

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING, ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND WORK ENGAGEMENT AMONG ACADEMICS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the work environment in Malaysian higher education institutions, requiring academics to rapidly adapt to online teaching and remote working, which may have affected their work engagement. This study aimed to examine the relationships between psychological well-being, perceived organizational support, and work engagement among academics at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, involving 122 academics selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using an online questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS Version 23. The findings revealed that only the positive relations with others dimension of psychological well-being significantly and positively influenced work engagement, whereas environmental mastery, self-acceptance, autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth, and perceived organizational support were not significant predictors. The study highlights the critical role of supportive interpersonal relationships in fostering academics' work engagement. These findings provide practical insights for university management to develop initiatives that strengthen collegial support and promote employee well-being to sustain engagement during periods of organizational change and future workplace disruptions.

Keywords: *work engagement, psychological wellbeing, perceived organizational support, Malaysia*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused major changes in higher education worldwide, including Malaysia. Following the Movement Control Order (MCO) on 18 March 2020, universities were required to shift to online learning and remote working arrangements to ensure the continuation of teaching, research, and academic services (Imran et al., 2020). Although working from home provides flexibility and better work–life balance (Brew et al., 2019), it also creates challenges such as increased workload, social isolation, technological difficulties, and work–family conflict, which may affect academics' psychological well-being and work engagement (Cheng et al., 2017). Psychological well-being is an important factor that helps individuals cope with work challenges. Ryff and Keyes (1995) identified six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. During the pandemic, academics in Malaysian higher education institutions faced additional responsibilities, including online teaching, research activities, student supervision, and administrative tasks while working from home (Bai and Liu, 2018). Therefore, maintaining work engagement became important to ensure effective academic performance and institutional sustainability.

Previous studies have shown that work engagement contributes to positive outcomes such as better performance, commitment, and well-being. However, most COVID-19-related studies focused on negative outcomes, such as stress, burnout, and psychological

problems, while limited attention was given to factors that help academics maintain engagement during challenging situations (Wong et al., 2021). Furthermore, although psychological well-being and perceived organizational support are recognised as important factors influencing employee outcomes (Ryff, 1989; Eisenberger et al., 1986), limited studies have examined their combined effects on work engagement among academics in Malaysian higher education institutions, particularly during the work-from-home period. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationships between psychological well-being, perceived organizational support, and work engagement among academics in Malaysia. Addressing this gap is important because identifying the psychological and organizational factors that promote work engagement can help universities develop evidence-based strategies to support academics' well-being and maintain high levels of engagement during future organizational disruptions. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining the relationships between psychological well-being, perceived organizational support, and work engagement among academics working from home in a Malaysian public university during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) identify the level of work engagement among academics, (2) determine the relationship between the six dimensions of psychological well-being and work engagement, and (3) examine the relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement.

Literature review

Work engagement

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, and work-related psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). It reflects employees' physical energy, emotional involvement, and cognitive immersion in their work and is widely recognised as an indicator of intrinsic work motivation (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employees with high work engagement are more enthusiastic, resilient, and willing to invest additional effort in accomplishing work-related goals. In higher education institutions, work engagement is particularly important because academics are expected to perform multiple roles, including teaching, research, supervision, administration, and community engagement. High levels of work engagement have been associated with improved teaching effectiveness, research productivity, innovative behaviour, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall performance (Gunasekara and Zheng, 2019; Joo et al., 2016). The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; 2017) provides a comprehensive theoretical explanation for work engagement. The theory proposes that work engagement develops when employees possess sufficient job and personal resources to cope with work demands. Job resources, such as organizational support, facilitate goal achievement and reduce work-related strain, whereas personal resources, including psychological well-being, enhance employees' resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, academics encountered substantial job demands arising from remote teaching, increased workload, technological adaptation, and work–family conflicts. Consequently, psychological well-being and perceived organizational support are expected to function as important resources that help academics maintain high levels of work engagement despite these challenges.

Psychological well-being

Psychological well-being refers to individuals' positive psychological functioning and overall quality of life (Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2019). It focuses on personal growth, effective functioning, and meaningful life experiences rather than only happiness and life satisfaction. According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being consists of six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Individuals with high psychological well-being usually have positive self-perceptions, good relationships, clear goals, and the ability to manage challenges effectively (Joo et al., 2016). These characteristics are important for academics who need to adapt to changing work environments. Previous studies found that psychological well-being is positively related to work engagement, job performance, and job satisfaction (Joo et al., 2016). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, academics faced challenges such as increased workload, technological difficulties, and stress, which affected their psychological well-being (Enwereuzor et al., 2021). Although many studies showed a positive relationship between psychological well-being and work engagement, some findings remain inconsistent, with only certain dimensions showing significant effects. Therefore, this study examines each dimension of psychological well-being to better understand its influence on academics' work engagement. Based on the JD–R Theory, psychological well-being acts as a personal resource that helps employees manage work demands and remain engaged in their work.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed: (H1): Psychological well-being has a significant positive relationship with work engagement; (H1a): Self-acceptance has a significant positive relationship with work engagement; (H1b): Positive relations with others have a significant positive relationship with work engagement; (H1c): Autonomy has a significant positive relationship with work engagement; (H1d): Environmental mastery has a significant positive relationship with work engagement; (H1e): Purpose in life has a significant positive relationship with work engagement; (H1f): Personal growth has a significant positive relationship with work engagement.

Perceived organizational support

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employees' belief that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Support from leaders, supervisors, fair policies, good communication, and recognition can increase employees' perception of organizational support (Devonish, 2016). Employees who feel supported are more likely to show higher motivation, commitment, and work engagement (Douglas et al., 2020). Based on JD–R Theory and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), organizational support acts as an important resource that helps employees manage work demands and encourages positive work behaviours. Previous studies have shown that POS is positively related to work engagement; however, most research has focused on non-academic settings. Limited studies have examined POS and work engagement among academics in Malaysian higher education institutions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when academics experienced major changes in their work environment. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement among academics in Malaysia. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed: (H2): Perceived organizational support has a significant positive relationship with work engagement.

Research framework

Figure 1 displays the suggested framework for this investigation. Psychological well-being (PWB) and Perceived organizational support make up two independent variables of the study. Work Engagement is the study's dependent variable. The framework also shows the proposed correlation for hypotheses in the investigation.

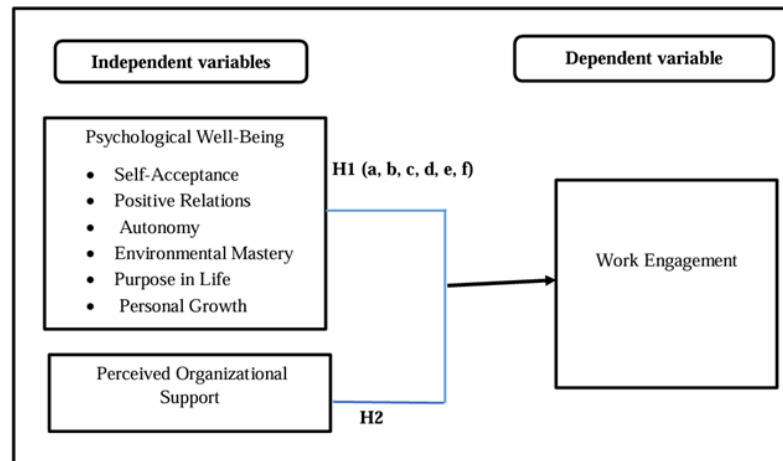


Figure 1. The proposed research framework.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between psychological well-being, perceived organizational support, and work engagement among academics at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Selangor Branch, including Shah Alam, Puncak Perdana, Puncak Alam, Sungai Buloh, Dengkil, and Selayang campuses. The target population consisted of 1,597 academic staff (Registrar Office, UiTM Puncak Alam), and a purposive sampling technique was used to select academics with experience working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed through an online survey, and 122 usable responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 38.1%. The sample size was considered adequate based on recommendations for quantitative analysis and the number of predictors in the research model (Hair et al., 2019). Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university authority, and participation was voluntary, with respondents assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Prior to the main study, a pilot test was conducted among 30 academics to evaluate the clarity, reliability, and validity of the questionnaire items. The measurement instruments were adapted from established scales, including Schaufeli et al. (2002) for work engagement, Ryff (1989) for psychological well-being, and Eisenberger et al. (1986) for perceived organizational support. Data were collected using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire and analysed using SPSS Version 23. Although purposive sampling enabled the selection of relevant respondents, the findings may have limited generalisability as the study focused only on academics from one UiTM branch. Future research is recommended to include academics from multiple higher education institutions and employ broader sampling approaches to enhance the applicability of the findings.

Results and Discussion

The total numbers of respondents are 122. Based on the findings in *Table 1*, it shows that 77.9 percent are female, while remaining 22.1 percent are male. 74.6 percent of respondents who participated are married that makes up as majority. Based on age, majority of respondents were found in 36-45 years old which represent 47.5 percent. Based on education, more than half of the respondents are PhD holder which represents 59 percent. Based on the campuses, it shows that 48.4 percent of respondents who are from Shah Alam that makes up as majority. Length of services shows that 33.6 percent respondents are 10 to 15 and 15 years and more 33.6 percent respectively. Based on the *Table 2*, work engagement has high correlation with 0.90 of Cronbach's Alpha. Secondly, perceived organizational support has high correlation with 0.94 of Cronbach's Alpha. All the dimensions in psychological well-being achieved above 0.80 exclude for self acceptance and environmental mastery with 0.68 and 0.57 respectively. All items are valid and relevant to be asked since the Cronbach Alpha is more than 0.5. *Table 3* presents the total mean score and standard deviation for each variable. The highest total mean score ($M = 4.38$, $SD = .57$) is for the attainment personal growth, followed by the positives relations with others ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .60$). In addition, the mean score for the happiness variable ($M = 3.99$, $SD = .60$) ranks third, and the perceived organizational support variable ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .77$) has the lowest mean score among the variables. *Table 4* shows a significant relationship ($p < 0.01$) between psychological well-being, perceived organizational support, and work engagement. Overall, most variables are positively related to work engagement. Positive relations with others shows a moderate correlation ($r = .45$), while self-acceptance ($r = .36$), environmental mastery ($r = .30$), and purpose in life ($r = .34$) show low positive correlations. Autonomy ($r = .22$) and perceived organizational support ($r = .20$) show weak positive relationships. However, personal growth is not significantly related to work engagement. *Table 5* shows the results of multiple regression analysis on the relationship between psychological well-being, perceived organizational support, and work engagement. The model explains 26% of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = 0.26$), while the remaining 74% is influenced by other factors. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.862 indicates that the regression assumptions are satisfied. Among all variables, only positive relations with others significantly predicts work engagement ($\beta = .36$, $p < 0.05$) and is the strongest predictor. The other variables—self-acceptance, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth, and perceived organizational support do not significantly predict work engagement ($p > 0.05$). Overall, positive relations with others are the most important factor influencing academics' work engagement at UiTM Selangor during the pandemic.

Table 1. Demographic profile.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	27	22.1
Female	95	77.9
Age		
26-35 years	21	17.2
36-45 years	58	47.5
46-55 years	30	24.6
56 above	13	10.7
Marital Status		
Single	25	20.5
Married	91	74.6
Others	6	4.9

Educational Level		
Bachelor Degree	3	2.5
Masters	45	36.9
PhD	72	59
Others	2	1.6
Campuses		
Shah Alam	59	48.4
Puncak Alam	39	32
Puncak Perdana	4	3.3
Sungai Buloh	18	14.8
Selayang	2	1.6
Length of Services		
Less than 3 Years	16	13.1
3 to 6 years	11	9.0
6 to 10 years	13	10.7
10 to 15 years	41	33.6
15 years and more	41	33.6

Table 2. Interpretation of reliability based on Cronbach's Alpha for 122 respondents.

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Work Engagement	17	0.90
Psychological Well-Being		
Self-acceptance	7	0.68
Positives relations with others	7	0.89
Environmental mastery	7	0.57
Autonomy	7	0.83
Purpose of Life	7	0.87
Personal growth	7	0.92
Perceived organizational support	8	0.94

Table 3. Total of mean scores and standard deviation.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Work Engagement	3.69	0.59
Psychological Well-Being		
Self-Acceptance	3.85	0.46
Positives relations with others	4.09	0.60
Environmental Mastery	3.69	0.44
Autonomy	3.76	0.58
Purpose of Life	3.99	0.60
Personal Growth	4.38	0.57
Perceived Organizational Support	3.40	0.77

Table 4. Correlation analysis.

Variables	Pearson Correlation	Significant Value	Magnitude of Correlation
Self-acceptance	0.36	0.00	Low
Positive relations with others	0.45	0.00	Moderate
Environmental mastery	0.30	0.00	Low
Autonomy	0.22	0.01	Weak
Purpose of Life	0.34	0.00	Low
Personal Growth	0.16	0.07	Moderate
Perceived Organizational Support	0.20	0.02	Low

Table 5. Results of regression between Independent Variables and Dependent Variable.

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t	Sig. Value
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	1.43	0.50	–	2.85	0.00
Self-acceptance	0.18	0.15	0.14	1.23	0.21
Positive relations with others	0.36	0.09	0.36	3.78	0.00
Environmental mastery	-0.01	0.15	-0.008	-0.07	0.94
Autonomy	0.02	0.10	0.02	0.28	0.77
Purpose of life	0.15	0.13	0.15	1.19	0.23
Personal growth	-0.18	0.10	-0.17	-1.68	
Perceived organizational support	0.05	0.06	0.07		0.80
(Constant)	1.43	0.50	–	2.85	
F-value			5.87		
R ²			0.26		
Adjusted R ²			0.22		
Sig. F change			0.00		

This study examined the level of work engagement and the relationships between psychological well-being, perceived organizational support, and work engagement among academics at UiTM Selangor Branch during the work-from-home period. The findings showed that academics had a moderately high level of work engagement (mean = 3.69), suggesting that they remained motivated and committed despite the challenges of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding is consistent with previous studies and supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory, which suggests that employees remain engaged when they have sufficient personal and job resources (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Contreras et al., 2021; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). The findings also showed that psychological well-being was partially related to work engagement, with only positive relations with others significantly influencing academics' engagement. This finding is consistent with Ryff (1989) framework and previous studies showing that supportive relationships help improve employee motivation and engagement (Joo et al., 2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic, support from colleagues, family members, and the university community helped academics remain engaged while working from home.

However, self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth were not significantly related to work engagement. This finding differs from previous studies that reported psychological well-being as an important predictor of work outcomes (Imran et al., 2020). The insignificant findings may be explained by the unique circumstances of the pandemic, where academics faced external challenges such as increased workload, technological difficulties, and rapid changes in teaching methods. Although academics may have possessed personal strengths, these resources may not have been sufficient to overcome situational challenges. For example, working from home did not necessarily increase autonomy because academics still needed to follow university requirements, teaching schedules, and administrative responsibilities. Therefore, social support may have been more important than individual psychological characteristics during this period. The findings support the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory by showing that not all personal resources influence work engagement equally. During the COVID-19 pandemic, positive relationships with others were the most important factor in helping academics remain engaged.

The study also found that perceived organizational support did not significantly influence work engagement, which differs from previous studies (Gunasekara and Zheng, 2019; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Although the JD–R Theory and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) suggest that organizational support should improve work engagement, the support provided during the pandemic may not have fully addressed academics' needs, such as managing increased workload, online teaching, and work–life balance. Academics may also have relied more on their own professional commitment and intrinsic motivation. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of positive relationships, supportive leadership, effective communication, and psychological well-being initiatives in maintaining academics' work engagement during challenging work conditions.

Recommendations for future research

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations are proposed to enhance academics' work engagement and psychological well-being. First, universities should strengthen institutional mental health interventions by providing accessible counselling

services, stress management programmes, and psychological support to help academics manage work-related pressures. Second, leadership training should be provided for academic leaders to develop supportive leadership skills, effective communication, empathy, and recognition practices, as strong leadership can enhance academics' motivation and engagement. Third, universities should establish peer support programmes, mentoring systems, and academic networking activities to strengthen positive relationships among academics, which was found to be an important factor influencing work engagement. Fourth, flexible work policies, including hybrid work arrangements, workload management, and greater flexibility in managing academic responsibilities, should be considered to support academics' work-life balance. Finally, continuous psychological well-being initiatives focusing on resilience, personal development, and stress management should be integrated into university policies to strengthen academics' ability to cope with changing work demands. These initiatives can assist higher education institutions in creating a supportive work environment that promotes academic well-being and sustained work engagement.

Conclusion

In summary, this study examined the influence of psychological well-being and perceived organizational support on work engagement among academics at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Selangor Branch during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed that academics demonstrated a moderately high level of work engagement while working from home, and only the positive relations with others dimension of psychological well-being had a significant positive relationship with work engagement, while other psychological well-being dimensions and perceived organizational support were not significant predictors. However, the study was limited by its focus on academics from a single UiTM branch, the use of purposive sampling, and a cross-sectional research design, which may limit the generalisability and causal interpretation of the findings. Practically, universities should strengthen psychological well-being initiatives, supportive leadership practices, peer support programmes, and flexible work arrangements to enhance academics' engagement and resilience. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples from different higher education institutions, apply longitudinal designs, and examine additional factors such as stress, burnout, leadership support, and work-family conflict to provide a more comprehensive understanding of academic work engagement.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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