need to design the policy..." (p.4)*

**Discussion**

The study explored the factors associated with the administrative burden experienced by university teaching faculty, primarily assistant professors. IPA showed six master themes reflecting factors of administrative burden experienced by assistant professors. The first master theme of "Administration as an Extra Responsibility" delves into various challenges experienced by assistant professors as their perspective showed a substantial administrative workload, extending beyond the traditional expectations linked with academic positions (Joshi et al., 2019). This educator's perspective is aligned with Smith's (2020) study, which showed that administrative work has taken a prominent place in the educators' duties and overshadowed the core domain of teaching and research. Educators try to manage and handle administrative tasks.

The second master theme, "Administrative responsibilities," defines the numerous duties imposed on assistant professors beyond teaching and research. Continuous professional development is a noteworthy facet of administrative responsibilities, which encompasses multiple tasks such as career exploration, educational trips, and participation in seminars and workshops (Wilson & Floden, 2003). Besides, enrolment and recruitment processes result in additional demands on the assistant professors, such as faculty recruitment, record-keeping of data, and overseeing students' enrolment (Hirsch, 2016). These administrative tasks collaboratively show a significant domain of educators' roles that influence their energy and time allocation. There is a need to balance these tasks to prevent the overwhelming administrative burden from compromising the foremost duty of teaching.

The third master theme, "Research-Related Responsibilities," explores the intricate role of research in the administrative burden on assistant professors. Developing research cells within the university settings implies a commitment to fostering a vibrant research culture. These cells mainly encompass structures such as Departmental and Doctoral Research Committees (DRC), scheduling viva voce examinations, and organizing seminars and conferences (Brown & Martinez, 2017). Establishing research cells emphasizes producing valuable scholars and advancing knowledge within the academic community. All research-related duties collectively contribute to the complicated web of administrative tasks. The balance between these tasks can ensure the pursuit of knowledge if aligned adequately with teaching excellence and institutional growth.

The fourth master theme, centered on the "Benefits of Administrative Responsibilities," uncovers the positive side of the complex administrative responsibilities imposed on assistant professors. Administrative responsibilities create teachers' affiliation as the collaborative projects nurture a sense of community among educators. The study of Trowler and Knight (2000) stated that teachers' affiliation contributes towards a supportive work environment, which enables collaborative problem-solving and exchange of ideas. This sense of companionship maximizes the whole work experience for teachers, mitigating the potential isolation often linked with academic roles. Administrative responsibilities also increase the job opportunities for educators by ensuring the visibility of educators within the institution (Johnson, 2017).

The fifth master theme is "Drawbacks of immense administrative responsibilities." In higher education, educators are not only purveyors of knowledge but are also burdened with an immense administrative load that often overshadows their primary role as educators. One of the significant drawbacks highlighted in the study is the time-intensive nature of administrative tasks that divert valuable hours away from research and teaching. Supported by the study of Halse and Malfroy (2010), the immense administrative workload resulted in a time famine for educators, limiting their capacity

to be deeply involved in scholarly endeavors. This time scarcity directly influences the quality of education, as educators consider themselves dealing with challenging demands and struggling to keep the rigor needed for effective teaching. Besides, administrative burdens often result in burnout among university teachers and adversely influence educators' job satisfaction and well-being. The study of Kyndt et al. (2016) reflected the significant association between high administrative duties and high exhaustion and stress among educators. The toll of unceasing juggling between academic obligations, paperwork, and committee meetings leads to a declined morale that ultimately compromises the overall quality of education delivered to the students.

Last, a central theme was "Management of Administrative Burden," which reflected the educators' perspective on managing the administrative load. Strategies that can be implemented at the personal level involve prioritization, effective delegation, and goal setting, which can assist educators in streamlining their workload (Barker, 2014). Furthermore, cultivating a supportive work environment can encourage collaboration and open communication among colleagues within or between departments to develop a more collective approach to administrative challenges (Kinman et al., 2019). By acknowledging the importance of educators' quality of life, universities should foster a culture that endorses resilience and sustainable work practices among their teaching staff. Similarly, institutions should implement streamlined administrative processes, reduce bureaucracy, and provide comprehensive training for faculty members on administrative tasks (Clark, 2013). At the national level in Pakistan, policymakers should identify educators' exclusive challenges and develop supportive measures. Adequate funding for higher education institutions is necessary to ensure they have resources for hiring administrative staff, implementing technological solutions, and offering professional development opportunities for educators (Aslam & Kingdon, 2012).

The study's major strength is that the crucial issue of the administrative burden imposed on assistant professors is highlighted in the study. The limitation of the study is that the researcher only explored the administrative burden imposed on assistant professors, excluding lectures, visiting faculty, associate professors, and professors. Therefore, the current study recommends that future studies involve all the teaching faculty, and there is a need to develop a reliable and valid scale on administrative burden by continuing the current study's findings.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, university teachers experience multifaceted challenges associated with the administrative workload that influence their teaching quality, which is their core responsibility. In the context of Pakistan, universities need a multidimensional approach that can encompass individual, organizational, and national levels. The adverse effects of administrative burden can be declined by empowering educators with effective time-management skills, encouraging organizational reforms that streamline administrative procedures, and developing supportive national policies. This mutual effort is necessary to ensure that university teachers in Pakistan can accomplish their academic roles without being overwhelmed by administrative demands, ultimately resulting in the advancement of higher education in the country.

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**Declaration of Interest Statement**

There was no conflict of interest in the study.

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