

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AMONG EMPLOYEES OF A MALAYSIAN PRIVATE BANK

ZAKARIA, A.

*Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia.
e-mail: azzarina[at]uitm.edu.my*

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Abstract. Psychological empowerment has garnered considerable scholarly interest due to its contribution to employee effectiveness, motivation, and organisational performance. While prior research has extensively examined empowerment from organisational and managerial perspectives, a critical gap remains in understanding demographic differences in psychological empowerment, particularly within non-Western organisational settings. Accordingly, this study examined differences in psychological empowerment across selected demographic characteristics among employees of a Malaysian private bank. Using a non-probability sampling design, a quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted. Data were collected using Spreitzer's psychological empowerment measure. Questionnaires were administered through the human resources department of the participating bank, resulting in 432 responses from 900 questionnaires distributed. After data screening, 421 valid responses were retained for independent-samples t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results indicated that age and gender did not significantly differentiate employees' perceptions of psychological empowerment. However, significant differences were found for ethnicity ($t = -3.762$, $p < 0.001$) and organisational tenure ($F = 7.552$, $p < 0.001$). Employees belonging to the combined non-Malay ethnic group reported higher levels of psychological empowerment than Malay employees, contrary to previous empirical findings, while employees with longer organisational tenure reported greater psychological empowerment, a finding that corroborates previous empirical evidence. Despite its single-organisation focus, this study contributes to the psychological empowerment literature by demonstrating that demographic characteristics do not consistently differentiate employees' perceptions of psychological empowerment. Practically, the findings suggest that organisations should implement targeted empowerment initiatives, such as structured mentoring programmes that leverage the expertise of long-tenured employees to strengthen psychological empowerment among employees with shorter organisational tenure.

Keywords: *demographic, psychological empowerment, bank, Malaysia*

Introduction

Psychological empowerment emphasises the individual experience of empowerment rather than specific management techniques aimed at empowering people (Dewettinck and Van Ameijde, 2011). Specifically, it refers to employees' perceptions of their empowerment within the workplace (Nwanzu and Babalola, 2024). Spreitzer (1995) defined psychological empowerment through four cognitive dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Meaning denotes the degree to which individuals regard their job as valuable and significant (Holdsworth, 2007). Competence refers to employees' assurance in executing tasks proficiently (Yukl, 2002). Self-determination represents the extent to which employees regard autonomy in managing job-related activities (Ergeneli et al., 2007), whereas impact pertains to employees' convictions about their capacity to influence organisational results and affect significant changes at work (Carless, 2004). According to Spreitzer (1996), psychological empowerment is primarily shaped by employees' subjective judgements of their work environment, rather than solely by objective organisational variables. Matthews et al. (2003) argued that empowerment is achieved only when psychological states foster

employees' perceptions of empowerment. Consequently, examining empowerment from the perspective of individual employees is essential, as the expected organisational benefits of empowerment can only be realised when individuals genuinely experience psychological empowerment (Rasheed et al., 2026), underscoring the value that the current study will add to the existing empirical studies.

Individuals may, however, experience psychological empowerment differently. Demographic characteristics may affect the degree to which employees view themselves as empowered and influence their openness to empowerment. Demographic factors frequently linked to empowerment include age, gender, organisational tenure, and ethnicity (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024; Mangundjaya et al., 2024; Tuuli and Rowlinson, 2009; Pitts, 2005; Dimitriades and Kufidu, 2004; Hancer and George, 2003; Özaralli, 2003; Miller et al., 2001; Spreitzer, 1996). Current empirical findings regarding these demographic factors and empowerment, however, appear to be varied. Prior studies have consistently demonstrated evidence between age and empowerment, mostly suggesting that older employees are more likely to perceive higher levels of empowerment than their younger peers (Bartram and Casimir, 2007; Hancer and George, 2003; Özaralli, 2003). Findings on gender, however, are less consistent. While several studies have shown no differences in empowerment between gender (Tuuli and Rowlinson, 2009; Dimitriades and Kufidu, 2004; Özaralli, 2003;); Khoury (2024), Mangundjaya et al., (2024), and Obi (2021) observed a significant difference in the perception of empowerment between male and female employees. Organisational tenure has received considerable attention in the literature, with various studies demonstrating greater empowerment among employees with longer tenure (Ahmad et al., 2021; Panagiotis et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2006; Hancer and George, 2003; Özaralli, 2003; Koberg et al., 1999); ethnicity, however, has received little attention, with a paucity of empirical evidence in the literature. The United States Bureau of the Census (1992) found that minority groups may experience reduced empowerment due to their relatively weaker organisational positions. Similarly, Tahir and Rana (2013) observed greater psychological empowerment among those at higher levels of group identity. Whilst Koberg et al. (1999) observed no significant differences between majority and minority groups.

The mixed findings on demographic factors and psychological empowerment suggest that the role of demographic characteristics in explaining psychological empowerment remains unclear. Addressing these inconsistencies is essential for further refining the existing conceptual understanding of psychological empowerment and for informing evidence-based practice by guiding practitioners in designing targeted, rather than uniform, empowerment interventions. This need is particularly relevant within the Malaysian banking sector, which operates in a highly regulated, rapidly evolving, and intensely competitive service environment that depends heavily on employee agility and responsive customer service (Cahya Asih and Izzati, 2026). Steegh et al. (2026) highlight that psychological empowerment is particularly relevant in the context of an agile way of working. Furthermore, Malaysia's culturally diverse and multi-ethnic workforce (Keqin and Jianjun, 2024) presents a distinctive organisational context in which employees from different demographic backgrounds may experience psychological empowerment differently, making this setting particularly relevant for empirical investigation. Correspondingly, this study seeks to examine differences in psychological empowerment across employees' demographic characteristics in a Malaysian bank, guided by the following hypotheses: (H1): Older employees are likely

to perceive greater empowerment than their younger counterparts; (H2): Female employees will perceive a greater sense of empowerment compared to male employees; (H3): Employees with longer organisational tenure will perceive greater empowerment than those with shorter tenure; (H4): Members of the majority ethnic group will perceive greater empowerment than those of minority groups.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a cross-sectional survey using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was chosen mainly for two reasons. First, to accommodate the participating bank's request that the study ensure minimal contact with employees and prevent disruption to their routine work. Secondly, the questionnaire allows broad participant coverage within a limited timeframe (the researcher faced restricted access). The questionnaire, in English, included an information sheet and a consent form. Participants were required to give their voluntary consent prior to taking part in the study. Psychological empowerment was measured using Spreitzer (1995) tool, which comprises 12 items assessing employees' perceptions of psychological empowerment in the workplace. The instrument assesses four components of psychological empowerment, i.e., meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Responses were assigned on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and 7 'strongly agree'. Questionnaires were distributed to employees at a Malaysian private bank's head office via the human resource department (a non-probability sampling method was applied). A total of 900 questionnaires were sent out, and 432 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 48%. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), data screening was conducted to identify entry errors, missing values, and responses outside expected ranges. Preliminary analyses were then administered to assess normality and identify outliers, confirming the appropriateness of the data for subsequent statistical analysis. Following the screening and preliminary analysis, the final sample size was reduced to 421 cases. Parametric statistical techniques, namely the independent samples t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA), were applied to examine the four hypotheses (Field, 2024; Pallant, 2020; Brace et al., 2006).

Results and Discussion

Demographic profile of respondents

Female employees constituted the majority of participants (56.8%), while male employees represented 43.2% of the sample (*Table 1*). Employees aged between 26 and 35 years formed the largest age group, accounting for 51.6% of respondents. In terms of ethnicity, Malays represented the largest share (61.3%), followed by Chinese (28.5%), Indians (9.3%), and other ethnic groups (1.0%). The majority of respondents had served the bank for 1 to 5 years (32.8%), followed by 6 to 10 years (17.6%). (H1): Older employees will perceive higher empowerment than younger ones. Due to few respondents in some age categories, the original groups were merged into two groups for analysis: 35 years and below and above 35 years. *Table 2* shows 244 respondents in the younger group and 177 in the older. The 35-year cutoff was chosen because most respondents were younger and aligned with De Lange et al. (2006). The analysis of the

independent-samples t-test (*Table 3*) revealed no statistically significant difference between younger and older employees with respect to psychological empowerment ($t = -1.170$, $df = 419$, $p = 0.24$). H1 was therefore not supported. Although the findings contrast with earlier studies suggesting that older employees tend to perceive higher levels of empowerment (Hancer and George, 2003; Özaralli, 2003), they nevertheless align with Rattanasuk and Khuwatsamrit (2021)'s study, which found that age did not significantly influence psychological empowerment. In the current study, the absence of significant differences may be attributed to the concentration of respondents in younger age groups and limited representation of older employees. The findings may also indicate that age is becoming a less salient factor in differentiating employees' perceptions of psychological empowerment within contemporary banking organisations. (H2): Female employees will perceive a greater sense of empowerment compared to male employees.

Table 1. Personal demographic information.

Category	Cases	Percentage
Gender		
Male	182	43.2
Female	239	56.8
Age		
Below 25	27	6.4
26-30	108	25.7
31-35	109	25.9
36-40	57	13.5
41-45	56	13.3
46-50	53	12.6
51-55	11	2.6
Above 56	0	0
Ethnicity		
Malay	258	61.3
Chinese	120	28.5
Indian	39	9.3
Others	4	1.0
Organisational tenure (Length of service with the bank)		
Less than one year	57	13.5
1-5 years	138	32.8
6-10 years	74	17.6
11-15 years	62	14.7
16-20 years	48	11.4
21-25 years	29	6.9
26-30 years	13	3.1
Over 30 years	0	0

Table 2. Collapsing the age groups.

Original group	Sample (N)	New group	Sample (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
Below 25	27	35 years and below	244	5.53	0.68
26-30	108				
31-35	109				
36-40	57	Above 35 years	177	5.61	0.62
41-45	56				
46-50	53				
51-55	11				
56 and above	0				
Total	421		421		

Table 3. Independent samples t-test for empowerment and age.

Category	T statistic (t)	Degree of freedom (df)	Significance level (p) two-tailed
Empowerment	-1.170	419	$p=0.24$

Table 4 shows no significant gender difference in psychological empowerment ($t = 1.009$, $df = 419$, $p = 0.31$); thus, H2 was not supported. This aligns with studies

reporting no differences in empowerment by gender (Tuuli and Rowlinson, 2009; Dimitriadis and Kufidu, 2004; Özaralli, 2003). The findings may reflect increased gender parity in contemporary workplaces, where organisational empowerment practices have become sufficiently embedded to provide comparable experiences of autonomy, participation, and responsibility for both male and female employees. (H3): Employees with longer organisational tenure will perceive greater empowerment than those with shorter tenure. Given the variations in the number of respondents across organisational tenure categories, several groups were combined to form broader categories. The revised categories consisted of less than one year, 1 to 10 years, 11 to 20 years, and over 20 years, as presented in *Table 5*. ANOVA results shown in *Table 6* revealed statistically significant differences across organisational tenure groups with respect to psychological empowerment ($F(3,417) = 7.552, p < 0.001$). Employees with over 20 years of service reported the highest empowerment score. Therefore, H3 was supported. The findings parallel previous studies (Ahmad et al., 2021; Hancer and George, 2003; Özaralli, 2003; Koberg et al., 1999), suggesting that prolonged organisational exposure enables employees to accumulate organisational knowledge and develop greater confidence in performing their roles, thereby strengthening perceptions of psychological empowerment. (H4): Members of the majority ethnic group will perceive greater empowerment than those belonging to minority groups. To facilitate statistical analysis and minimise large variations in group size, the non-Malay ethnic categories (Chinese, Indian and Others) were combined into a single category labelled others. Consequently, the analysis compared two ethnic groups, namely Malays and Others. The independent samples t-test results presented in *Table 7* indicate a statistically significant difference between the ethnic groups with respect to psychological empowerment ($t = -3.762, df = 419, p < 0.001$). Respondents classified under others reported higher levels of empowerment than Malay respondents. Therefore, H4 was not supported. The findings differ from the H4 expectation that members of the majority group would perceive greater empowerment than minority groups. The present findings suggest that perceptions of empowerment may vary according to contextual and organisational factors within the Malaysian banking landscape. Differences in cultural value orientations that may shape perceptions of autonomy and responses to empowerment practices may explain the observed variations. The findings may also reflect organisational practices that provide relatively equitable opportunities for participation and decision-making across ethnic groups, suggesting that empowerment perceptions may be shaped more by organisational experiences than by ethnic majority or minority status alone. Further investigation is therefore warranted to better understand the mechanisms underlying ethnic differences in psychological empowerment.

Table 4 Independent samples t-test for empowerment and gender.

Category	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Empowerment	Male	182	5.60	0.62	1.009	419	p=0.31
	Female	239	5.54	0.68			

Table 5. Collapsing the organisational tenure groups.

Original group	Sample (N)	New group	Sample (N)	Mean (M)	SD
Less than a year	57	Less than a year	57	5.61	0.79
1-5 years	138	1-10 years	212	5.48	0.58
6-10 years	74				
11-15 years	62	11-20 years	110	5.59	0.76
16-20 years	48				

21-25 years	29	Over 20 years	42	5.85	0.43
26-30 years	13				
Over 30 years	0				
Total	421		421	5.56	0.66

Table 6. ANOVA for empowerment and organisational tenure.

Category	F statistic	df	Significance level (p) two-tailed
Empowerment	7.552	417	$p < 0.001$

Table 7. Independent samples t-test results for empowerment and ethnic group.

Category	Ethnic group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Empowerment	Malays	258	5.47	0.59	-3.762	419	$p < 0.001$
	Others	163	5.72	0.73			

Conclusion

This study examined differences in psychological empowerment across demographic factors of age, gender, ethnicity, and organisational tenure among head office employees of a Malaysian private bank. The results indicated no significant differences in empowerment by age or gender, with employees reporting similar levels regardless of these factors. Notable differences, however, exist by ethnicity and organisational tenure: minority ethnic groups report greater empowerment than the majority, and those with longer tenure report feeling more empowered. The findings extend the psychological empowerment literature by demonstrating that demographic characteristics do not uniformly differentiate employees' perceptions of psychological empowerment. While organisational tenure and ethnicity emerged as significant differentiators, age and gender did not. These findings refine the existing conceptual understanding by indicating that demographic differences in psychological empowerment vary across organisational settings and workforce contexts. Organisations should, hence, avoid adopting a uniform approach to empowerment and instead implement targeted interventions where meaningful demographic differences exist. One practical initiative is to institutionalise a structured mentoring programme that pairs employees with shorter organisational tenure with experienced employees who have served the organisation for more than 20 years. Such a programme may facilitate the transfer of organisational knowledge and practical expertise, enabling less-tenured employees to adapt more effectively to their roles while strengthening their overall psychological empowerment. The study, however, is subject to some limitations. It was conducted at a single Malaysian private bank, which confines the generalisability of the results. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature limits the analysis of views on empowerment over time. Future research could consider including multiple banking institutions, comparing private and public banks, or incorporating additional demographic and organisational factors to better understand psychological empowerment in Malaysia.

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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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