

Burnout Breakdown: Unraveling Influences on Academic Performance in Malaysian Public Universities

Raja Mayang Delima Mohd Beta *

*Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Seremban, 70300 Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA,
Email: drmayang@uitm.edu.my*

Ayu Kamareenna Abdullah Thani, Nur Hidayah Rosely, Siti Rosnita Sakarji,

Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM Cawangan Kelantan, Kampus Machang, 18500 Kelantan, MALAYSIA,

Nurbarirah Ahmad

Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM Cawangan Melaka, Kampus Alor Gajah, 78000 Melaka, MALAYSIA,

** Corresponding Author*

Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to unravel the influences on academic performance among faculty members in Malaysian public universities, with a specific focus on burnout. By examining the factors contributing to burnout and its impact on academic performance, this research sheds light on the complexities of the relationship.

Design/methodology/approach: The sample included 431 academicians from 20 universities. The study focused on job demands, perceived job burnout, job resources, and religious personality. Questionnaires were adapted from previous studies, and the Job Demands-Resources theory of burnout guided the research design. Data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0 and AMOS 23.0 with structural equation modeling.

Finding: The results showed that all factors significantly predicted the variables. Perceived job burnout was moderate (mean score: 3.16) and mediated the relationship between job demands and performance. Religious personality moderated the relationship between job demands and burnout, while job resources moderated the relationship between job demands and performance.

Research limitations/implications: The study recommends further research in different institutions to validate and expand the knowledge on job burnout among academicians, as it affects various aspects of academic performance in tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Job Burnout, Academicians, Religious Personality, Job Demands, Malaysian Public University

Introduction

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) is responsible for the education sector. The 19th Education Minister, Dr. Maszlee Malik said that both of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 and the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) will be continued and will control the newly merged Education Ministry and Higher Education Ministry. In 2013, the Ministry of Education embarked on a review

of higher education through the development of a Higher Education Blueprint that was published in 2015 (MoHE, 2016).

Academicians are the strength of good learning outcomes. Their job satisfaction in turn increases their morale and motivation to contribute to the system, and their contribution leads to better results. Thus, it can be seen that tertiary education outcomes will change labour market needs since knowledge is considered as a marketable good. As the number of academicians in public institutions of higher learning is significant to graduates' accomplishment (Deb, Strodi & Sun, 2014), it is viewed that more research should be conducted, with highlight given on increasing the productivity of academicians.

Previous studies on job burnout have mostly been conducted on private universities (Baharim, 2008); thus, this study chooses to examine it in the context of public universities. There are two main reasons why this study has chosen public universities, which are lack of understanding on the issues of job burnout (Baharim, 2008), and the work system, work motivation and organisation goals or objectives of employees in the public universities which differ from the private universities (Buelen & Broeck, 2007).

Perceived Job Burnout in Academician Context

Professional development is perceived as a load when pressure is created on academicians to upgrade themselves when they already have a lot of work to do. In such a situation, professional development is measured in terms of improvement of academicians' qualification, exposure and experience; these metrics prove to be difficult to concentrate on and thus, create stress and burnout among academicians (Zafir & Sheikh, 2013). Burnout refers to prolonged periods of stress experienced by staff and is usually described as emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and personal accomplishment at various levels. It has been associated with a wide range of negative effects on staff and organisations in areas such as work productivity and job satisfaction (Maslach et al., 2001).

In Malaysian public universities, teaching and research activities are usually described as related work for academicians. Academicians always believe that their roles and responsibilities are not only focused on teaching and research, but also involves invisible duties and activities such as peer reviews, mentoring, external examining and participation in events conducted by the community (Amzat, 2012). The burden of doubled responsibilities really put academicians under pressure (Said, Rasdi, Samah, Silong & Sulaiman, 2015). Without any proactive action by the government or universities, academicians will face job burnout (Chen, Haniff, Siau, Loh & Abd, 2014).

Based on previous studies, researchers have argued that within the Malaysian context, there are several types of occupations that have also been reported to suffer from stress such as navy personnel (Mohd Boki & Abu Talib, 2009), production operators (Zafir et al., 2008), shift workers (Nurfazila et al., 2008), petrochemical workers (Fairbrother & Wan, 2003), automotive industrial assembly workers (Edimansyah, 2008), registered nurses (Kamal et al., 2008), employees (Fardale & Murrer, 2015) salespeople (Nasurdin et al., 2006), bank dental healthcare workers (Rusli et al., 2006), laboratory technicians (Aziah et al, 2004 & Aniza et al., 2010) and managers (Manshor et al., 2003; Knudsen, Ducharme & Roman, 2009).

Literature Review

There are number of reasons for focusing on the area of perceived job burnout especially among academicians in public universities. Based on previous findings on perceived job burnout studies among academician, the review revealed that academician's exposure to high numbers of students, especially tuition of postgraduates, strongly predicts the experience of higher level of burnout (Robertson and Watts, 2010). Other predictive variables in the different level of perceived job burnout included gender, with higher depersonalisation scores found in male teachers and female teachers typically scoring higher on the emotional exhaustion dimension. Age also demonstrated an association, with younger staff appearing more vulnerable to emotional exhaustion.

Burnout in university teachers was comparable with other service sector employees such as school teachers and healthcare professionals. The current review reveals a scarcity of comparative studies across different university contexts, therefore a multi-site studies are required in order to control for the potential influence of moderating variables such as institution age when measuring burnout in university teachers.

Many universities promote awareness among educators and students about mental well being, including how to identify when mental health is threatened. This awareness can be directly applied to burnout management and indeed one of the goals of this research was to provide research evidence showing that certain individual conditon were conduction to lower levels of burnout among academicians. Recent studies (Omar et al. 2016; Capone & Petrillo 2016; Olorunsola 2013) have increasingly suggested that the level on perception towards job burnout should be further examined.

One reason for this is to test the belief, which has been posited by a number of burnout models, that an expected higher level of perceived job burnout will occur (Barkhuizen, Rothmann, Tytherleigh & Lackritz 2004; Ghorpade, Lackritz & Singh Adekola 2010; Friedmann, Azeem & Nazir 2008). However, up to now, relatively few research studies have empirically examined the consequences of perceived job burnout on academician's in-role and extra-role performance (Sai, Sobanah, Tharmalingam & Vikniswari 2018; Panda & Mohanty 2003; Rajeev & Jyoti 2009).

Nowadays, universities' management also face competitive pressure from other universities. Most universities now set new goals to compete with other universities, thus academicians are forced to be involuntarily involved with this critical goal. This may cause academicians to face plenty of burnout (Ahsan, Abdullah, Fie & Alam, 2009) which affect their performance (Ahsan et al., 2009).

Burnout is a significant risk factor which has cause increasing concerns, and there are a variety of predictive factors contributing to this risk, which including work overload, inadequate knowledge or skills to perform the job, repetitive and routine tasks, bad relationships with students and staff members, lack of respect and appreciation, lack of positive feedback from top management, difficult clients and co-workers, inadequate management practices, and the fact that quite often, the actual job conditions fall short of academician's expectations (Omar, Rusdi, Hussein, Thangal & Mohd 2016).

Research Objectives

Since this study aims to examine the in-role and extra-role performance of academicians working at Malaysian public universities, it will focus on using protective factors which include job demands and perceived job burnout. Following this, the specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- (i) To assess the levels of perceived job burnout among academicians at Malaysian public universities and based on their gender, marital status, age, job position, fieldwork, working experience, education level and universities categories.
- (ii) To examine the effects of job demands on in-role and extra-role performance, job demands on perceived job burnout, and perceived job burnout on in-role and extra-role performance among academicians at Malaysian public universities.

Design/methodology/approach

This study utilises a survey research and cross-sectional data methodology. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), using surveys or questionnaires an efficient data collection strategy, which allows the researcher to know exactly what is required and the way to measure the variables of interest. For instance, the ontological assumptions of objectivism match the researcher's assumptions on the nature of reality.

Conversely, the epistemological assumptions match the researcher's assumptions on what constitutes knowledge and how knowledge can be expanded. Finally, as there are several relevant theories and models in the literature (for example; job demands-resources theory, job demand-control theory), a deductive study that allows the researcher to develop hypotheses and test them using empirical data will be used, as recommended by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009). Hence, this study employs a confirmatory research study.

This research is quantitative in nature for the ease of collecting observable and measurable data on variables. There are researchers in the field of training who have used this method in collecting data (Waheeda et al., 2017). In this research, quantitative data was collected based on structured closed-ended questions or Likert scale. Moreover, quantitative research is more appropriate for understanding how one or more variables can influence each other (Creswell, 2009).

This method involves the procedure of structured questions where the response selections have been fixed, and a number of respondents were involved. Some past studies used the Likert scale to measure the variables in consideration because such scale has been shown to have high validity (Henard & Dacin, 2010; Zehir et al., 2011). Also, Dawes (2008) indicated that Likert scale is suitable when the data used for factor analysis, regression analysis, or structural equation modelling.

Findings

There is a positive and significant effect of perceived job burnout on academic performance. Based on Table 1, it is shown that all paths are significant such as job demands to perceived job burnout, perceived job burnout to in-role and extra-role performance and job demands to in-role and extra-role performance are significant. Based on result, the H1, H2 and H3 is significant, therefore the researcher proceeds to analyze the mediation effect for answering the H4, and moderating effect for answering H5 and H6 in following sections.

Accordingly, this study proposed that perceived job burnout would increase when the job demands increase. The results of the data analysis have shown a significant and positive link between job demand and perceived job burnout. The result showed that the academicians who are burden with high job demands might perceived themselves at the job burnout stage, which this more likely contributes to their performance.

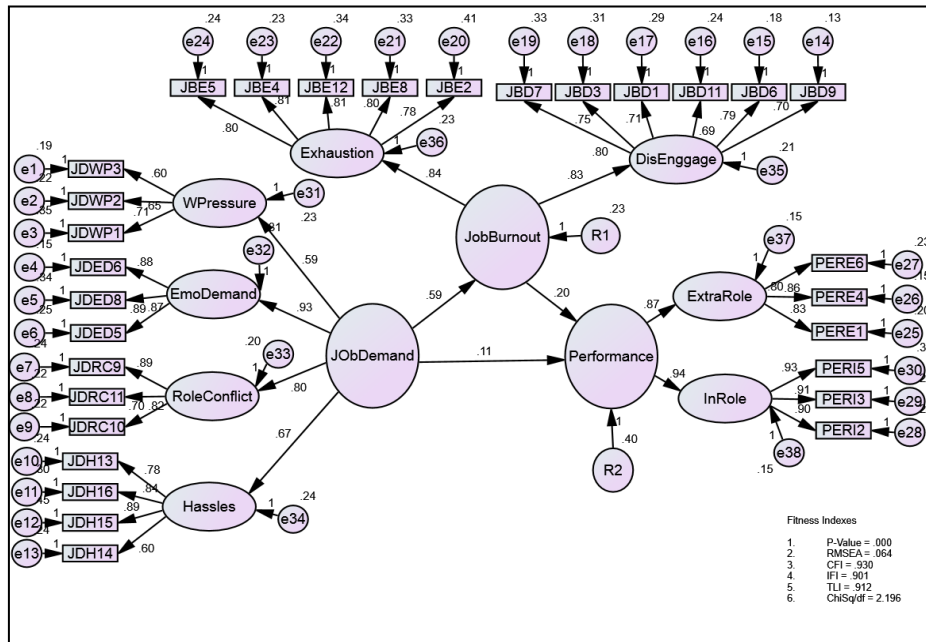


Figure 1. Structural Model

Table 1. The Regression Path Coefficients and its Significance based on p-value < 0.05

H(x)	Construct		Construct	Beta	Estimate	C.R.	P	Result	R2
H1	Performance	<-	JDemands	0.105	0.105	11.078	***	Significant	0.233
H2	JBurnout	<-	JDemands	0.586	0.586	12.228	***	Significant	0.192
H3	Performance	<-	JBurnout	0.195	0.195	11.897	***	Significant	0.232

The analysis of the result also showed in detail for each construct of each variable that is being tested. It has been revealed that academicians who faced high work pressure and emotional demand has highly significant and positively related to the high level of exhaustion meanwhile those academicians with high role conflict and hassles were facing high disengagement during their work at workplace.

In line with JD-R Theory (2011), it provides empirical evidence on the positive effect of job demands towards perceived job burnout. Most importantly, observation on perceived job burnout effected by the job demands is positive. The employees had increased extra work roles in the job because the job demands directly contributed to increase in the perceived job burnout and indirectly to reduce performance.

Whereas the JD-R model was originally used to explain burnout, it now accounts for various types of employee well-being. By the turn of the century, burnout had become a serious issue in most Western countries, and scholars started to realize that the syndrome was not unique to those performing “people work” (Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2002; Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou, & Kantas, 2003; Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996).

The findings of the study were consistent with those of previous studies which provided empirical evidence on the effect between job demands and work-related outcomes such as turnover, performance, burnout (Olorunsola, 2013; Bakker, 2014; Yolert & Bostanci, 2012). Each job demand does not occur in isolation from all other job demands, it is conceivable that the effects of job demands accumulate and interact with each other. Van Woerkom, Bakker, and Nishii (2016) found that workload strengthens the positive relationship between emotional job demands and sickness absenteeism, indicating that emotional demands are more detrimental under conditions of high workload.

Research limitations/implications

The limitation drawn from the results of this study are as the following. Firstly, this study was limited to only job demands as an independent variable, besides some of the demographic background factors are also being tested that has indirect influence towards the different level of perceived job burnout. There are still many factors influencing the perceived job burnout in the organization which was limited to be tested in this research. Secondly, the effect of perceived job burnout focuses on the in-role and extra-role performance of academicians and they are still many variables that may give effect on the perceived job burnout. Thirdly, a mediator for this study is the perceived job burnout. Other mediator variables should be considered for future study. Fourth, this study focuses also on the existence of two moderators. They are job resources and religious personality. Other potential moderating variables should also be put in consideration based on the nature of other studies. Fifth, this study focuses on Malaysian public universities and the result of the study could not be generalised to another public-sector agencies in Malaysia. Sixth, this study applies the method of quantitative research design and the data collected through a questionnaire survey. No interview session was conducted due to the time constraint to complete this study. Lastly, this study was conducted in a Muslim-majority country which limited the generalisation of the findings.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study is a quantitative study, a cross-sectional data technique was executed. A survey was conducted and self-administered questionnaire as a tool to measure variables in this study such as perceived job burnout, job demands, job resources, religious personality and in-role and extra-role performance was used. Data collected at twenty (20) Malaysian public universities were obtained from 431 staffs who participated in answering the online-questionnaire survey from November 2017 to March 2018. The results of the study were obtained through EFA analysis using IBM SPSS version 23.0 and Pooled-CFA using AMOS Version 23. From the pooled-CFA measurement model, it was proven that the variable of job demands has a significant and positive effect on the perceived job burnout, meanwhile the effect of the perceived job burnout showed significant and positive relationship towards academician's in-role and extra-role performance.

In addition, there were nine (9) demographic background factors that being tested, and all of the factors possessed different level of perceived job burnout. There are, gender, marital status, age and academicians' position, fieldwork, working experience, education level and universities categories. Besides, the significant results helped the hypotheses in this study to be accepted. This problem, intensified by poor and often abusive working conditions, can have serious effects on the mental health of education professionals. This situation is aggravated by salary reductions in times of economic crisis, longer working hours, and an

increase in the demands placed upon the teaching profession by society, which in turn has a detrimental effect on the quality of academic life of student (Rosales, 2013). This is because the results indicated that age is a relevant social variable, since professionals aged 20-29 years suffer from moderate levels of burnout, corroborating the findings of several studies. This may be due to the fact that age and outdated knowledge and skills may result in an accumulation of work and non-work-related fatigue, which together lead to the appearance of and gradual increase in burnout. However, other studies on burnout place maximum levels of burnout on other age groups (Gil Monte, 2005) which may be related to level of experience and training.

7.0 References

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