

Perceived Supervisor Support and Work Engagement: Mediating Role of Job-Related Affective Well-Being

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The present study mainly investigated the mediating role of job-related affective well-being between perceived supervisor support and work engagement among university academic staff. The job-related affective well-being were scored into two subscales, positive emotion and negative emotion. Selected using the simple random technique, a total of 110 academic staff of a public university, mean aged 42.63 years ($SD = 8.51$) completed a set of survey instrument which consisted of Survey of Perceived Supervisor Support Scale (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006), Job-related Affective Well-Being Scale (Van Katwyk et al., 2000) and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Results showed that perceived supervisor support and both subscales of job-related affective well-being correlated significantly with work engagement. Findings indicated that both positive emotion and negative emotion of job-related affective well-being partially mediated the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement. Hence, perceived supervisor support influenced the emotional states and in turn influenced work engagement. The findings of this study provide implications for a healthy relationship between supervisor and employee to elicit positive emotion and weaken negative emotion which in turn enhances work engagement for organization's sustainability.

Keywords. Perceived supervisor support, job-related affective well-being, work engagement

While universities in Malaysia still hold importance in nation building, teaching and research, public universities are obliged to compete among worlds' high prestige universities (Wan et al., 2015). Consequently, these universities could attract international students

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thus giving significant contribution to the economy of the country. As mentioned in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015-2025, the government aspired to increase the quality of the overall system of higher institutions. To do so, universities have to be ranked within the Top 25 U21 ranking for research output and increasing the number of international students' enrolment. Therefore, universities have to be prepared in maintaining their quality so that the aspiration could be achieved.

In the discussion of ways to improve universities' quality, academic staff would be automatically mentioned and take an active role in the process. In Malaysia, changes to academic staff's roles and responsibilities to match the improvement effort usually depicted in the Key Performance Indicator that is constantly reassessed to match the demands stated by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. Academic staff are expected to be actively engaged in academic dialogues, debates and other duties that are closer to community while increasing the research grants quality (Sani, 2019).

Work engagement could be simply defined as the utilization of three dimensions which are vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Academic staff who are highly engaged could have a sense of organizational commitment (Harini et al., 2019) which is valuable in achieving goals for the university. A management that is concerned about their employees' well-being could also enhance multiple aspects of the academic staff's performance which is helpful in increasing the visibility of the universities (Agbinou et al., 2018). Responding to how academic staff's engagement could bring the institutions closer to the government aspirations, this study concentrates on the factors that contribute to work engagement of academic staff in Malaysia, particularly perceived supervisor support and job-related affective well-being.

Perceived supervisor support came out as an extension to perceived organizational support (Jin & McDonald, 2017) on the basis that the compliments that have been received from supervisor is giving greater impact to employees compared to the organizations (Mudrak et al., 2018). Hence, perceived supervisor support can be defined as employees' beliefs on the extent that their supervisors value their well-being and contribution to the organizations. Social support in the workplace has been shown to increase employees' work engagement (Khan t& Yusoff, 2016; Mudrak et al., 2018; Van Rensburg et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2016). This may also include social support given by their supervisors, as positive relationships between supervisor and employees would initiate positive outcomes to the engagement of the employees in the workplace (De Carlo et al., 2016;

Wolter et al., 2019). Accordingly, perceived supervisor support can act as a barrier to unfavorable organizational behaviors (Alkhateri et al., 2018) while influencing employees' satisfaction (Rathakrishnan et al., 2016) and work engagement (Jin & McDonald, 2017; Wolter et al., 2019).

However, the nature of the profession might also determine the impact of supervisor support. While adequate supervisor support can reduce the intention to leave the organization (Alkhateri et al., 2018; Gadi & Kee, 2020), there was no significant result found in a study among academic staff population (Rathakrishnan et al., 2016). They suggested that Malaysian academic staff's intention to leave were usually caused by issues related to compensation, autonomy, KPI achievability and job satisfaction rather than due to the lack of supervisory support. It was also suggested that the benefit of perceived supervisor support can be influenced by cultural issues especially in communities that put high value on hierarchical status (Newman et al., 2012).

Other than that, the present study also focuses on personal aspects as a possible contributing factor to work engagement. The personal aspect is represented by job-related affective well-being which is defined as the positive and negative emotions at the workplace that contribute to individuals' well-being (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). Generally, employees who have positive emotions towards their job would have the ability to adapt to their job demands (Simon & Duran-Bush, 2014) thus are less likely to be involved in occupational stress (Malik & Noreen, 2015). Presence of positive emotions within individuals also highly increases their work engagement (Adil & Kamal, 2016; Kong & Li, 2018; Othman et al., 2018). Besides, job-related affective well-being among employees is advantageous to the organizations as it increases organizational citizenship behavior (Cicei, 2012). Employees also tend to take more opportunity for job crafting in the presence of job-related affective well-being (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2015). A study also found that job-related affective well-being can be maintained by perceived organizational support (Malik & Noreen, 2015). One study reported that job-related affective well-being has positive association with work engagement (Kong & Li, 2018).

In the education setting, dispositional positive emotions were found to be positively associated with the work engagement of academic staff (Ameer & Zubair, 2020). Likewise, another study in the setting reported that there was a positive relationship between job-related affective well-being and work engagement (Adil & Kamal, 2016). Moreover, teachers' job-related affective well-being are helpful

in preventing stress amidst their demanding job scope (Malik & Noreen, 2015). Therefore, past research suggested that job-related affective well-being can benefit the quality of the work life of individuals, as both positive and negative emotions can predict work engagement (Kong & Li, 2018).

Therefore, in this study, the authors presumed that while perceived supervisor support influence work engagement of employees, the authors argued that job-related affective well-being acted as a mediator in the relationships between perceived supervisor support and employees work engagement. In a sense, perceived supervisor support elicited negative or positive emotions in employees, which in turn affected their work engagement. For instance, positive or strong perceived supervisor support brings out positive emotions in employees that resulted in improved work engagement in the workplace. Multiple studies reported that there is significant positive relationship between supervisor support and affective well-being (Audenaert et al., 2017; Malik & Noreen, 2015; Van Dierendonck et al., 2004; Yang et al., 2016). The authors suggested that a supportive supervisor makes the employees feel appreciated, acknowledged, cared, loved, and supported, which then produces a conducive working environment that enhances employees' work engagement in the workplace. This shows that a conducive work environment is important to enhance engagement among employees.

In Malaysia, a conducive work environment can be achieved through government actions and requirements of key performance indicators (Tauhed et al., 2018) by providing work autonomy and motivation to both the university and staff. Other than that, the proper support and relationship built between academic staff and the organizations can also give satisfaction which eventually contributes to work engagement (Meilani, 2017). Likewise, work engagement is related to positive outcomes to organizational behaviours of employees namely organizational citizenship behaviour (Iqbal et al., 2017) and productivity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The tendency to not to experience burnout can also be observed in engaged employees (Faskhodi & Siyyari, 2018). Studies showed that lecturers valued the trust and the chance to take part in decision making (Alzyoud et al., 2015; Tauhed et al., 2018) given by their supervisors. Such support encourages a conducive working environment that could increase lecturers' involvement to their tasks hence increasing their work engagement.

Therefore, this study concentrated on the role of positive emotion and negative emotion of job-related affective well-being as mediating variables in the relationship between perceived supervisor support and

their work engagement among university academic staff. The broader objectives of the study included to examine the relationship among perceived supervisor support, job-related affective well-being and work engagement.

Hypotheses

There following hypotheses were phrased in accordance to the objectives:

- H1. There is a positive relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement.
- H2. There is a positive relationship between positive emotion component of job-related affective well-being and work engagement.
- H3. There is a negative relationship between negative emotion component of job-related affective well-being and work engagement.
- H4. Positive emotion component of job-related affective well-being would mediate the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement.
- H5. Negative emotion component of job-related affective well-being would mediate the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a correlational quantitative design. To supplement the poor response rate of the online survey, printed versions of research instruments were also distributed to the academic staff through their office pigeon hole.

Sample

The participants for this research were 110 academic staff from all faculties of a public university in Malaysia. Most of the participants were females (60.90%) and bearing Malay (91.81%) nationality. The participants aged between 24 and 63 years ($M = 42.63$; $SD = 8.51$) and mostly had between six to ten years of teaching experience. To develop a sampling frame, a list of active academic staff was obtained from the university staff directory which

was available online. The inclusion criteria of participants were that participants bear Malaysian nationality and must teach at least one course during the data collection period. Hence, a total of 675 academic staff was found qualified to fill up the research instruments. The participants were chosen through simple random sampling using a random number generator application. Table 1 shows the summary of demographic profiles of participants.

Table 1

Demographic Profiles of Participants (N = 110)

Demographic Characteristics	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Male	43	39.10
Female	67	60.90
Race		
Malay	101	91.81
Chinese	3	2.73
Indian	3	2.73
Others	3	2.73
Year of Working Experience		
5 years and below	19	17.27
5.1 – 10 years	37	33.64
10.1 – 15 years	20	18.18
15.1 – 20 years	26	23.64
20.1 years and above	8	7.27

Instruments

Including the demographic section, there were four sections in the questionnaire set. Instruments to measure job-related affective well-being and perceived supervisor support were originally developed in English therefore these were translated into Malay Language through direct translation procedure (Capitulo et al., 2001). Then, the instruments were assessed and validated by two experts. The experts were given an evaluation form consisting of the translated items and original items which allowed them to provide their comments and suggestions to improve the items. Based on the comments and suggestions by the experts, some modifications on term word usage were before the instruments were finalized.

Survey of Perceived Organizational Support Scale

To measure the perceived supervisor support, a modified version of Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOSS, Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006) was used. Instead of using organization as the subject of the items, the word supervisor was used in the modified version (e.g., *My supervisor really cares about my well-being*). There were six items in the instrument which were extracted from the 36 full version of SPOSS (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). A 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) were used; while, item 5 was reversely scored. Supported by Hair et al. (2010), this instrument has been found reliable and valid with CR = .96, AVE = .81 and $\alpha = .95$.

Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale

The Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale (JAWS) was used to assess an individual's well-being at work by focusing on emotional reactions at work (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). Consisting of 20 items, JAWS had an equal number of items to measure two subscales, namely Positive Emotion (e.g., *My job made me feel at ease*) and Negative Emotion (e.g., *My job made me feel angry*). JAWS could be responded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *extremely often*). Internal consistency of the scale had been reported to be .94 and .88 for Positive Emotion Subscale and Negative Emotion Subscale, respectively. The convergent validity have been evidenced as the factor loadings ranged from .54 to .97, CR as .95 and .88; while AVE were .64 and .51 for Positive Emotion Subscale and Negative Emotion subscale, respectively.

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

The Malay version of the 17-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) translated by Yew et al. (2017) was used to measure work engagement. Developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003), UWES comprised of three subscales which included Vigour (e.g., *At my work, I feel bursting with energy*), Dedication (e.g.; *To me, my job is challenging*) and Absorption (e.g., *Time flies when I'm working*). UWES could be rated on 7-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 7 = *always*). In this study, UWES found to be a valid and reliable instrument to measure work engagement with CR = .95, AVE = .60 and $\alpha = .95$.

Procedure

Each of the participants in the sample list was getting a questionnaire link that is distributed through email. Out of 252 e-mails

sent, within two weeks' period, the response rate was only 19.84%. Therefore, another mode of survey was carried out which intended to add enough responses for data analysis. The paper-based survey was distributed to another 100 academic staff and a sufficient number of responses were finally achieved for the data analysis. The total time taken for data collection was 10 weeks for online and another 10 weeks for printed instruments, as procedures were similar. Therefore, a total of 20 weeks in mid-2019 were taken for data collection.

For ethical consideration, an informed consent was included in the questionnaire set which consisted of the brief introduction to the basic information of the study including the title, aim and possible outcomes of the study. The participants were ensured that their participation was not forced and they can withdraw from the research at any time. Besides, ethical concerns regarding the participants' privacy and confidentiality were also explicitly written.

Results

Data was first checked for missing value, normality, outliers and multicollinearity issues to ensure that it was suitable for the subsequent analyses. While both perceived supervisor support and work engagement were seen as one-dimensional constructs in this research, job-related well-being was evaluated in terms of two subscales namely positive emotion and negative emotion as proposed by Van Katwyk et al. (2000).

Pearson correlation was run in order to test hypotheses and the summary of the results is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix for All Study Variables (N = 110)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Job-Related Affective Well-Being	-	.90*	-.67*	.52*	.63*
2. Positive Emotion		-	-.47*	.45*	.55*
3. Negative Emotion			-	-.37*	-.44*
4. Perceived Supervisor Support				-	.57*
5. Work Engagement					-

* $p < .001$.

Perceived supervisor support and positive emotion dimension of job-related affective well-being are correlated positively with work engagement. On the other hand, negative emotion dimension of job-related affective well-being is correlated negatively with work

engagement. These significant correlations indicate support for H1, H2, and H3.

To test hypotheses H4 and H5 the bootstrapping method in AMOS were used and the summary of the analysis is shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3

Summary of Results on the Existence of Mediation

Paths	<i>p</i>	<i>LB</i>	<i>UB</i>
PSS → PE → WE	.001	.09	.32
PSS → NE → WE	.003	.05	.23

Note. PSS = Perceived Supervisor Support; PE = Positive Emotion; NE = Negative Emotion; WE = Work Engagement.

GOF: $\chi^2 = 943.74$ ($df = 579$, $p = .00$), $\chi^2/df = 1.63$, CFI = .90, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .070.

Table 4

Summary of Results on the Mediating Effect

Path	Standardized Estimate		Conclusion
	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	
PSS → PE → WE	.41*	.20*	Partial Mediation
PSS → NE → WE	.43*	.13*	Partial Mediation

Note. PSS = Perceived Supervisor Support; PE = Positive Emotion; NE = Negative Emotion; WE = Work Engagement.

* $p < .00$.

Results indicated that both direct and indirect effects are significant thus it is concluded that positive emotion and negative emotion dimensions of job-related affective well-being partially mediated the relationship between perceived social support and work engagement; hence offering substantial support for H4 and H5.

Discussion

This study examined the role of perceived supervisor support and job-related affective well-being to work engagement of academic staff. Results of this study showed that perceived supervisor support was significantly and positively associated with work engagement. In the setting of this study, the result indicated that support from supervisors to the respective academic staff increases work engagement in terms of teaching, researching and consulting. This is in line with past studies that perceived supervisor support can hinder

employees from sustaining unfavorable organizational behaviors (Alkhateri et al., 2018) despite the demanding tasks and improving the work engagement (Jin & McDonald, 2017; Wolter et al., 2019) instead. Highly engaged employees could also attract more support from their supervisors, explaining the correlation between both constructs (Wolter et al., 2019). Findings also supported past studies that showed positive relationships between supervisor support and work engagement (Khan & Yusoff, 2016; Mudrak et al., 2018; Van Rensburg et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2016; Wolter et al., 2019).

Notably, the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement can also be explained by the findings that job characteristics contribute to work engagement among employees (Iqbal et al., 2017). Besides, cultural aspects namely the common practices and systems at workplace in Malaysia can also contribute to the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement (Newman et al., 2012). For instance, academic staff might develop motivation to complete their tasks to achieve the KPI requirements hence contributing to their work engagement. Thus, perceived supervisor support can create a motivation process that leads to work engagement among academic staff (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

The findings also showed a significant relationship between job-related affective well-being and work engagement, and positive and negative emotions partially mediated the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement. In a sense, positive support from supervisors induced positive emotions in employees which in turn increased work engagement. Similarly, negative supervisor support or lack of supervisor support induced negative emotions in the employees towards the supervisor, which resulted in a reduction of work engagement. The relationship between both job-related affective well-being and work engagement has been supported by several studies (Adil & Kamal, 2016; Kong & Li, 2018; Othman et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2016). Another study confirmed that dispositional positive emotions were positively associated with the work engagement of academic staff (Ameer & Zubair, 2020). Positive emotions are regarded as the indicator of pleasant affective experiences in the workplace which contribute to affective well-being (Van Katwyk et al., 2000).

People who score higher in job-related affective well-being reported that they tend to feel ecstatic, energetic, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, satisfied and content about their jobs. This might explain the participants' tendency to be more engaged with their work since these positive emotions could make them develop rigorousness and

dedication (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Despite the challenging job scopes, academic staff could stay involved, dedicated and absorbed to their job because of these positive emotions that manage to counteract the occupational stressors of the job in the setting of this study (Malik & Noreen, 2015). Moreover, being engaged at work can also give them job-related affective well-being (Adil & Kamal, 2016) due to the sense of pride and being highly engrossed in tasks felt by the participants. Therefore, this study suggested that the association between job-related affective well-being and work engagement was resulted by the positive emotions academic staff experienced while doing their tasks.

The result also indicated that perceived supervisor support and job-related affective well-being are the contributing factors to work engagement of the academic staff. For instance, when academic staff are getting an adequate amount of support from their supervisor, they report the ability to stay engaged to their jobs better than when support is not apparent in the workplace (Jin & McDonald, 2017; Wolter et al., 2019). This also showed the importance of a conducive work environment in influencing academic staff's work engagement (Meilani, 2017; Tauhed et al., 2018). Besides, the participants also reported work engagement when they feel positive about their jobs. This is in line with past study that reported that job-related affective well-being was found to be the contributing factor of work engagement (Kong & Li, 2018).

However, the result showed that job-related affective well-being contribute to work engagement more than perceived supervisor support despite the lack of supporting past studies on the construct compared to perceived supervisor support. This might be due to the nature of the profession as an academic staff, which is more influenced by personal aspects than job resources to affect their work engagement. Past study also described how supervisor support influences work engagement of academic staff through their sense of satisfaction about their job (Meilani, 2017). Also, it was found that supervisor support was not that important in determining academic staff's intention to quit. Instead, factors that can cause positive feelings about their job such as compensation, autonomy, performance indicators, achievability and job satisfaction can better influence their decision (Rathakrishnan et al., 2016). In addition, the contribution of job-related affective well-being might be higher since academic staff or generally workers can develop resilience, dedication and to be easily immersed in work if they have positive emotions while doing their tasks. Thus, external support, for this research is perceived

supervisor support, could not contribute as much to the engagement of academic staff compare to emotions.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

There were several limitations of this study. First, a limited number of participants were obtained. The data of this study was barely sufficient for data analysis. Second, this study can give only rough ideas of the phenomena within the context since the sample is collected from one specific public university in Malaysia. Even so, the result can still be attributed to the university since a random sampling method was applied.

Therefore, it is suggested that a better strategy can be planned to ensure higher response rate in future study. Generally, larger sample sizes could give more reliable results with greater precision and power. The population of this study can also be expanded further, which involves participants from more universities across different states in Malaysia. Other than that, more measures should be strategized so that participants gain more interest in participating in the study such as providing a token of appreciation. Besides, the differences between academic staff in public universities and private universities can also be examined. The bigger scale of this research can visualize the work engagement of academic staff in Malaysia more accurately.

Implications

This study showed the importance of job-related affective well-being and supervisor support to the behavior of academic staff at their workplace. In addition, the information provided from this research can also be used as a guideline for improving affective well-being among academic staff, specifically in the training of supervisors to ensure that supervisors enhance positive feelings in employees, making them feel encouraged, supported, appreciated, and motivated to work. Moreover, this study increases the awareness on the role of the universities in providing adequate physical and environment support to manage their staff's well-being so that better work engagement can be expected. By doing so, a combination of supportive supervisors, conducive work environment will instill a sense of belongingness in employees toward their organization, making them feel belonged and eventually, enhancing their work engagement in the workplace. As previously mentioned, being

engaged at their job would lead to academic staff's active participation in various activities that can enhance the institutions' visibility among other top universities in the world.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to reveal the mediating role of job-related affective well-being in the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement among university academic staff. The results showed that both positive emotion and negative emotion of job-related affective well-being partially mediated the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement. In a nutshell, the findings of this study provide implications for a healthy relationship between supervisor and employee in eliciting positive emotion and weakening negative emotion to strengthen work engagement for organization's sustainability.

Acknowledgement

This paper is an output of a research project granted by Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia (Code: 2017-0214-106-01). The authors would like to extend their gratitude to Sultan Idris Education University for the contributions made to this article.

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Received 11 February 2021

Revision received 16 February 2022