

Exploring the Impact of Job Satisfaction on Educator Performance in Private Universities in Anhui, China

¹Wang Li, ²Ali Khatibi, ²Jacqueline Tham, ²S. M. Ferdous Azam

¹President's Office, Anhui Xinhua University, No.555, West Wangjiang Road, Hefei, 230088, Anhui, China

²Postgraduate Centre, Management and Science University (MSU), University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, 40100 Shah Alam, Selangor

Article History:

Received: 23-10-2024

Revised: 05-11-2024

Accepted: 13-12-2024

Abstract:

This study examines the crucial link between job satisfaction and teaching performance among educators at private universities in Anhui Province, China. As competition in higher education intensifies and educational paradigms evolve, the well-being of faculty members has become a key factor in driving both individual and institutional success. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to capture a wide range of perspectives from educators. The results highlight a strong positive relationship between job satisfaction and teaching performance, indicating that educators who feel valued and supported are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of engagement, effectiveness, and commitment. The study identifies several key factors contributing to job satisfaction, including a supportive work environment, fair workload distribution, professional development opportunities, and effective communication between faculty and administration. In contrast, workplace stressors were found to negatively impact teacher morale and productivity, emphasizing the need for institutions to foster a positive organizational culture. Based on these findings, the study provides actionable recommendations for university leaders and policymakers to enhance job satisfaction, thereby improving teacher performance and overall educational outcomes. By prioritizing educator well-being, private universities in Anhui can create an environment that not only enhances individual performance but also supports the long-term success and sustainability of the educational system. This research offers valuable insights for higher education stakeholders seeking to improve institutional effectiveness through a focus on teacher satisfaction.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, Job performance, Private universities, Higher education, Anhui Province

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving professional landscape, job performance (JP) has become a critical concern for both employees and organizations. It reflects the individual contributions of employees toward achieving organizational goals, and is increasingly recognized as a strategic focus for firms (Abeykoon & Perera, 2019). The universality of job performance criteria across various demographics emphasizes its relevance to workers of all genders, ages, and employment situations, highlighting the growing body of research examining the link between job performance and job satisfaction (Arunika & Kottawa, 2016). Achieving a balanced integration of professional and personal life responsibilities is increasingly important in understanding this relationship.

A significant body of literature underscores the strong connection between work-life balance and job performance. Mend and Zhang (2017) argue that a harmonious work-life balance is essential for enhancing job satisfaction, which in turn is positively correlated with job performance. In the context of China, Thevanes and Mangaleswaran (2018) found that employees who maintain a better work-life balance report higher levels of both job performance and job satisfaction. This trend is particularly evident in the banking sector, where research by Rifadha and Sangarandeniya (2015) and Adikaram and Jayathileke (2015) highlights unique challenges faced by banking professionals. Rapid demographic shifts, technological advancements, and the transition to virtual work environments have contributed to heightened stress levels among employees in this sector, underscoring the need for effective work-life balance strategies.

Studies within the Chinese banking sector further illustrate how achieving a balance between work and personal life positively influences job performance, particularly among managerial employees (Rifadha & Sangarandeniya, 2015; Adikaram & Jayathileke, 2015). Female employees in managerial roles often report higher levels of job satisfaction compared to their male counterparts, reflecting a nuanced dynamic in job satisfaction and performance across genders (Rifadha & Sangarandeniya, 2015). The intense pressures, tight deadlines, and heightened expectations characteristic of the banking sector highlight the need for effective strategies to support job satisfaction and performance among employees.

The implications of work-life balance extend beyond individual well-being, significantly impacting organizational success. Adikaram and Jayathileke (2015) argue that private banks can leverage insights into work-life balance to enhance their policies and benefit programs, ultimately fostering a stable and content workforce. High levels of employee satisfaction can lead to increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, and greater employee loyalty, all contributing to overall organizational success. Further studies in both the Chinese and manufacturing sectors reinforce that job performance positively influences job satisfaction, especially in organizations that implement practices aimed at enhancing employee performance (Abeykoon & Perera, 2019).

Research consistently highlights the positive relationship between job satisfaction and factors such as salary, supervision, and the overall working environment (Samarawickrama et al., 2018; Tham et al., 2017; Pambreni et al., 2019; Herath et al., 2023). The increasing emphasis on work-life balance as a key determinant of employee satisfaction further emphasizes the complex nature of factors contributing to job satisfaction (Kumari et al., 2019). Aruna Shantha (2019) points out that many employees in China express dissatisfaction with their work due to inadequate work-life balance, citing the demanding nature of tasks and frequent transitions to challenging assignments as significant contributors to declining efficiency.

Despite the growing recognition of work-life balance, a gap remains in understanding how employers in China prioritize this aspect. Dissanayaka and Ali (2013), as cited in Abeykoon and Perera (2019), note that many employers have not adequately addressed work-life balance, possibly due to a lack of understanding of effective methods. Moreover, research by Mohottigedera (2018) emphasizes the positive link between job satisfaction and organizational involvement, suggesting that organizations that prioritize employee well-being stand to benefit from enhanced performance and engagement.

The findings highlight the critical interplay between job performance, job satisfaction, and work-life balance, particularly within the context of the Chinese banking and manufacturing sectors. Organizations aiming to improve their policies, benefit programs, and employment structures should address the nuanced needs of their employees and optimize work environments to enhance overall satisfaction and productivity. These findings also have societal implications, particularly in government institutions, where employee satisfaction can lead to improved public services and social development outcomes (Shanthykumary & Nirushika, 2020).

While existing studies provide valuable insights into the associations between the working environment and job satisfaction, further exploration is needed, particularly within China's higher education sector. Research by Amarasena (2019) and Herath and Wijerathna (2019) suggests a positive correlation between working conditions and job satisfaction. However, other studies indicate inconsistent results, highlighting the complexity of these relationships. This study aims to explore the interplay between job performance, job satisfaction, workload, and working environment, focusing on university academic administrators in private higher educational institutions in China. By addressing these complexities, this research seeks to contribute valuable insights to the existing literature and inform organizational practices that can enhance employee satisfaction and performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job satisfaction is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has garnered significant scholarly attention, resulting in diverse interpretations and dimensions across various research efforts. Locke (1976) defines job satisfaction as a pleasant emotional state that arises from evaluating one's work experiences. This definition emphasizes the emotional aspect of job satisfaction, suggesting that positive feelings about one's job are deeply intertwined with personal experiences and perceptions. Robbins (1993) expands on this by describing job satisfaction as the overall attitude an individual holds toward their job, highlighting that satisfaction can be either positive or negative, depending on one's overall attitude toward employment. This broader perspective emphasizes that satisfaction is not a monolithic concept but rather a composite of various feelings and opinions related to specific aspects of the job.

Spector (1997) further refines the concept by framing job satisfaction as individuals' global sentiments regarding their work and attitudes toward different job facets. He asserts that job satisfaction is not merely an emotional state but also an evaluative process that encompasses different elements of the work environment. Building on this, Spector (2005) describes job satisfaction as an attitudinal variable that reflects individuals' overall perceptions of their employment. In this view, job satisfaction can encompass both emotional responses and cognitive evaluations of work conditions. Lu et al. (2005) contribute further by suggesting that job satisfaction can be viewed as either a global feeling toward one's job or a set of attitudes about specific job dimensions, such as pay, supervision, and opportunities for growth. Weiss (2002) also adds to this understanding, emphasizing that job satisfaction is fundamentally an attitude characterized by positive or negative evaluations of the employee's working conditions and environment.

Nasrallah (2017) frames job satisfaction within the context of occupational psychology, proposing that it involves an awareness of the relationship between performance and expectations. He notes that job

satisfaction manifests as an employee's overall stance toward their job, shaped by various factors such as a comfortable work environment, good supervision, and effective mentorship. Moreover, Nasrallah (2017) suggests that job satisfaction reflects a combination of pleasant feelings arising from one's employment and the associated institution, reinforcing the idea that work can indeed be a source of genuine pleasure. Job satisfaction, in this context, encompasses emotions and attitudes influenced by factors such as opportunities for growth, organizational policies, working conditions, and interpersonal relationships.

Several factors influence employee satisfaction levels, which can be categorized into social, organizational, and individual factors (Alias et al., 2018). Jayasena and Weligamage (2016) identify key determinants of job satisfaction, including pay, promotion opportunities, supervision quality, fringe benefits, and contingent rewards. Thiagaraj and Thangaswamy (2017) connect job satisfaction to personal factors, employment conditions, and management practices, illustrating the complex interplay of various elements in shaping employee attitudes. Harem (2015) emphasizes that job satisfaction is a vital component of an employee's overall attitudes, indicating that contentment and enjoyment in one's role are essential for cultivating loyalty, which in turn enhances organizational performance. A satisfied workforce is more likely to contribute actively to organizational goals, influencing employee retention, productivity, and overall organizational effectiveness.

Nasrallah (2017) underscores the importance of job satisfaction in promoting health, well-being, and organizational success. Employees who are satisfied demonstrate greater commitment and enthusiasm, which leads to higher success in their professional roles. Job satisfaction is recognized not only as a subjective experience for individuals but also as a critical determinant of organizational performance. Employees with higher levels of job satisfaction are more committed to their organizations and more likely to deliver superior customer service. Consequently, job satisfaction can directly impact organizational outcomes such as productivity, employee retention, and customer satisfaction.

The work environment is another significant factor influencing employee satisfaction and motivation. It includes the physical workspace, organizational rules and regulations, available resources, organizational culture, and relationships with supervisors (Heath, 2006, as cited in Shanthykumary & Nirushika, 2020). Agbozo et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of an attractive and supportive work environment, noting that key elements such as competitive salaries, trustworthy employee-management relationships, equity, fairness, and challenging yet achievable objectives all contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction under optimal working conditions. In the context of Chinese government sector organizations, Shanthykumary and Nirushika (2020) highlight a general lack of attention to employees' working conditions and job satisfaction. This issue is similarly evident in private sector organizations in developing countries, often leading to lower employee satisfaction (McNall et al., 2016; Wulandari et al., 2023; Ranawaka et al., 2023).

Yusuf and Metiboba (2012) categorize the working environment into three broad categories: technical, human, and organizational. The technical environment refers to the physical infrastructure, equipment, and tools available for work, while the human environment focuses on interpersonal relationships among coworkers, employers, and employees. The organizational environment pertains to issues related to organizational procedures, rules, and values, all of which significantly influence employee attitudes and behavior. Agbozo et al. (2017) further break down the working environment into physical,

psychological, and social components. The physical environment involves tangible conditions like office layout and machinery, while the psychological environment relates to factors that influence employee behavior, such as emotions and attitudes. The social environment, on the other hand, includes working relationships, communication styles, and teamwork dynamics, all of which play a crucial role in shaping job satisfaction.

Moreover, workload plays a critical role in employee satisfaction and performance. Syihabudhin et al. (2019) define employee workload as the burden of work and the capacity of employees to manage tasks effectively within their roles. Workload can be categorized into quantitative and qualitative dimensions (Koesomowidjojo et al., 2017). Quantitative workload refers to factors like working hours and work stress, particularly when the volume of tasks exceeds the employee's capacity. In contrast, qualitative workload involves the complexity of tasks, which can challenge employees' abilities to meet job requirements (Omar et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2023; Sudha et al., 2023). Organizational structure significantly impacts workload distribution and task complexity, with variations in workload among employees with similar roles based on education, skills, and specialization (Sravani, 2018). Rajan (2018) highlights the relationship between employee workload and productivity, noting that while insufficient workload may lead to unproductivity, excessive workload can result in stress, burnout, and diminished performance. Striking a balance in workload is therefore essential for employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.

Excessive workload can also spill over into employees' personal lives, which leads to challenges that lower overall efficiency (Syihabudhin et al., 2019). Therefore, organizations must carefully manage workloads to support employee well-being and performance. Research consistently highlights the importance of workload management in influencing job satisfaction, suggesting that organizations that implement effective workload management strategies can foster greater employee well-being.

In conclusion, job satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including individual attitudes, working conditions, and workload, which collectively shape employee experiences. Recognizing and addressing these factors is essential for organizations seeking to enhance employee satisfaction and improve overall performance. The relationship between job satisfaction, organizational dynamics, and employee well-being is complex and necessitates ongoing research and practical strategies to foster environments that promote both employee happiness and organizational success. Theoretical frameworks such as the Spillover Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) Model, and the Effort-Recovery Model provide valuable lenses through which to understand the intricate relationships between job performance, satisfaction, and workload. These models underscore the importance of balancing work and personal life, addressing employee needs, and managing workload effectively to ensure optimal job satisfaction and organizational outcomes.

In Figure 1, the independent variables, working environment, and workload, are depicted as influencing the mediating variable, job satisfaction. This reflects the idea that the conditions of the work environment and the demands of the workload directly impact the satisfaction levels of academic administrators.

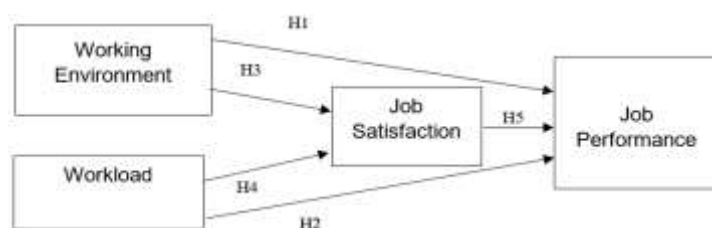


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

The following section presents the research hypotheses developed.

H1: There is a relationship between working environment and job performance of teachers at Private Higher Education Institutes in China.

H2: There is a relationship between workload and job performance of the teachers at Private Higher Education Institute in China.

H3: There is a relationship between working environment and job satisfaction of the teachers at Private Higher Education Institute in China.

H4: There is a relationship between workload and job satisfaction of teachers at the Private Higher Education Institutes in China.

H5: There is a relationship between job performance and job satisfaction of the teachers at Private Higher Education Institutes in China.

H6: Job satisfaction has a mediating effect of working environment on job performance of the teachers at Private Higher Education Institutes in China.

H7: Job satisfaction has a mediating effect of workload on job performance of the teachers at Private Higher Education Institutes in China.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the factors affecting job satisfaction and performance among academic administrators in Chinese private higher education institutions, with a focus on Anhui Province. The research targets a population of 498 academic administrators across various institutions, providing a solid foundation for the sampling process. A comprehensive sampling frame is essential to ensure a valid representation of the larger population, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the research outcomes. The study seeks to strike a balance between obtaining a sufficiently large sample for meaningful insights while considering available resources and time constraints. Stratified random sampling is employed to ensure diversity and representativeness, with subgroups based on characteristics such as academic departments or years of experience. Nine universities are selected from different provinces, prioritizing those with the highest number of academic administrators to maintain a proportional stratified random sampling design. This guarantees that each selected sample accurately reflects the overall academic administrator population across the chosen institutions.

To capture the diversity within administrative roles, five distinct grades of academic administrators are identified: Assistant Registrars/Bursars, Senior Assistant Registrars/Bursars, Deputy Registrars/Bursars, Registrars/Bursars, and Others. This categorization ensures comprehensive

representation, contributing to a holistic understanding of the experiences and perceptions of academic administrators in the Chinese private higher education context. The sample size is determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, which recommends 217 participants based on a population of 498. To account for potential non-responses, the researcher aims for a sample of 300 participants, guided by an expected response rate of 72.5%, derived from similar studies. The distribution of questionnaires is proportional to the number of academic administrators in each institution, ensuring accurate representation.

Instrument development is crucial in obtaining reliable data, and this study utilizes structured questionnaires with 50 closed-ended questions and eight demographic questions. These questions assess key constructs such as job satisfaction, job performance, working environment, and workload, while demographic questions allow for further analysis. Established scales are used to measure these constructs, with adjustments made to ensure relevance within the Chinese context. A pretest is conducted to refine the questionnaire, incorporating feedback from superiors, subordinates, and peers. Reliability is evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, and validity is established through content, criterion, and construct validity (Azam et al., 2021; Azam et al., 2023; Raziqa & Maulabakhsh, 2015). Data is collected via both hard copy and electronic questionnaires to increase response rates. Ethical considerations are addressed through obtaining permission from universities, and no translation of questionnaires is required due to assumed proficiency in English.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are essential for understanding the context of this study, as they provide valuable insights into the profile of academic administrators within Chinese private higher education institutions. A total of 233 respondents participated in the survey, providing information about their university affiliation, designation, highest qualification, age, gender, years of service at the executive level, marital status, and parental status. The sample comprised academic administrators from various institutions, with Anhui Finance & Trade Vocational College and the University of Anhui Province contributing the highest percentages of respondents, at 14.6% and 18.0%, respectively. On the other hand, Anhui Agriculture University had the lowest representation, at 5.6%. This distribution indicates that the sample included a balanced representation across the different universities. Regarding the respondents' designations, most were in entry-level administrative positions, with 36.9% holding roles as Assistant Registrars/Bursars, while 33.0% were Senior Assistant Registrars/Bursars. This suggests that junior and middle-level executive roles dominate university administration in China, reflecting the hierarchical nature of career progression in this context.

The respondents' educational qualifications revealed that the majority held master's degrees, with 61.8% of the sample having obtained this level of education, and 37.3% had a bachelor's degree. Notably, no respondents held doctoral degrees, highlighting the rarity of such qualifications in positions within Chinese private universities. The age distribution of the sample showed that most respondents were middle-aged, with the largest age group, 39.1%, falling within the 40-49 age range, while younger respondents, aged 20-29 years, made up only 10.3% of the sample. Gender distribution indicated a slight majority of female respondents, at 56.2%, which aligns with the broader demographic trend in university administration in China, where women represent approximately 62% of such roles. The years of service data indicated that 23.2% of respondents had been in executive-level positions for

15-19 years, suggesting that many academic administrators remain in their roles for extended periods despite the limited upward mobility often associated with such positions. Regarding marital status, 89.3% of respondents were married, and a significant proportion, 73.8%, were parents, reflecting societal norms and family structures in this demographic. Overall, the demographic data provides a comprehensive understanding of the profiles of academic administrators in Chinese private higher education institutions, highlighting key trends such as age, gender, education, and career longevity.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed in this study to examine the relationships between various constructs, including working environment, workload, job satisfaction, and job performance. SEM is a powerful statistical technique that enables researchers to test complex relationships among multiple dependent and independent variables, making it particularly useful for investigating intricate hypotheses in the social sciences. In this study, SEM was used to evaluate the research objectives and hypotheses derived from the conceptual framework, which postulates specific relationships among the variables. Following the two-stage approach outlined by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the first stage involved developing the measurement model through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). CFA tests whether the data fits a hypothesized model based on prior theoretical frameworks or research. The initial CFA was used to validate the measurement model by testing the fit between the observed data and the hypothesized model, utilizing key fit indices such as the normed chi-square (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). In the initial model, the fit indices indicated poor overall model fit. While the normed chi-square and RMSEA scores fell within acceptable ranges, the CFI was below the recommended threshold, prompting model revision. This revision involved allowing correlations between specific error terms based on modification indices suggested by AMOS, which improved the CFI value and resulted in a valid and reliable measurement model for the study's constructs.

Despite improvements, the final measurement model still presented some issues. Although the normed chi-square and RMSEA values met the recommended thresholds, the CFI remained slightly below 0.90, suggesting that the model did not fully align with the hypothesized relationships. However, the model was still deemed acceptable, as fit indices are not the sole determinants of model validity. As Bentler and Chow (1987), Byrne (2010), and Hair et al. (2010) argue, goodness-of-fit indices are only statistical indicators and should not be used as the sole criteria for model acceptance in social research. It is essential to consider both theoretical and methodological justifications when assessing model fit. According to widely accepted guidelines, a normed chi-square value below 5, a CFI exceeding 0.90, and an RMSEA below 0.08 are considered acceptable. However, minor deviations from these thresholds should not be overly criticized. Instead, researchers should prioritize theoretical coherence and logical justification for the hypothesized relationships, as fit indices are only one aspect of the overall validity of a model in social science research (Bentler & Chow, 1987; Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010; Jacobucci, 2010). This approach highlights the importance of balancing statistical indicators with theoretical and conceptual clarity when evaluating the adequacy of a model in social science research.

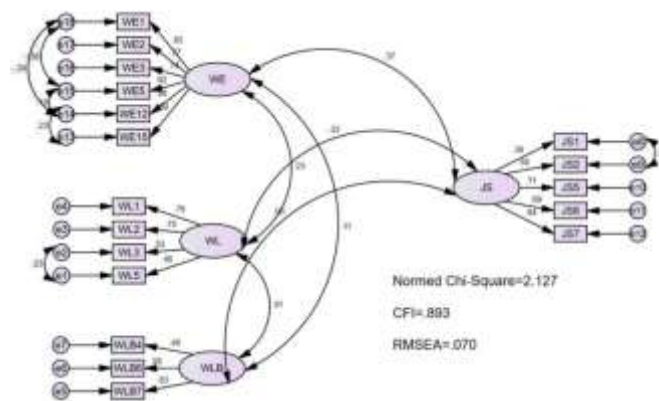


Figure 2: Final Measurement Model - Overall

The final measurement model was assessed for goodness of fit using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) before moving on to a full structural model to explore causal relationships among the latent constructs and test the proposed hypotheses. While the normed Chi-Square and RMSEA values met the recommended thresholds, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was below the acceptable level of 0.90, indicating that the structural model required respecification to improve the data fit. A review of the modification indices revealed that the covariance of error terms could not be adjusted, as these terms were linked to different constructs. Consequently, despite some indices remaining suboptimal, the final structural model was accepted. This decision was based on the understanding that goodness-of-fit indices are primarily statistical indicators (Bentler & Chow, 1987; Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010) and should be considered alongside theoretical and methodological justifications. Therefore, even though the CFI fell short of the ideal threshold, the model was deemed valid, given its theoretical coherence. The initial model was found to adequately fit the data, and further modifications were not deemed necessary. This approach highlights the importance of balancing statistical criteria with theoretical considerations when determining the adequacy of a model in social science research. The decision to accept the model, despite some suboptimal indices, underscores the recognition that minor deviations in fit indices should not automatically lead to model rejection, especially when the theoretical and conceptual framework is sound. Thus, the final structural model provided a satisfactory basis for testing the hypotheses, even with some limitations in the fit indices, reaffirming the value of theoretical alignment in model evaluation.

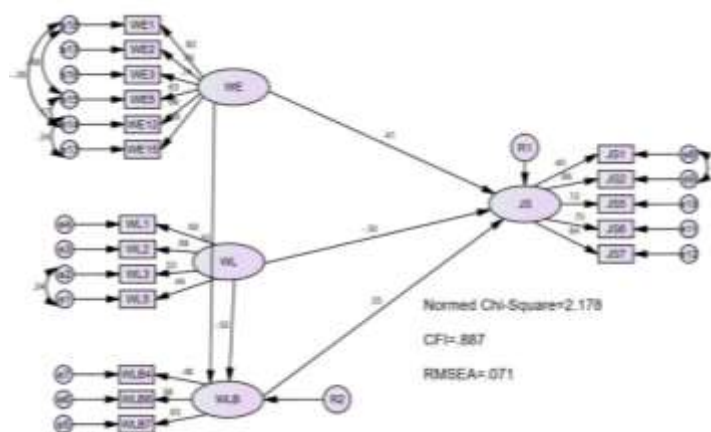


Figure 3: Final Structural model

The final structural model was rigorously tested for goodness of fit using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) before being used to investigate the causal relationships among the latent constructs. The model's fit indices revealed that the normed Chi-Square and RMSEA values met the recommended thresholds, with scores of 2.178 and 0.071, respectively, indicating an adequate fit. Specifically, the normed Chi-Square value was below the recommended level of 3, and the RMSEA was below 0.08, both of which suggest that the model fits the data well. However, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was slightly below the acceptable threshold of 0.90, which suggested that the structural model may require some respecification for a better fit. Despite this, the model was accepted and verified, based on the understanding that goodness-of-fit indices are statistical tools that serve as indicators of model fitness, but should not be the sole determinant in model evaluation (Bentler & Chow, 1987; Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010). Theoretical and methodological considerations should also play a crucial role in determining the acceptability of a model, particularly in social science research. As such, despite the CFI being below the ideal level, the model was considered acceptable, as the overall theoretical framework and conceptual foundation of the study remained sound. In social science research, these fit indices are primarily statistical, and minor deviations from ideal values are often seen as unrealistic or impractical in the context of complex, real-world data (Bentler & Chow, 1987; Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010; Jacobucci, 2010).

Figure 3 and accompanying tables provide a detailed overview of the goodness-of-fit indices, which show that the initial model sufficiently fits the data, ensuring that the variables represent and measure the constructs of the overall measurement model. Therefore, the final structural model was deemed to have the best possible fit, and the 18 items included in the model were found to adequately represent the data, contributing to the operationalization of each construct. The composite reliability measure for the final model exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.6, indicating that the constructs were reliable. However, the average variance extracted (AVE) for the constructs was below the recommended level of 0.5. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), if the AVE is less than 0.5, but the composite reliability exceeds 0.6, the convergent validity of the construct can still be considered acceptable. Therefore, despite the lower AVE values, the final structural model was considered robust and reliable for hypothesis testing.

Following the finalization of the structural model, the hypotheses developed based on the conceptual framework were tested. The maximum likelihood regression weights were used to determine the significance of the direct and indirect effects between the variables, with the results assessed at the 95% confidence level. The direct effects revealed several key insights. The relationship between the working environment and job satisfaction was found to be significant, with a positive coefficient of 0.407, indicating that an improved working environment is associated with higher job satisfaction. Similarly, the relationship between workload and job satisfaction was also found to be significant, with a coefficient of -0.3, indicating a negative correlation between workload and job satisfaction. However, the direct effects between other variables, such as working environment and job performance, as well as job satisfaction with itself, were found to be non-significant. These findings suggest that while certain factors such as working environment and workload impact job satisfaction, other hypothesized relationships did not hold up under testing.

The indirect effects were also evaluated to determine the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationships between working environment and job performance, as well as between workload and job satisfaction. The results showed that all indirect effects were non-significant, suggesting that job satisfaction did not mediate the relationships between these variables. These findings are consistent with the hypothesis tests, which provided additional insight into the relationships among the variables.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) was supported, as a significant positive relationship was found between the working environment and job satisfaction. Similarly, Hypothesis 2 (H2) was also supported, with a significant negative relationship between workload and job satisfaction. However, Hypotheses 3 (H3) and 4 (H4), which postulated a relationship between the working environment and job satisfaction, and between workload and job satisfaction, were not supported by the data, as no significant relationships were observed. Furthermore, Hypothesis 5 (H5) was not supported, indicating that job satisfaction did not significantly relate to job performance. Finally, both Hypotheses 6 (H6) and 7 (H7), which examined the mediating effects of job satisfaction on the relationships between working environment and job performance, as well as between workload and job satisfaction, were also not supported. These findings suggest that, although certain relationships were confirmed, job satisfaction did not function as a mediating variable in the context of this study.

In conclusion, while the final structural model presented a generally good fit, with key constructs demonstrating reliability and validity, the results of the hypothesis testing revealed mixed findings. Some relationships, such as those between working environment and job satisfaction, were supported, while others, particularly those involving job performance and the mediating role of job satisfaction, were not. These results provide valuable insights into the factors influencing job satisfaction and performance among academic administrators in Chinese private higher education institutions, while highlighting the complexity of the relationships among these variables.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

A positive working environment and a manageable workload are critical factors in enhancing job satisfaction among teachers in higher education institutions in China. This positive correlation underscores the importance for these institutions to implement effective strategies aimed at improving job satisfaction, which, in turn, can significantly enhance their competitiveness in the academic sector. Recent research highlights the central role that teacher job satisfaction plays in institutional success, offering valuable insights and recommendations for educational leaders. These implications are vital for guiding operational and strategic planning within these institutions.

One of the primary recommendations is for the authorities of private higher education institutions to prioritize the improvement of the working environment for teachers. A supportive and conducive atmosphere is essential for fostering job satisfaction, motivating educators, and driving institutional performance. By addressing both the professional and personal needs of teachers, institutions can create a positive work environment that not only enhances job satisfaction but also improves overall organizational effectiveness. This recommendation aligns with existing literature, which highlights the significant influence that the work environment has on employee morale, productivity, and, consequently, the institution's success (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010). Creating such an environment

will also help institutions attract and retain talented educators, who are more likely to thrive in workplaces that support their well-being and professional growth.

In addition to improving the work environment, it is essential for institutions to allocate adequate funding toward enhancing the physical workspace. Research suggests that the physical environment directly influences job performance, indicating that institutions should invest in upgrading facilities and resources to create a more comfortable and productive setting for educators. Such investments not only demonstrate a commitment to staff well-being but also play a key role in attracting and retaining high-quality faculty members. Improved facilities can foster collaboration, innovation, and creativity among staff members, which, in turn, enhances their satisfaction and engagement (Bentler & Chow, 1987; Jacobucci, 2010). This type of investment reflects a long-term commitment to improving both the working conditions and overall job satisfaction of educators.

Beyond physical improvements, creating a supportive environment for interpersonal relationships among staff is equally important. Higher education institutions must address any relationship issues that may arise among officers, their superiors, peers, and subordinates. Promoting positive working relationships and resolving conflicts effectively can contribute to a harmonious work atmosphere, enhancing job satisfaction and overall organizational performance. To facilitate this, institutions can implement team-building activities, mentorship programs, and open communication channels that encourage collaboration and camaraderie among staff members. These initiatives can help reduce tensions and create a more inclusive, supportive culture, further boosting job satisfaction.

Moreover, organizing programs that focus on safety, occupational stress, well-being, and workload prioritization is crucial. These programs can provide staff with strategies to manage their workload and cope with stress, ultimately improving their working conditions and job satisfaction. By offering resources and support for stress management and task prioritization, institutions can help staff maintain a healthy work-life balance, particularly in the high-pressure environment of higher education, where workloads can often become overwhelming (Hair et al., 2010). These initiatives not only contribute to the physical and mental well-being of staff but also increase their overall job satisfaction, as employees feel better supported in managing their responsibilities.

Equitable workload distribution among administrative officers is another important consideration for institutions. Ensuring that workloads are evenly distributed among officers at the same level and reducing the burden on junior staff compared to their senior counterparts can significantly enhance staff engagement and productivity. Fair workload distribution promotes a sense of fairness and reduces resentment, fostering a greater sense of belonging and commitment to the institution's mission (Byrne, 2010). Addressing these concerns can help create a more harmonious and efficient work environment, where all staff members feel equally valued and supported.

Additionally, developing policies for rotating academic administrative staff across different divisions can prevent stagnation and help ensure an even workload distribution. Rotation policies can enhance job satisfaction by providing staff with varied experiences and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Such policies can also prevent burnout by allowing staff to develop new skills and perspectives. This approach can help create a dynamic, engaged workforce that remains motivated

and committed to their roles. Furthermore, these policies can mitigate the negative effects of role monotony and the psychological challenges associated with long-term assignments to a single division.

Another key strategy for enhancing job satisfaction is to create a calendar that allows for appropriate gaps between significant annual events. Overloading administrative officers with continuous tasks can lead to stress and decreased job satisfaction. By strategically scheduling events and allowing time between major tasks, institutions can prevent burnout and ensure a more manageable workload. This thoughtful planning enables educators to allocate their time and resources more effectively, improving both job satisfaction and performance.

The implications of this study are significant for academic administrators and policymakers. The findings emphasize the need to address issues related to workload and the working environment in order to enhance job satisfaction among teachers in higher education institutions. As institutions strive for greater efficiency, tensions may arise between academic performance demands and staff well-being. Therefore, initiatives aimed at improving the working environment and managing workloads are essential for fostering job satisfaction among educators (Bentler & Chow, 1987; Jacobucci, 2010).

Policymakers and regulators should also take these findings into account, advocating for policies that address teacher job satisfaction. These policies should ensure transparent transfer procedures, timely job rotations, flexible working hours, and manageable workloads—key factors in enhancing teacher productivity and job satisfaction. Universities should also establish policies that recognize the needs of academic staff, such as offering flexible working arrangements and providing resources to support their work.

In conclusion, improving job satisfaction in higher education institutions requires a comprehensive approach that prioritizes the enhancement of the working environment, workload management, and the provision of support through various programs and policies. By implementing these recommendations, institutions can improve staff retention, enhance job performance, and ultimately achieve better organizational outcomes, positioning themselves as leaders in the competitive higher education sector.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abeykoon, R., & Perera, H. (2019). The impact of work-life balance on job satisfaction in the banking sector in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Business Studies*, 5(2), 1-18.
- [2] Abilash, P., & Siju, K. (2021). Impact of telecommuting on job satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic: A study of employees in India. *International Journal of Management Studies*, 8(2), 12-24.
- [3] Agbozo, G., Kpodo, S., & Owusu-Antwi, G. (2017). Work environment and job satisfaction in selected public universities in Ghana. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 9(15), 51-61.
- [4] Alias, M. M., Shamsudin, F. M., & Hashim, A. (2018). Factors influencing job satisfaction among Malaysian public sector employees: A review of literature. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(1), 55-67.
- [5] Amarasena, D. (2019). A study on the job satisfaction of university academics in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 41(5), 487-502.
- [6] Anderson, J. C., & Gerbing, D. W. (1988). Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103(3), 411-423.
- [7] Andrade, T. A., Santos, J. L., & Guimaraes, T. (2019). Work conditions and job satisfaction: A study of Malaysian civil servants. *Asian Journal of Business and Management*, 7(2), 56-68.
- [8] Aruna Shantha, M. K. (2019). Work-life balance and its impact on job satisfaction in the banking sector. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention*, 8(6), 28-35.

- [9] Arunika, R. A., & Kottawa, S. S. (2016). Job performance and job satisfaction: A literature review. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Innovative Technology*, 3(3), 157-162.
- [10] Azam, S. M. F., Yajid, M. S., Tham, J., Hamid, J. A., Khatibi, A., Johar, M. G. M., & Ariffin, I. A. (2021). *Research Methodology: Building Research Skills* (1st ed.). McGraw-Hill Education (Malaysia) Sdn. Bhd.
- [11] Azam, S. M. F., Yajid, M. S., Tham, J., Hamid, J. A., Khatibi, A., Johar, M. G. M., & Ariffin, I. A. (2023). *Research Methodology: Building Research Skills* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill Education (Malaysia) Sdn. Bhd.
- [12] Bentler, P. M., & Chow, W. (1987). A note on the fit of models to data. *Psychometrika*, 52(1), 123-130.
- [13] Bhanu, B., & Sai Babu, K. (2018). Impact of workplace stress on job satisfaction among IT professionals in India. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 6(2), 55-63.
- [14] Byrne, B. M. (2010). *Structural equation modeling with AMOS: Basic concepts, applications, and programming*. Routledge.
- [15] Chaaban, J., & Du, X. (2017). The relationship between workload and job satisfaction among teachers in the Middle East. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31(5), 766-781.
- [16] Dissanayaka, H. A. M. S., & Ali, A. R. (2013). The relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction in the banking sector of Sri Lanka. *Journal of Business Management*, 8(4), 8-15.
- [17] Edwards, J. R., & Rothbard, N. P. (2000). Mechanisms linking work and family: Clarifying the relationship between work and family constructs. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 178-199.
- [18] Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39-50.
- [19] Garg, R., & Yajurvedi, M. (2016). Work-life balance: A critical review and its implications on job satisfaction. *International Journal of Research in Business Studies and Management*, 3(7), 12-22.
- [20] Geurts, S. A. E., & Demerouti, E. (2003). Collective job demands and well-being: The role of resources. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 8(3), 220-230.
- [21] Geurts, S. A. E., Kompier, M. A. J., & Rutte, C. G. (2003). The relationship between work and non-work: A review of the literature. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 8(3), 220-230.
- [22] Glaveli, N., Kapsalis, A., & Vassilaki, M. (2013). A new approach to the measurement of the spillover effect between work and family: The relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 11(2), 165-183.
- [23] Gunawan, W., Sugiyanto, A., & Purwanto, Y. (2018). Work-life balance and job satisfaction among teachers in Indonesia. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 9(18), 74-82.
- [24] Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2010). *Multivariate data analysis* (7th ed.). Pearson.
- [25] Heath, R. (2006). The role of working conditions in employee job satisfaction: Evidence from the Australian Workplace Relations Survey. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17(7), 1168-1187.
- [26] Herath, D. M., & Wijerathna, D. (2019). The relationship between working conditions and job satisfaction of academic staff in Sri Lankan universities. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(4), 631-644.
- [27] Herath, R. B., Tham, J., Khatibi, A., & Azam, S. F. A. (2023). An investigation into the Relationship between Revenue Management Practices and Financial Performance in Star-Rated Hotels in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, 11(11), e1538. <https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i11.1538>
- [28] Holland, P. W., Parry, E., & Muir, E. (2019). The impact of perceived workload on job satisfaction and turnover intentions among nurses in Australia. *Australian Health Review*, 43(1), 84-91.
- [29] Horani, O. M., Khatibi, A., AL-Soud, A. R., Tham, J., Al-Adwan, A. S., & Azam, S. M. F. (2023). Antecedents of business analytics adoption and impacts on banks' performance: The perspective of the TOE framework and resource-based view. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management*, 18, 609-643. <https://doi.org/10.28945/5188>
- [30] Hsu, Y. L., Chang, T. C., & Chen, H. L. (2019). Work-life balance and job satisfaction: A study of Taiwanese employees. *Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 35(2), 87-97.
- [31] Inegbedion, H. I., Abubakar, M. S., & Osasere, E. A. (2020). Perception of workload and job satisfaction among academic staff in Nigeria: Evidence from higher education institutions. *African Journal of Business Management*, 14(2), 30-38.
- [32] Jacobucci, R. (2010). *The basics of structural equation modeling*. SAGE Publications.
- [33] Jansen, W., & Hak, T. (2005). The importance of pretesting in research: A comprehensive approach. *Quality and Quantity*, 39(1), 1-15.
- [34] Jayasena, S. N., & Weligamage, S. (2016). The impact of compensation on job satisfaction: A case study of employees in the banking sector of Sri Lanka. *Journal of Management*, 9(1), 35-46.
- [35] Karácsony, P. (2021). Teleworking and job satisfaction: Evidence from Slovakian employees. *Journal of Business and Management Sciences*, 9(1), 45-54.

- [36] Kasbuntoro, A., Setiawan, Y. S., & Adi, P. S. (2020). Working conditions and job satisfaction in Indonesia's banking sector: The mediating role of job performance. *International Journal of Management Research and Business Strategy*, 9(4), 75-88.
- [37] Kline, R. B. (2005). Principles and practice of structural equation modeling (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- [38] Koesomowidjojo, S. A., Suharno, S., & Supriyadi, E. (2017). The effect of workload on job satisfaction in the public sector. *International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research*, 15(21), 189-202.
- [39] Kumar, P., & Velmurugan, K. (2018). The impact of flexible working hours on job satisfaction among IT professionals. *International Journal of Human Resource Management and Research*, 8(2), 15-24.
- [40] Kumari, D., Jagannathan, K., & Arulraj, A. (2019). The significance of work-life balance on job satisfaction: A study of employees in the private sector. *Global Business Review*, 20(4), 1106-1122.
- [41] Kurnianto, I. R., Astuti, P. P., & Suharyanto, D. (2017). The correlation between working environment and job satisfaction in Indonesian universities. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 5(2), 145-156.
- [42] Locke, E. A. (1976). The nature and causes of job satisfaction. In M. D. Dunnette (Ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 1299-1349). Chicago: Rand McNally.
- [43] Lu, L., Kuo, S. S., & Huang, Y. (2005). Job satisfaction among Chinese employees: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(3), 525-542.
- [44] Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.
- [45] Meijman, T. F., & Mulder, G. (1998). Psychological aspects of workload. In P. L. Perrewé & D. C. Ganster (Eds.), *Exploring theories of stress and emotions at work* (pp. 5-33). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- [46] Mend, A., & Zhang, Y. (2017). The influence of work-life balance on job satisfaction: A case study of employees in China. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 5(1), 24-32.
- [47] Mohottigedera, N. R. (2018). The relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment among employees in the banking sector. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, 8(1), 37-50.
- [48] Morris, M. L., & Madsen, S. R. (2007). The effects of work-life balance on job satisfaction and commitment in the workforce. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(4), 800-814.
- [49] Muhammad, M. F., Zahoor, S., & Farooq, U. (2015). Workplace environment and job satisfaction: A study of private universities in Pakistan. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 6(6), 102-110.
- [50] Mukhtar, F. (2012). Workload and job satisfaction among teachers: A study in Pakistani educational institutions. *Journal of Educational Research*, 15(3), 35-44.
- [51] Naheed, S., Ahmed, I., & Rehman, S. (2018). Workload and job satisfaction: A study of employees in private banks in Pakistan. *International Journal of Management Sciences*, 5(1), 12-21.
- [52] Nasrallah, N. (2017). Job satisfaction: A significant contributor to organizational success. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 7(2), 127-141.
- [53] Nguyen, H. N., Tham, J., Khatibi, A., & Azam, S. M. F. (2019). Enhancing the Capacity of Tax Authorities and its Impact on Transfer Pricing Activities of FDI Enterprises in Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh, Dong Nai, and Binh Duong Province of Vietnam. *Management Science Letters*, 9(8), 1299-1310.
- [54] Nordin, N., Khatibi, A., & Azam, S. M. F. (2024). Nonprofit Capacity and Social Performance: Mapping the Field and Future Directions. *Management Review Quarterly*, 74(1), 171.
- [55] Nyamubi, M. (2017). Working conditions and job satisfaction among teachers in Tanzania. *Tanzania Journal of Education*, 2(1), 45-54.
- [56] Omar, N. A., & Yusoff, N. Z. (2015). Workload and job satisfaction in the public sector. *Asian Social Science*, 11(10), 179-187.
- [57] Pambreni, Y., Khatibi, A., Azam, S. M. F., & Tham, J. (2019). The Influence of Total Quality Management toward Organization Performance. *Management Science Letters*, 9(9), 1397-1406.
- [58] Pushpika, J. R. (2019). The impact of workload on job satisfaction of academic staff in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 7(1), 17-26.
- [59] Rajan, R. (2018). The relationship between workload and employee performance in the banking sector. *International Journal of Research in Business Studies and Management*, 5(1), 20-30.
- [60] Rajapakse, R. M. D. A. P., Azam, S., & Khatibi, A. (2022). The Role of Environmental Incentives in Greening the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: A Developing Economy Perspective. *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal*, 33(5), 1167.
- [61] Ranawaka, P., Khatibi, A., Azam, S. M. F., & Tham, J. (2023). An overview of Corporate Governance Laws and Regulations applicable to the Banking Industry in Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Research Publications*, 130(1), 268-292. <https://www.ijrp.org/paper-detail/5300>
- [62] Rasheed, A. A., Albattat, A., & Azam, S. M. F. (2024). Contextual Factors and Virtual Professional Learning Communities in Maldivian Schools. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 38(2), 486.
- [63] Raziqa, A., & Maulabakhsh, R. (2015). Job satisfaction and its relationship with performance: A study of the banking sector in Pakistan. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 5(8), 1-8.

- [64] Rehman, S., & Siddiqui, A. (2020). Flexible work arrangements and job performance: The mediating role of work-life balance in Pakistan's public universities. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 34(5), 1027-1045.
- [65] Reporting Practices Adopted/Diffused? Evidence From Public Listed Companies in Sri Lanka. *Asian Journal of Business and Accounting*, 16(2), 107.
- [66] Rifadha, M. M., & Sangarandeniya, M. A. R. (2015). Work-life balance and job satisfaction in the banking sector: A study on female employees. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 5(3), 33-42.
- [67] Robbins, S. P. (1993). *Organizational behavior* (5th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- [68] Robinson, G., Judge, T., & Campbell, J. (1991). The relationship between job satisfaction and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34(2), 408-422.
- [69] Samarawickrama, H. D. C. S., Gunasekara, A. M. A. S., & Kumara, N. A. R. (2018). Impact of salary on job satisfaction: A case study of selected private banks in Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 10(1), 22-35.
- [70] Sekaran, U. (2000). *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach* (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- [71] Shanthikumar, K., & Nirushika, R. (2020). The impact of workplace environment on employee satisfaction: Evidence from China. *International Journal of Human Resource Management Studies*, 5(2), 32-42.
- [72] Shanthikumary, S., & Nirushika, N. (2020). The influence of work conditions on job satisfaction in the public sector: Evidence from Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 43(9), 758-765.
- [73] Sims, P. (2019). Teacher job satisfaction and working conditions: A survey of secondary teachers in England. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 47(2), 213-232.
- [74] Smith, A., Brown, C., & Lee, J. (2015). Telecommuting and its impact on employee satisfaction and productivity. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 30(3), 473-489.
- [75] Spector, P. E. (1997). *Job satisfaction: Application, assessment, cause, and consequences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- [76] Spector, P. E. (2005). Job satisfaction: A theoretical overview. In *Handbook of Industrial, Work, and Organizational Psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 26-32). London: Sage Publications.
- [77] Sudha, A., Azam, S. M. F., & Tham, J. (2023). Transformational Leadership and Job Performance of Maldives Civil Service Employees, Mediated by Organisational Commitment. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 36(3), 271.
- [78] Sukdeo, N. (2017). The relationship between working conditions and job satisfaction in the manufacturing sector in South Africa. *South African Journal of Industrial Relations*, 37(1), 52-66.
- [79] Syihabudhin, M., Jauhari, I. Y., & Rahman, A. (2019). The influence of workload on employee performance. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention*, 8(9), 27-34.
- [80] Tham, J., Yazid, M. S. A., Khatibi, A. A., & Azam, S. M. F. (2017). Internet and Data Security – Understanding Customer Perception on Trusting Virtual Banking Security in Malaysia. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 2(7), 186-207.
- [81] Thevanes, S., & Mangaleswaran, S. (2018). Work-life balance and employee satisfaction in the banking sector of China. *International Journal of Research in Business Studies and Management*, 5(1), 1-12.
- [82] Thiagaraj, A., & Thangaswamy, T. (2017). The relationship between job satisfaction and management practices in the public sector. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 8(2), 45-52.
- [83] Tirta, I. G., & Enrika, P. (2020). The role of job satisfaction in the relationship between job performance and organizational commitment among the Millennium Generation in Indonesia. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention*, 9(1), 15-23.
- [84] Udriyah, U., Tham, J., & Azam, S. M. F. (2019). The Effects of Market Orientation and Innovation on Competitive Advantage and Business Performance of Textile SMEs. *Management Science Letters*, 9(9), 1419-1428.
- [85] Weiss, H. M. (2002). Deconstructing job satisfaction: Separating evaluations, beliefs, and affective experiences. *Human Resource Management Review*, 12(2), 173-194.
- [86] Wulandari, R. S. W., Khatibi, A., Tham, J., Azam, S. M. F., & Windiyaningish, C. (2023). Marketing Mix Strategy to Increase Outpatient Loyalty at the Hajj Hospital Jakarta Indonesia. *Central Asian Journal of Medical and Natural Science*, 4(5), 204-221. Retrieved from <https://cajmns.centralasianstudies.org/index.php/CAJMNS/article/view/1807>
- [87] Yusuf, A. A., & Metiboba, K. A. (2012). Work environment and job satisfaction: A study of selected banks in Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3(17), 244-250.
- [88] Zheng, C., Tham, J., & Azam, S. M. F. (2023). Links and interaction of villagers and rural revitalization: A bibliometric review. *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture*. <https://namibian-studies.com/index.php/JNS/article/view/807>
- [89] Zhou, L., & Azam, S. M. F. (2024). The Impact of Green-Listed Companies on Rural Ecological Environments in China: A Spatial Heterogeneity and Empirical Analysis. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 356, 120687.