JOB SATISFACTION AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF IN HIGHER EDUCATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract*: Job satisfaction is important for employees and organizational outcomes. Work motivation has a positive impact on the performance of employees. The higher the employees' work motivation, the higher the results of employees' performances. There is lack of study on the job satisfaction with a combination of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs especially during Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study will target on academic staff who have been affected during the Covid-19 pandemic in the northern area. The objective of the study was to find out the relationship between the employees' motivation factors and job satisfaction. In this study, the independent variables were physiological needs, safety and security needs, self-belonging needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs, while the dependent variable was job satisfaction. This study was based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, which indicated the employees' motivational factors. The result will be analyzed using descriptive analysis to determine the factors of the employees' motivation that lead to job satisfaction. Moreover, pearson product-moment correlation coefficient also will be used to investigate the relationship between the employees' motivational factors and job satisfaction. The findings from this study were significant as they helped the organizations' management to evaluate their employees' job satisfaction and investigate their employees' motivation level, whether it was high or low.*

Keywords*: Employees' Motivational Factors, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Job Satisfaction*
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Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) designated Covid-19 as a pandemic on March 11th, 2020. The Covid-19 epidemic started in China and has moved to Malaysia. The Malaysian government issued MCO on March 18th, 2020. This epidemic caused most individuals to alter their cultural patterns, everyday routines, and behaviours, from personal to organizational, outdoor, and public. Many nations have made drastic policy adjustments to enforce compliance with their rules and regulations to safeguard their people from the epidemic and maintain high levels of production and performance.

As a major higher education institution, the university is one of the most important service sectors affected during the Covid-19 pandemic. In response to Covid-19, higher education institution has temporarily closed, and educators should provide online distance learning (ODL) platforms to ensure the educational process remains uninterrupted (Al-Kumaim et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the Covid-19 adjustments and restrictions resulting psychological stress on educators exacerbated the difficulties of rapid distance learning (Marshall & Wolanskyj-Spinner, 2020). A similar study by Alea et al. (2020) supported those distractions and responsibilities associated with working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic affected work performance and created more stress for educators. Therefore, educators, particularly those in higher education while working at home and affect their job satisfaction.

As a result, the human resource as the main department in a company needs to resolve the employees' problems (Stefurak et al. 2020). One of the most challenging human resource departments is to increase motivation and job satisfaction of employees (Janovac et al., 2021). The workers are lacked motivation from both the organization's management and peers (Pei, 2007). Besides that, most employees in a company cannot become excellent workers. Basalamah and As'ad (2021) stated that job satisfaction is an assessment of workers' attitudes towards their work. Thus, managers who understand the employee motivation may implement methods to enhance employee performance (Hitka et al., 2021).

In general, numerous motivation theories can be researched in relation to employee motivation. By using the idea, companies may assess employee job satisfaction and improve staff motivation. Thus, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory is essential to study since it has a significant effect on education and human development (Een et al., 2021). Maslow (1943) structured his view of how people classify their requirements for survival into a five-stage hierarchy of needs that includes physiological, safety and security, self-belongings, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs. Thus, it helps to discover the motivating elements that may help workers to perform better at work. The goals of the study are to identify employees motivational variables that contribute to work happiness and examine the connection between employee motivation and job satisfaction.

Literature Review

This study focuses on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory and several determinants that influence job satisfaction of employees such as physiological needs, safety and security needs, self-belonging needs, self-esteem needs and self-actualization needs. These will be discussed in the following subsections.

Motivation

Motivation happened in a situation whereby people execute activities with a specified goal in an organization (Akla & Indradewa, 2022). In order to fulfil one's needs, one must participate in a particular activity (Santos-Vijande et al., 2021). According to Pancasila et al. (2020), work motivation is regulated by the need of job satisfaction process, which means, satisfied employees are motivated to perform everything required in the job with the aim to achieve the organization's goals and objectives, hence improving their performance. According to Khan et al. (2020), motivation is strongly interrelated with employee performance which can contribute to the full potential. According to Lai (2011), motivation is a set of closely linked ideas, perceptions, values, interests, and behaviours that underpin behaviour defined by willingness and desire to accomplish something. According to Loan (2020), job motivation influences employee performance; the more motivated the workers are, the better their outcomes. This assertion aligns with Suartina and Sadiartha (2019), who have discussed how job motivation affects employee performance. Workplace motivation connects the needs, encouragement, and objectives to improve employee performance (Stoyanov, 2017). The motivational activities can

be as inspiring people which involves occupying them with meaningful motivation, making workers happier and more committed to their professions (Tella, 2007).

Maslow Theory

According to Woolridge (1995), Maslow's Theory is appealing since it depicts the workers' motivating elements that contribute to job satisfaction. Maslow (1943) defined the hierarchy of needs as a five-stage hierarchy of requirements based on the most essential and desired element as a fundamental need. According to Martin and Joomis (2007), to advance in Maslow's Hierarchy of requirements, people or workers must first meet the demands at the base of the pyramid, which are physiological needs, before they can be effectively motivated. These basic requirements would be an important criterion for determining whether or not humans are satisfied with their lives (Amin et al., 2021). The most basic requirements are physical survival and protection, followed by a desire to belong to a family, community, or society. Next, individuals require spirit and sociability at this time (Aminah et al., 2021). Then, followed by ego and self-esteem needs, before meeting the self-actualization demands (Maslow, 1943). According to Norazmi (2020), failure to fulfil fundamental human requirements disrupts the human emotion, resulting in a lack of personal growth, career, or job satisfaction.

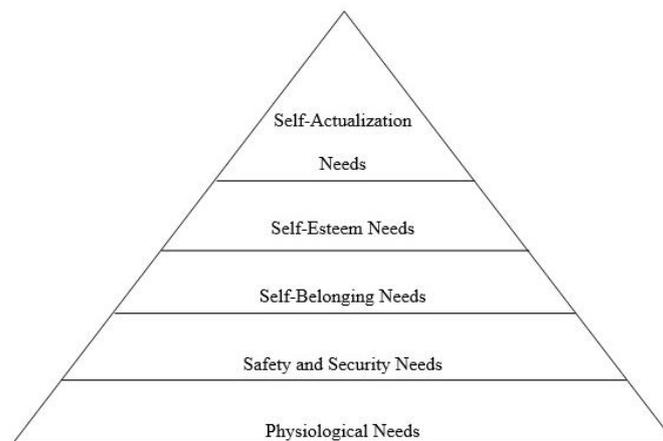The diagram below shows the hierarchy of needs of Maslow Motivation Theory:

Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Goble, 1970)

Physiological Needs

According to Sarma and Hoek (2004), physiological requirements are the most basic needs that allow an organism to live, such as breathing, drinking, eating, sleeping, and sheltering. They also said that workers might be ill, distressed in their employment owing to discontent with the fundamental phases. For example, workers may be dissatisfied with their compensation for completed work. As a result, they will be focused on the next pay period to ensure their income (Azizi, 2010). Furthermore, people or workers think that higher pay and benefits may meet their demands since employees need money and work for it (Nurul & Mosammod, 2011). Therefore, employees may be encouraged if they are rewarded and paid for their achievements. According to Udechukwu (2009), workers who do not fulfil their fundamental requirements are more likely to quit their jobs than those who do. As a result, employees who are lacking everything in life are most likely to have been motivated by physiological needs. The individuals are conquered by these needs until they feel contented. When the physiological needs have been met, other higher order needs are most likely to come forward and dominate.

H1. There is a significant relationship between physiological needs and job satisfaction.

Safety and Security Needs

When all physiological requirements, such as food, water, shelter, and others, are met, the desire for security and safety may take precedence over physiological demands (Azizi, 2010). This implies that requirements for safety and security can only be met if the person or employee's physiological needs are met (Boeree, 2006). When he feels he will not be hurt psychologically, emotionally, or physically, a person's response is called security (Martin & Joomis, 2007). Additionally, Sarma and Hoek (2004) highlighted the examples of security such as stability, protection, security, dependence, freedom from dread, concerns, and confusion; desire for structure, law, order, and boundaries; strength in the protector. According to Tan and Amna (2011), providing workers with a comfortable working environment, such as air conditioning and music, may inspire them to do their jobs well. Besides that, employees are now preferring digital tools to become another part that are important in the safety and security needs (Rao, 2022). Therefore, safety needs such as feeling protected and free from coercion in their fundamental survival can be observed through a balancing of ethnic or society between the diversity of ethnic groups, in continuing and keeping with the policies set down by the government.

Digital tools had outrightly become safety and security needs in the minds of employees.

H2. There is a significant relationship between safety and security needs and job satisfaction.

Self-Belonging Needs

According to Gouws (1995), basic needs are defined as companionship, love, social approval, and support (Roos, 2005). According to Bilski (2018), in this new digital era, these basic needs can also be defined as "Love, Like, Share and Retweet Needs". Shoura and Singh (1999) claim that this requirement is vital to all social groups in everyday life. It includes professional and personal connections such as family, contacts, partners, and close neighbours. Conversely, unhappiness may lead to anti-social behaviour and an inability to interact with others. According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011), organizations should explain that the workers' work are belonged to the company, which establishes the shared objectives and values, as well as social contact and connection with the employees and also outsiders to guarantee the employees are happy with their present employment. They also think that good social connections will lead to more significant self-identification, thus, increasing work satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). As a result, when the employees were motivated, they would feel the sense of belonging towards the organization and they can perform well in their jobs by achieving the goals and objectives of the organization.

H3. There is a significant relationship between self-belonging needs and job satisfaction.

Self-Esteem Needs

Self-esteem is the desire to be respected by others and appreciated by oneself (Gouws, 1995). According to Rao (2022), this need also can be achieved when people feel comfortable with their reputation and achievement. Self-esteem involves having knowledge, talents, and abilities in specific areas and respecting them. Employees with high self-esteem needs are highly driven, which may influence their work happiness. Dima, Man, and Kot (2010) define affiliation requirements as the desire to join a new group of people. It motivates individuals to stay and strive to survive in smaller or larger groups and they work together with those who share a

vision and common goals. Hence, by having high level of self-esteem needs, the employees would become highly motivated, and this can give impact on their job satisfaction. Those who have lack of satisfaction could actually cause humiliation and it could make them feel down. From a professional perspective, this translates as being ineffective leadership for the leader, and little respect by others for one's opinion and expertise advice. However, other study by Fitzmaurice (2021) argues on self-esteem give impact on employees' job satisfaction where in his study it shows that there is no relationship found between self-esteem needs and job satisfaction which means the result obtained did not support the self-esteem needs that influence the job satisfaction.

H4. There is a significant relationship between self-esteem needs and job satisfaction.

Self-Actualization Needs

A person's latent specialities and potentialities, which are their skills or competencies, may grow while doing their regular tasks (Heylighen, 1992). According to Suyudi et al. (2022), self-actualization is also related with leadership. Therefore, individuals who can identify their talents and abilities may be encouraged to discover their specialities in order to be recognized by the company. Maslow (1970) states that self-actualization occurs when all basic needs are met. Therefore, people should prioritize their lower needs in order to reach the first level of Maslow's Hierarchy. According to Maslow as cited in Heylighen (1992), even though the lower stage requirements have been met, the highest stage need, self-actualization, has not been met. Hence, when the employees can recognize their own talents, they can differentiate themselves from the others as they know that they have some specialties that the others do not have.

H5. There is a significant relationship between self-actualization needs and job satisfaction.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as a pleasing sensation while doing one's employment, and it may influence or result in different areas of the job (Suong et al., 2019). According to Akla & Indradewa (2022), job satisfaction can be attainable when employees are having good relationships with their leaders and receive attention from their upper-level management. The employees would believe that they have an important roles towards the organization. Job satisfaction seems to be essential for individual and organizational outcomes ranging from job performance to health and longevity (Spector, 2003). According to Rehman et al. (2020), job satisfaction is also one of the most essential factors in an organization where the most important factor is the attitude indicator, which is a standardised method of evaluating individual judgments of their work experience. Employees that are happy with their employment contribute significantly to the organization's performance and survival (Roos, 2005). Thus, high job satisfaction means a person enjoys and values his or her employment (Roos, 2005). Then, the individuals will assess their employment based on their own values, both good and bad (Sempane, Rieger & Roodt, 2002). According to Arnold & Feldman (1986), today's managers are incredibly concerned with employee's job satisfaction, especially as it relates to productivity, absenteeism, staff turnover, and merger activity. Job happiness significantly affects the workers' personal, social, and professional life (Sempane, Rieger & Roodt, 2002). According to Ayub and Rafif (2011), the pressure will not allow the person to exhibit his or her full potential but affecting the organization's skills.

Conceptual Framework

The aim of this study is to propose a model for job satisfaction among academic staff in higher education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia. There are five independent variables which are taken from the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Physiological needs are the most basic needs which include the needs for people to stay alive. Safety and security needs consist of both physical and physiological fundamentals. The self-belonging needs is the needs for each of crowd and friendship. Self-esteem needs include the wish for accomplishment, pride and confidence. Self-actualization needs is the highest level in the hierarchy of needs and an individual is aimed to achieve the highest potential. All these needs are believed to have impacts on the relationship between job satisfaction among academic staff. The conceptual framework in this study is shown in Figure 2.
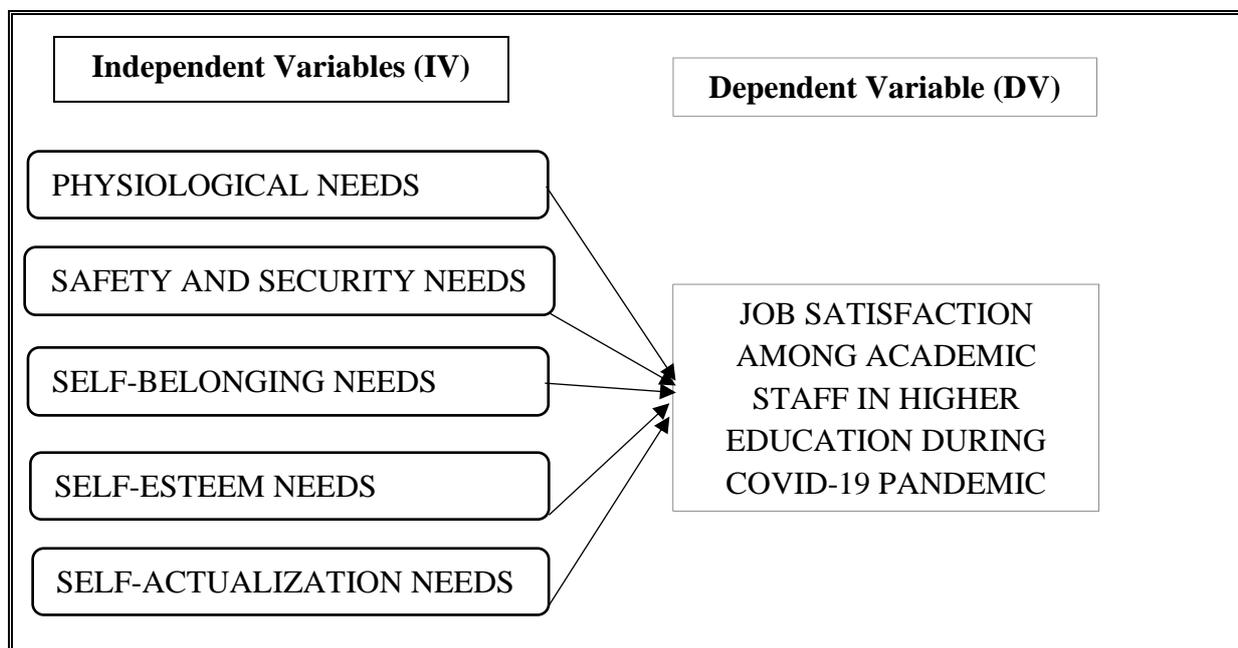

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Impact of Employees' Motivation Factors toward Job Satisfaction

Methodology

The research methodology has been clarified by the sampling plan and instruments used. This quantitative study will used questionnaires as the instrument and academic staff in higher education in the northern region of Malaysia as the respondents. Thus, the researcher had decided to use the convenient sampling technique in this study. This was because the respondents were selected based on their willingness to answer the questionnaire.

According to Tabachnick and Fiddle (2007), as cited in Pallant (2011), the appropriate number for the sample size can be calculated using the formula of $N > 50+8m$, where m is the number of independent variables. Therefore, by using this formula, the appropriate sample size needed for this study was 90 respondents. However, the researcher decided to increase the sample size to 120 respondents. In order to collect data for this study, the method used was via a questionnaire which was the close-ended questions. The questionnaires will personally distribute. The reason for using this method was the researcher believed that it gave a high

return rate. Apart from that, if the respondents have any doubts about the questionnaire, the researcher could clarify it immediately.

Conclusion

This study will determine the relationship between motivational factors such as physiological needs, safety and security needs, self-belongingness needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs and the employees' job satisfaction. This could help the organization to identify the employees' motivational factors that were needed in order to make them satisfied with their job. Furthermore, it also helps the management to evaluate their employees' job satisfaction and investigate their employees' motivational level, whether it was high or low. In addition, as employees, it is essential to identify the needs required to increase their motivation level when performing their work. Thus, the organization would realize that it is vital for them to contribute to the issue discussed in this study to maintain the employees' motivation level and job satisfaction.

Acknowledgement

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