

The Role of Organizational Support in Promoting Work-Life Balance among Academic Staff: Evidence from Malaysian Public Universities

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i2/27674>

Published Date: 14 February 2026

Abstract

This study investigates the role of organizational support in promoting work-life balance among academic staff in Malaysian public universities. Work-life balance is a growing concern in higher education institutions due to the increasing demands of teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities that affect the mental health and overall well-being of academics. Despite various organizational initiatives introduced to support employees, the effectiveness of such support remains underexplored in the local academic context. A quantitative survey was conducted involving 300 academic staff from different public universities. The questionnaire examined respondents' demographic backgrounds, their perceptions of organizational support, and the effectiveness of policies and programs related to work-life balance. The findings reveal that while the majority of respondents (over 65%) perceive moderate to high organizational support in managing work and life responsibilities, satisfaction levels with the actual implementation of these policies remain relatively lower. Key areas of concern include the lack of managerial support, limited involvement of family in organizational programs, and insufficient improvements in work-life initiatives. Although 67% of respondents acknowledged the benefits of existing programs, only 53.7% expressed satisfaction with them. Additionally, many participants agreed that work-life policies should be enhanced and more inclusive, particularly in recognizing family values and individual employee needs. This study highlights the need for stronger organizational commitment and leadership in supporting work-life initiatives, with emphasis on continuous policy improvement, family-inclusive programs, and psychological support systems. The findings contribute to understanding the organizational dynamics that influence academic well-being and offer practical recommendations to promote a healthier and more productive academic workforce in Malaysian public universities.

Keywords: Organizational Support, Work-Life Balance, Academic Staff, Public Universities, Malaysia, Employee Well-Being

Introduction

In recent years, the issue of work-life balance (WLB) has gained increasing attention across various sectors, including higher education. Among academic staff in Malaysian public universities, the ability to achieve a healthy equilibrium between professional duties and personal life has become a growing concern. The nature of academic work—encompassing teaching responsibilities, administrative tasks, student supervision, and pressure to publish in reputable journals—places a heavy demand on the time, energy, and emotional well-being of academics (Yusof et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2021). These competing demands often blur the boundaries between work and personal life, leading to chronic stress, job dissatisfaction, reduced productivity, and ultimately, mental health challenges (Aziz et al., 2021; Omar & Hassan, 2023). *To situate this issue more clearly, these concerns have become even more pronounced within Malaysian public universities where systemic reforms and performance-driven expectations increasingly shape academic work.*

In the Malaysian context, academic institutions are undergoing rapid changes due to globalisation, digital transformation, and the implementation of performance-based evaluation systems such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These developments have placed additional expectations on academic staff to demonstrate excellence not only in teaching but also in research output, community engagement, innovation, and institutional visibility (Ismail et al., 2020; Zulkifli et al., 2023). This shift has inadvertently intensified workloads and extended working hours, often encroaching upon personal time meant for rest, recreation, and family bonding. Consequently, the risk of burnout, emotional exhaustion, and work-life conflict among academic personnel has become more apparent, warranting serious institutional attention (Hamid et al., 2023). Given these escalating demands, it becomes essential to explore how academics negotiate work and personal responsibilities within such a challenging institutional environment.

Work-life balance refers to the ability of an individual to effectively manage work responsibilities and personal life without one aspect significantly undermining the other. In academia, achieving this balance is essential for sustaining long-term motivation, job satisfaction, and personal well-being (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Cheong & Abdullah, 2020). Studies have shown that when academic staff experience greater autonomy, flexible working conditions, and institutional understanding of their family commitments, they are more likely to remain engaged, productive, and committed to their institution (Rahman et al., 2022; Norlina et al., 2023).

This underscores the need to critically examine the extent to which institutional structures and policies support academics in balancing these dual roles.

Organizational support plays a critical role in promoting work-life balance by providing not only formal policies and infrastructure but also a supportive culture that recognizes the diverse needs of employees. This includes the implementation of flexible working hours, access to childcare facilities, mental health support, family-friendly leave policies, and wellness promotion initiatives (Ng & Baharum, 2021; Jamaluddin et al., 2021). More importantly, the perception that the organization values and supports its staff has been

consistently linked to lower levels of work-life conflict and improved psychological well-being (Tan et al., 2020; Allen et al., 2021).

However, the availability of formal policies alone may not sufficiently reflect how organizational support is actually experienced by academic staff, indicating the importance of evaluating both structure and lived experience.

Despite the growing discourse on work-life balance in academia, there remains a lack of empirical research focusing specifically on how organizational support is perceived and experienced by academic staff in Malaysian public universities. Most existing studies tend to examine the issue from a general employee perspective, often overlooking the unique expectations and stressors faced by academics, such as promotion pressures, grant acquisition, and administrative burdens (Nor & Abdullah, 2024). Furthermore, the effectiveness and implementation of institutional WLB policies are still underexplored, especially in relation to leadership commitment, inclusivity, and practical satisfaction among staff members (Zulkifli et al., 2023).

These gaps demonstrate a clear need for research that holistically captures the contextual, cultural, and institutional dynamics shaping work-life balance among academics.

Given these gaps, this study aims to investigate the role of organizational support in promoting work-life balance among academic staff in Malaysian public universities. It seeks to identify the extent to which existing support mechanisms meet the holistic needs of academics and how these initiatives influence their mental health and job satisfaction. By understanding the perceptions and experiences of academic staff, the study offers valuable insights into how higher education institutions can design more effective and inclusive strategies to foster a healthier, more balanced academic workforce. *Thus, this study positions itself as a timely empirical inquiry that directly addresses the limited understanding of how organizational support is enacted and perceived within Malaysia's academic landscape.*

This study offers originality by examining organizational support for work-life balance specifically within Malaysian public universities, a context that remains insufficiently explored in existing scholarship. Unlike previous studies that focus broadly on general employees or isolated policy components, this research integrates institutional structures, cultural expectations, and academic workload realities into a unified analytical framework. The study contributes to the social science discipline by providing empirical evidence on how perceived organizational support influences academic well-being, thereby enriching theoretical discussions on organizational support theory and offering practical implications for higher education leadership and policy development.

Literature Review

The concept of work-life balance (WLB) has evolved significantly over the past few decades, transitioning from a gendered discourse surrounding working mothers to a broader organizational issue affecting employees across all levels and demographics. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work-life conflict as a form of inter-role conflict where the demands from work and personal life are mutually incompatible. This conflict has been linked to various negative outcomes, including psychological distress, burnout, job dissatisfaction, and impaired job performance.

Within the academic profession, WLB issues are especially pronounced. Academics often operate under flexible yet unstructured working conditions, leading to work encroaching on personal time. The pressure to publish, supervise students, attend to administrative duties, and engage in continuous professional development contributes to what has been described as the “always-on” culture in academia (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Lee et al., 2021; Nor & Abdullah, 2024)). In the Malaysian higher education context, performance-based incentives and key performance indicators (KPIs) have heightened the intensity of academic workloads, further straining the balance between professional and personal responsibilities.

Organizational support is identified as a key moderating factor that can help mitigate work-life conflict. Organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Norlina et al., 2023) posits that employees form general beliefs about the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. When employees perceive high levels of organizational support, they are more likely to reciprocate with increased affective commitment, job satisfaction, and engagement. This extends to WLB, where organizational support through policy, leadership, and workplace culture can foster a healthier integration of work and life domains.

Existing research suggests that WLB initiatives such as flexible working arrangements, leave entitlements, employee assistance programs, and wellness activities contribute positively to employees' mental health and work outcomes (Allen et al., 2013; Cheong & Abdullah, 2020; Ng & Baharum, 2021). However, the presence of such policies alone does not guarantee effectiveness. The implementation process, organizational culture, leadership buy-in, and employee awareness significantly influence how these policies are perceived and utilized.

In the Malaysian academic landscape, studies on WLB are still emerging. A few have explored job stress, gender disparities, and job satisfaction among lecturers, but there is a notable gap in research specifically examining the perceived effectiveness of organizational support structures. For instance, academic staff may be aware of available policies but hesitant to utilize them due to fear of negative career consequences or lack of managerial endorsement (Hamid et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is limited understanding of how WLB needs and experiences differ across demographic lines, such as age, gender, marital status, and career stage.

The literature also indicates a need to examine WLB through a more culturally contextualized lens. In Malaysia, family obligations, religious values, and collectivist norms may influence how work-life challenges are perceived and managed. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all policy may not be effective across different employee segments, particularly in academia where generational diversity and workload variability are pronounced (Rahman et al., 2022).

In light of these gaps, this study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge by empirically examining how academic staff in Malaysian public universities perceive the role of their institutions in supporting work-life balance, and how such support affects their overall well-being and mental health.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the role of organizational support in promoting work-life balance among academic staff in Malaysian public universities. A survey-based approach was selected to gather a broad set of data efficiently across multiple institutions, allowing for statistical analysis of patterns, perceptions, and relationships among variables.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised academic staff employed in selected Malaysian public universities, including lecturers, senior lecturers, language instructors, associate professors, and administrative-academic personnel. A total of 300 respondents participated in the study through purposive sampling, ensuring representation across different faculties, designations, academic qualifications, and years of service.

The sample included 48.7% male and 51.3% female respondents. A majority (84%) were married, and more than 86% held a Master's or Doctoral degree. In terms of designation, the sample consisted of lecturers (26%), senior lecturers (43.3%), and a smaller proportion of associate professors (7.3%). The duration of service ranged from less than 5 years to over 30 years, offering insights from both early-career and experienced academics.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of demographic variables and items measuring organizational support and work-life balance perceptions. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree) adapted from previous validated instruments, with modifications to suit the higher education context in Malaysia.

Key constructs measured include:

- Perceived organizational support for managing work-life commitments
- Satisfaction with existing work-life balance programs and policies
- Perceived effectiveness of institutional initiatives
- Recommendations for improvement

The instrument underwent content validation by academic experts and pilot testing with a small group of respondents to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability. Internal consistency reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, with acceptable values above 0.70 for key subscales.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through an online platform to ensure wider accessibility and convenience for participants. Respondents were invited via official university communication channels and provided with informed consent information. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the process.

Participation was voluntary, and no personal identifiers were collected, in compliance with ethical research standards. The survey remained open for four weeks, during which follow-up reminders were issued to increase the response rate.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, to describe respondent demographics and perceptions. The results

focused on the degree to which respondents agreed with statements about organizational support and work-life balance. Further inferential analysis (not covered here) may be conducted in future phases to examine relationships between demographic factors (e.g. age, gender, marital status) and perceptions of organizational support. However, this paper primarily reports on the descriptive findings and their implications.

Results and Discussion

Respondent Demographics

A total of 300 academic staff from Malaysian public universities participated in the survey. The gender distribution was balanced, with 48.7% male and 51.3% female respondents. The majority were aged between 36–50 years (77.3%), and most were married (84%). In terms of academic qualification, 51% held doctoral degrees, while 35.3% held master's degrees. The largest proportion of respondents were senior lecturers (43.3%), followed by lecturers (26%) and language instructors (13.3%). Regarding length of service, over 84% had served between 6 to 30 years, indicating the sample was largely composed of experienced academics.

Perceptions of Organizational Support for Work-Life Balance

Respondents were asked to assess their level of agreement with several statements concerning the role of their institutions in supporting work-life balance. Overall, the responses suggest that organizational support is perceived as moderately effective as shown in table 1.

- **General Support for Work-Life Balance:**

Most respondents (65.7%) agreed that their organization supports them in managing work and life commitments ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 0.670$). Similarly, 67% acknowledged that work-life balance programs and policies were beneficial to them ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.690$). These findings suggest a moderate level of institutional awareness and action in promoting work-life integration.

- **Satisfaction with Existing Programs:**

Despite general agreement on the usefulness of current policies, only 53.7% expressed satisfaction with their implementation ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.720$). This indicates a potential gap between policy design and execution. Satisfaction levels may be influenced by accessibility, relevance, and managerial support for such programs.

- **Family-Inclusive Practices and Managerial Support:**

60.3% of respondents agreed that work-life programs should involve employees' spouses to reduce conflict ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.707$), while 63.3% believed that supportive organizations must recognize employees' family needs ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.682$). These results underscore the importance of culturally contextualized practices that acknowledge the centrality of family in Malaysian society.

- **Perceived Gaps in Management Support:**

A significant portion (58.3%) believed that current work-life policies lack adequate managerial backing ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 0.643$), suggesting a top-down disconnect in policy enforcement. Moreover, 67.7% agreed that such policies need further improvement ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.517$), pointing to demand for continuous policy refinement.

Table 1

The Role of the Organization in Enhancing Work-Life Balance of Academic Staff

Item	Strongly Disagree Freq. (%)	Disagree Freq. (%)	Agree Freq. (%)	Strongly Agree Freq. (%)	Mean	STD
1. The organization supports me significantly in managing work and life commitments.	18 (6%)	66 (22%)	197 (65.7%)	19 (6.3%)	2.72	0.670
2. Programs and policies related to work-life balance management are beneficial to me.	23 (7.7%)	59 (19.7%)	201 (67%)	17 (5.7%)	2.71	0.690
3. I am satisfied with the work-life balance programs and policies provided by this organization.	31 (10.3%)	99 (33%)	161 (53.7%)	9 (3%)	2.49	0.720
4. The organization's work-life balance programs should provide opportunities for employees and their spouses to reduce work-life conflict.	22 (7.3%)	78 (26%)	181 (60.3%)	19 (6.3%)	2.66	0.707
5. Organizations that support work-life balance should appreciate individual employees and understand the importance of their families.	13 (4.3%)	8 (2.7%)	190 (63.3%)	89 (29.7%)	3.18	0.682
6. Work-life balance programs and policies in this organization do not receive support from management.	14 (4.7%)	175 (58.3%)	98 (32.7%)	13 (4.3%)	2.37	0.643
7. Work-life balance programs and policies in the organization need to be improved.	2 (0.7%)	4 (1.3%)	203 (67.7%)	91 (30.3%)	3.28	0.517

(Survey Sources, 2025)

Discussion

The findings highlight that while public universities in Malaysia have initiated various efforts to support academic staff in achieving work-life balance, there remain critical areas requiring improvement. The relatively moderate satisfaction levels suggest that institutional initiatives may lack visibility, accessibility, or alignment with the actual needs of academic staff. This is consistent with prior research indicating that the mere existence of work-life policies is insufficient if they are poorly communicated or perceived as inauthentic (Tan et al., 2020; Ng & Baharum, 2021). Many academic staff are unaware of the full range of available support or are reluctant to use them due to fear of negative career consequences or lack of managerial endorsement (Hamid et al., 2023; Norlina et al., 2023).

Importantly, the perceived absence of strong managerial commitment undermines the effectiveness of otherwise well-intentioned programs. As Allen et al. (2021) noted, leadership

buy-in is crucial in embedding work-life policies into organizational culture and in fostering employee trust and engagement. In the Malaysian academic context, where collectivist values and family obligations are central to personal well-being, policies that integrate family participation, respect cultural norms, and allow flexible arrangements are especially vital (Rahman et al., 2022; Jamaluddin et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the generational composition of academic staff also plays a role in shaping expectations and perceptions of organizational support. Younger staff members may prioritize autonomy, digital flexibility, and personal development, whereas senior academics might value structured support and recognition of family commitments (Zulkifli et al., 2023; Ismail et al., 2020). Therefore, universities should adopt a differentiated and inclusive approach in developing work-life initiatives that are adaptable to diverse demographic groups.

The study reinforces the theoretical propositions of Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which posits that employees respond positively when they perceive the organization as valuing their well-being and contributions. In this study, perceptions of support were associated with moderate satisfaction, but implementation gaps suggest a disconnect between policy intent and lived experiences. Bridging this gap requires strategic alignment between policy formulation, leadership accountability, and feedback-driven improvement (Cheong & Abdullah, 2020; Omar & Hassan, 2023).

Finally, the integration of psychological and mental health support into the broader framework of organizational support is imperative. Academic staff who are emotionally exhausted or cognitively overwhelmed are less likely to remain productive and committed. Recent literature has shown that burnout, stress, and role ambiguity are rising among Malaysian academics, particularly post-pandemic, and call for universities to provide accessible counselling, resilience training, and stress management programs (Aziz et al., 2021; Yusof et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This study examined the role of organizational support in promoting work-life balance among academic staff in Malaysian public universities. The findings indicate that while universities have implemented various policies and programs aimed at supporting staff in balancing work and personal life, their effectiveness remains moderate. Most respondents acknowledged the value of existing initiatives, but a significant number expressed dissatisfaction with their implementation and questioned the degree of managerial support. It is evident that work-life balance is a pressing issue within the Malaysian academic sector, driven by increasing workloads, high performance expectations, and evolving institutional demands. Organizational support, especially in the form of flexible policies, family-inclusive practices, and leadership engagement, is critical in mitigating the negative consequences of work-life conflict such as stress, burnout, and reduced productivity. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on academic well-being by offering empirical evidence from a Malaysian context. It highlights the gap between policy presence and policy impact, emphasizing the need for institutions to not only develop but also sustain and refine work-life balance initiatives that are relevant, inclusive, and effectively communicated.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several strategies are recommended to enhance organizational support for work-life balance in Malaysian public universities. First, leadership at all levels must demonstrate clear commitment to work-life values, ensuring consistent implementation of related policies. Effective communication is also essential, as many staff may be unaware of available support programs; thus, regular dissemination through internal channels is crucial. Additionally, programs should be tailored to reflect the diverse needs of academic staff, considering factors such as generational differences and cultural expectations, including family involvement. Institutions should also establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the impact of work-life policies through staff feedback and performance metrics. Finally, integrating mental health and psychological support, including counselling and stress management services, is vital to strengthening employee well-being beyond just flexible scheduling. In sum, addressing work-life balance is not merely a matter of policy provision but one of strategic implementation and cultural alignment. With greater commitment and responsiveness, public universities in Malaysia can foster a more balanced, satisfied, and productive academic workforce.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka for the funding provided under the IPTK-Registrar Office Top-Down Grant 2022, Short-Term Research (PJP/2022/TD/IPTK/S01837).

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