

Juggling Dual Demands: Experiences of College Educators in Balancing Research and Teaching Responsibilities

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Abstract: This study explores the challenges and strategies employed by college educators in balancing their dual responsibilities of research and teaching. Higher education institutions often require faculty members to excel in both domains, yet the increasing pressure to publish research while providing high-quality teaching creates a unique set of challenges. This qualitative phenomenological study aims to understand the lived experiences of college educators as they navigate the competing demands of research productivity and teaching effectiveness. Through semi-structured interviews with 15 college educators from various disciplines, the study reveals how these professionals manage their time, prioritize tasks, and adapt to the conflicting expectations of their roles. Findings show that while college educators employ various strategies to juggle these demands—such as time management, setting clear priorities, and seeking institutional support—they face significant stress, workload imbalance, and challenges in maintaining a work-life balance. The study concludes by offering recommendations for institutional policies and practices that can better support educators in managing these dual responsibilities, including the provision of more flexible teaching loads, improved mentoring for research, and better institutional recognition for teaching excellence.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In higher education, faculty members are traditionally expected to fulfill two major roles: teaching and research. Both are critical to the mission of universities, with teaching directly influencing students' learning and research contributing to the advancement of knowledge in their fields. However, the dual demands of excelling in both areas often create tension, as educators strive to meet the expectations of their institutions, colleagues, and students.

The expectation to engage in research has become increasingly important in academia, particularly with the growing emphasis on research funding, publication outputs, and the pursuit of tenure (Boyer, 1990). However, teaching remains a cornerstone of higher education, with faculty members expected to provide high-quality instruction, engage with students, and contribute to the intellectual development of their fields. Balancing these two roles is a significant challenge, and faculty members often find themselves struggling to allocate sufficient time and energy to both responsibilities (Austin, 2002).

This study aims to explore the experiences of college educators in balancing these dual demands, with a particular focus on the strategies they employ, the obstacles they face, and the support systems they rely on. Understanding these

experiences is essential for developing institutional policies that can better support educators in achieving a balance between teaching and research, while also promoting their well-being and professional growth.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research used a qualitative phenomenological design to capture the lived experiences of college educators as they balance their teaching and research responsibilities. Phenomenology allows for a deep exploration of how individuals experience a particular phenomenon—in this case, the challenge of managing dual demands in academia (Creswell, 2013).

A purposive sampling method was employed to select 15 faculty members from various disciplines, including the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, at a mid-sized public university. Participants were selected based on their significant involvement in both teaching and research, as well as their willingness to share their experiences. The sample consisted of both early-career and more experienced faculty members, with varying levels of research output and teaching experience.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. The

interview questions focused on the following themes: the strategies educators use to manage their teaching and research responsibilities, the challenges they face, the support they receive from their institutions, and their perceptions of how institutional policies affect their ability to balance these roles. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns in the data.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the interview data revealed several key themes related to the experiences of college educators in balancing research and teaching responsibilities.

➤ *Time Management and Prioritization:*

A common strategy reported by participants was the use of time management techniques to juggle their dual responsibilities. Many educators relied on meticulous scheduling, setting aside specific blocks of time for teaching, research, and administrative tasks. This finding aligns with previous research on time management in academia, which suggests that prioritization and organization are essential for balancing competing demands (Gmelch, 2000). However, even with careful planning, many participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of tasks they needed to complete.

➤ *Workload Imbalance:*

Participants frequently expressed concern about the imbalance between the time and effort required for teaching versus research. While many educators acknowledged the importance of both roles, they often found themselves dedicating more time to research in order to meet the demands of tenure, publication, and funding. As one participant noted, "It's a constant struggle—teaching is time-consuming, but research demands that I keep up with publications and grants, or my career might stagnate." This sentiment echoes the findings of Brew and Boud (1995), who found that many academics experience stress and burnout due to the competing demands of research and teaching.

➤ *Institutional Support and Expectations:*

Institutional support played a critical role in how participants managed their dual responsibilities. Educators who felt supported by their institutions, through flexible teaching loads, research grants, and mentoring, were more likely to report a sense of balance. Conversely, those who perceived a lack of support from their institutions, particularly in terms of research mentorship and recognition for teaching, expressed greater dissatisfaction and stress. This aligns with the work of Austin (2002), who argues that universities must provide adequate support for faculty to succeed in both teaching and research.

➤ *Stress and Work-Life Balance:*

The challenge of balancing teaching and research often led to significant stress and challenges in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Many participants reported working long hours, often sacrificing personal time to meet

academic demands. This finding supports the work of Lee and McNally (2011), who highlighted that the pressure to balance multiple academic roles contributes to faculty stress and negatively impacts their well-being.

➤ *Strategies for Coping:*

In response to these challenges, participants employed several strategies to cope with the demands of teaching and research. These included seeking collaboration with colleagues on research projects, setting realistic goals for both teaching and research, and utilizing teaching assistants to help with administrative and grading tasks. Additionally, some educators noted the importance of maintaining a passion for both teaching and research, which helped them stay motivated despite the challenges.

The findings of this study suggest that college educators face significant challenges in balancing their research and teaching responsibilities. Despite the use of time management strategies and the implementation of coping mechanisms, the dual demands often lead to stress, burnout, and an imbalance between the time allocated to research and teaching. This research corroborates the work of Gmelch (2000) and Austin (2002), who emphasized that while time management is important, the structural and institutional demands placed on faculty members often exacerbate feelings of stress and overwhelm.

One of the key findings of this study is the critical role that institutional support plays in helping faculty balance their responsibilities. Educators who felt supported by their institutions were more likely to report a sense of balance and job satisfaction. Institutions that provide flexible teaching loads, adequate research funding, mentoring, and recognition for teaching are more likely to retain faculty and foster a positive work environment (Boyer, 1990). This supports the need for universities to develop policies that not only recognize the importance of research but also acknowledge and reward high-quality teaching.

The issue of work-life balance also emerged as a significant concern in this study. Many participants reported that their professional responsibilities encroached on their personal time, leading to stress and burnout. Universities need to consider the well-being of faculty members by offering policies that promote work-life balance, such as reduced teaching loads, sabbaticals, and wellness programs.

This study highlights the complex and often overwhelming nature of balancing research and teaching responsibilities in academia. While many college educators employ effective strategies to manage their time and responsibilities, they face significant challenges related to workload imbalance, institutional support, and work-life balance. The findings suggest that higher education institutions must provide more comprehensive support for faculty members, including flexible workloads, research mentorship, and recognition of teaching excellence. By addressing these issues, universities can help ensure that educators thrive in both their teaching and research roles,

ultimately benefiting their students, the academic community, and their own professional growth.

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