

**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**EXPLORING THE ROLES,  
CHALLENGES, AND COPING  
MECHANISMS OF ADMINISTRATIVE  
STAFF IN SUPPORTING ACADEMIC  
STAFF AT HIGHER EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

At higher education institutions, academicians or faculty have always been the focus, shadowing the administrative staff, whose roles are equally important. This is evidenced by limited studies on administrative staff in higher education institutions. Their roles are always hidden behind a desk, their challenges are unheard of, and their coping strategies are less explored. This brings about the need to understand better how administrative staff support academic staff in higher education institutions. Thus, this research explores how they perceived their roles in supporting the academic staff, their challenges and how they cope with the challenges in higher education institutions. This study is specific to one of the private universities in Kuala Lumpur. A descriptive qualitative design was adopted with a semi-structured interview employed to obtain the qualitative data. A total of 12 administrative staff were interviewed and the data was analysed using thematic analysis. A total of eleven themes were established based on the context of exploration. The first three themes emerged from administrative staff's perception of their roles namely the supportive role of the academic leader, an intermediary role for stakeholders and important pillars to the institutions. The following four themes revolved around the challenges faced by administrative staff which include barriers to communication, academic leadership styles, academic staff attitude and the sense of being undervalued. The last four themes focused on their coping strategies namely managing themselves, obtaining social support and coping spiritually. The study suggested that addressing these implications with a supportive and collaborative environment can contribute to the success of both administrative and academic staff in ensuring the smooth running of the educational institution.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>i</b>	<b>AUTHOR'S DECLARATION</b>	
<b>ii</b>	<b>ABSTRACT</b>	
<b>iii</b>	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	
<b>iv</b>	<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	
<b>ix</b>	<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	
<b>x</b>	<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	
<b>x</b>	<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	

### CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Background of the Study	3
1.2	Statement of Problem	6
1.3	Research Objectives	7
1.5	Significance of Study	8
1.6	Limitations of Study	9
1.7	Definitions of Terms	10
	1.7.1 Administrative Staff	
	1.7.2 Academic Staff	
	1.7.3 Higher Education Institution	
	1.7.4 Perceived Roles of Administrative Staff	
	1.7.5 Challenges Faced by Administrative Staff	
	1.7.6 Coping Mechanism	
1.8	Conclusion	11

### CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction	12
2.2	Management in Higher Education Institutions	12
2.3	Administration in Higher Education Institutions	14
2.4	The Roles of Administrative Staff in Higher Education Institutions	15
2.5	Challenges in Higher Education Institutions	17
2.6	Stress in a Workplace	18
2.7	Coping Strategies with Stress	20

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

Higher education institutions play a vital role in promoting lifelong learning by contributing to the development of skills, the advancement of knowledge, the maximisation of educational resources, and the provision of opportunities for diverse populations. This shift signifies a move from solely focusing on educating young secondary students to actively encouraging individuals from various backgrounds to pursue higher education at different stages of their personal and professional journeys (Institute for Lifelong Learning, n.d.).

Joensuu-Salo et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of higher education institution management in boosting entrepreneurship education and supporting teachers' competence. This study investigates the impact of managerial practices of higher education institutions on teachers' entrepreneurial competence and practices in entrepreneurship education.

Chan (2016) emphasised the significance of higher education institutions in producing knowledgeable and intellectually adept students and graduates who can contribute holistically to their communities. Consequently, undergraduate education in higher education institutions aims to bring about profound positive changes in individuals' lives and society. It is also noted that students' expectations for a college degree tend to be both functional and personal (Chan, 2016). Higher education's role is to allow individuals to learn, discover their identity, and pursue their desired career paths. In addition, students viewed universities as the stepping stones for individual employment (Chankseliani et al., 2020).

The future of higher education institutions is of the utmost importance to the whole community and even the world. Nonetheless, the past of higher education must be understood in order to comprehend its future (Byrd, 2001). Higher education institutions contribute to the development of teaching by improving human capital and