

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The employees' job performance is very significant to organisations. It is due the employees' job performance is linked with and contributes to organisational goals (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). The employees' job performance can also substantially affect organisational profitability (Bevan, 2012; Muchhal, 2014; Reio & Wiswell, 2000; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). Therefore, the issue of job performance is often discussed in literature that involves various organisations, which include higher education institutions (HEI).

The success of HEI primarily depends on academic staff's job performance, competency, commitment and motivation to achieve the mission and goals of universities. According to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, the quality of educators (including the academic staff at HEI) is a crucial factor that influences student outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2015). Therefore, HEI needs to ensure the academic staff job performance is consistently high. HEI must implement performance management procedures to improve academic staff's job performance and align its goals and objectives with the HEI's strategic goals. It will enhance the university's overall performance to achieve its intended end (Tanveer et al., 2018). HEI also can identify the factors that can

influence job performance as another mechanism to manage job performance among the academic staff. Having an adequate understanding of job performance factors can facilitate HEI in planning the strategy to manage job performance among academic staff.

Effective human resource management (HRM) practices should be built to achieve a high level of job performance among employees in an organisation (Albrecht et al., 2015; Dessler, 2006; Majumder & Hossain, 2012; Wall & Wood, 2005). The HRM practices are commonly referred to practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, career development, compensation, and benefits (Boxall & Purcell, 2008). The HRM practices are able to develop employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and motivations (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). The HRM practices also are the fundamental activities by which the organisation can develop and shape the employees' skills, abilities, and behaviour to do their job successfully and focus on meeting the targets (Cania, 2014; Harter et al., 2002).

The relationship between leader and subordinate or known as leader-member exchange (LMX) can also influence an employee's job performance. It is due to a positive relationship between leader and subordinate that creates mutual trust, respect, influence and high-quality information exchange and feedback between leader and subordinate (Chen et al., 2007). The interaction between leader and subordinate will also increase because of a positive relationship between them (Winkler, 2010b). In addition, the the quality of relationships between leader and subordinate is able to influence the subordinate to produce positive work attitudes and behaviours in the organisation (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liden et al., 1997; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997; Illies, 2007).

The employees' characteristics are another potential antecedent for their job performance in an organisation specifically, the work engagement. Khan (1990) argued that when employees are engaged, they are not only physically involved in their work, but they also are cognitively alert and emotionally connected to others in the organisation. Employees with a high level of work engagement feel motivated, eager and excited about their work even when faced with setbacks, limitations, and challenges (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The employees will also show total concentration on his/her job and being deeply involved in his/her job (Christian et al., 2011).

The employees' personalities are also able to influence the job performance of employees. A positive personality is capable of producing employees with positive values involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioural values and thus contributes to the effectiveness of job performance (Churchill et al., 1985). The employees' personality gives consistency in their work attitude and behaviour (Feist & Feist, 2006). Thus, Robertson and Callinan (1998) argue the personality variables can be a significant predictor of job performance when they are carefully matched with appropriate jobs and organisation.

Therefore, this study aims to uncover the issues among individuals, particularly the academic staff job performance, and examine the influence of human resource management practices, LMX, work engagement and personality on job performance.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The Times Higher Education System in 2020 showed that the job performance of academic staff contributes to merely 60 percent of the overall performance of the university. However, according to Yee (2018), the job performance of academic staff at the

private university in Malaysia does not fully meet the satisfactory level. To be specific, the type of private university that is facing issue related to job performance is under the category of Islamic University College. A study by Tengah, Mohamad Husin and Mohamad Zan (2022) among 200 academic staff members from two Islamic University Colleges in Malaysia found that the overall job performance of academic staff's is still at the moderate level. Mesran and Jakaria (2019) also discovered similar findings in their study among 70 academic staff members at one Islamic University College in Malaysia. They also indicate that the job performance of academic staff in that context is still at a moderate level. Based on previous findings, it is essential to explore the factors that influence job performance among academic staff in this context (the Islamic University Colleges in Malaysia).

Many studies have been conducted in the past to understand the factors that may influence job performance. Based on the reviews of past literature that involved either public or private higher education institutions, it was found that the factors related to work environment can influence job performance such as performance measurement system (Janudin, Maelah, Mohd Amir & Abdullah, 2015), workload, time pressure, recognition, insufficient facilities (Sahbudin & Abdul Halim, 2017; Omar, Ahmad Selo & Rafie, 2020), workplace health (Kefeli, Ahmad, Sabri, Johari, Samsudin & Kang, 2021), tolerance at workplace (Mohammadi & Karupiah, 2019), and organisational values (Mesran & Jakaria, 2019).

Human resource management (HRM) practice is another critical work factor that may influence job performance. Seven HRM practices offer positive contributions to

employees' job performance. The practices are training and development, reward, job analysis, recruitment and selection, social support, employee relationship, and employee empowerment (Delery & Doty, 1996; Nataraja & Alamri, 2016). The possible reason is that the HRM practices such as training, performance appraisal, teamwork, employee involvement, and compensation can increase the employee's level of job satisfaction (Pavan & Reddy, 2016). The HRM practices such as career advancement, employee participation, job security, performance feedback, rewards and recognition, training and development can also motivate employees to engage with their job (Alfes et al., 2013b; Boon & Kalshoven, 2014; Alima & Fauzunia, 2018).

According to Van De Voorde and Beijer (2015), if employees are satisfied with the HRM practices, they feel obliged to repay the organisation because of their reciprocal relationship with the employer. Hoon Song and colleagues (2014) asserted that one of the ways for the employees to repay their organisation is through a higher level of work engagement. Engagement with the job can facilitate the employees' commitment to their work and the organisation and ultimately will motivate them to achieve high levels of job performance (Armstrong & Taylor, 2013).

Another critical factor that influences employees' job performance is Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). Power (2013) states that LMX is significant to higher education institution leadership contexts because of its close correlation with transformational leadership. It has gained recent prominence due to the frequently expressed need to transform higher education institutions to meet the changing demands of society (Power, 2013). LMX refers to the quality of supervisor and subordinate relationships. Researchers

argue that LMX can improve job performance. In addition, LMX can create a positive work attitude and behaviour among employees, such as organisational commitment, citizenship behaviour and work engagement (Walumbwa et al., 2011; Truckenbrodt, 2000; Hui et al., 1999; Cheung & Wu, 2012).

Based on the previous discussion, although the influence of HRM practices and LMX on job performance has been verified in previous studies, it remains unclear what underlying mechanisms explain the relationship. Researchers such as Li and colleagues (2012) indicated that the employee factor can play the role of a mechanism between HRM practices, LMX and job performance. A possible employee factor is work engagement and personality. Work engagement has been recognized as a mediator between organisational factor and job performance (Li et al., 2012). In regard to personality, past studies have suggested that personality traits might predict and play an important role in an employee's job performance (Cheng-Liang & Mark, 2014; Raja et al., 2011) because it can create an organisational citizenship behaviour (e.g. Borman et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2005; O'Neill et al., 2011; Spitzmuller, Sin, Howe & Fatimah, 2015; Shaffer, Li & Bagger, 2015).

Based on the previous discussion, this study will examine the influence of HRM practices, LMX, work engagement and personality on job performance simultaneously in the context of Islamic University Colleges in Malaysia. To the best of the researchers' knowledge through literature searching, no concrete empirical studies have been conducted to understand the factors that influence job performance among academic staff in this context (Islamic University Colleges in Malaysia). Past studies examined the factors of academic staff job performance in the context of research universities in Malaysia (Janudin,

Maelah, Mohd Amir & Abdullah, 2015; Janib, Mohd Rasdi, Omar, Alias, Zaremohzzabieh & Ahrari, 2021), Malaysian Polytechnics (Sahbudin & Abdul Halim, 2017; Sikul, Harun, Mohtar & Datu Eranza, 2015; Omar, Ahmad Selo & Rafie, 2020), Apex universities in Malaysia (Campbell & Yen, 2014), public universities (Kefeli, Ahmad, Sabri, Johari, Samsudin & Kang, 2021), and private universities (Mohammadi & Karupiah, 2019).

In addition, past research focused on identifying the antecedents to job performance and often examined the factors affecting job performance on an isolated basis, without considering a combination of organisational and individual factors. Hence, this research is intended to fill the gap in investigating the influence of organisational (HRM practices, LMX) and individual factors (work engagement, personality) on academic staff performance at Islamic University Colleges in Malaysia. Moreover, the potential role of work engagement and personality as a mediator in the relationship between HRM practices, LMX and job performance will also be investigated in this study.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1. Is there a significant influence of HRM practices and Leader-Member Exchange on the academic staff job performance in the Malaysian Higher Education Institutions?
2. Is there a significant influence of work engagement and personality on the academic staff job performance in the Malaysian Higher Education Institutions?
3. Do HRM practices and Leader-Member Exchange have an influence on the academic staff work engagement and personality in the Malaysian Higher Education Institutions?

4. Do work engagement and personality mediate the relationship between organisational factors (HRM practices, Leader-Member Exchange) and the academic staff job performance?

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

1. To examine the influence of HRM practices and Leader-Member Exchange on the academic staff job performance in the Malaysian Higher Education Institutions.
2. To examine the influence of work engagement and personality on the academic staff job performance in the Malaysian Higher Education Institutions.
3. To examine the influence of HRM practices and Leader Member Exchange on the academic staff work engagement and personality in the Malaysian Higher Education Institutions.
4. To examine the mediating role of work engagement and personality in the relationship between organisational factors (HRM practices, Leader-Member Exchange) and the academic staff job performance.

#### **1.5 The Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in analysing the influence of human resource management practice, leader-member exchange, work engagement and personality on job performance. In other words, the current study offers new findings on how work (human resource management practice, leader-member exchange) and individual (work engagement and personality) factors simultaneously influence job performance. The previous studies only

verify the relationship between variables in this study separately in different contexts. For example, the relationship between human resource management practices and job performance has been tested in the study by Nataraja and Alamri (2016). While the link between leader-member exchange and job performance has been verified in another study by Power (2013). As a result, there is no adequate conclusion about the factors that influence job performance in a particular context.

The current study also contributes to the body of knowledge with new empirical findings on the mediating role of work engagement and personality in trying to understand job performance among academic staff. To date, the literature only validates the role of personality as predictor to job performance (Cheng-Liang & Mark, 2014; Raja et al., 2011). Meanwhile, work engagement so far has been regarded as mediator between other organisational factors and job performance (Li et al., 2012).

The empirical findings from this study can offer practical solutions to the management of higher education institutions management, particularly the Islamic University Colleges in Malaysia in helping the academic staff to excel in job performance. By understanding the influence of work factors such as human resource management practices and leader-member exchange, including individual factors such as work engagement and personality on job performance, the Islamic University Colleges management can develop guidelines and plan for initiatives to encourage academic staff to produce excellence job performance. Apart from that, the Islamic University Colleges could also gain the understanding of the role of work engagement and personality as the mediator.

## 1.6 Scope of the Study

Studying job performance among Malaysian academic staff is relevant in response to the number of past academic studies that reported lack of job performance among this research target (Tengah, Mohamad Husin & Mohamad Zan, 2022). Thus, the focus of this study is to examine factors that may influence job performance. In this study, two independent variables (human resource management practices and leader-member exchange) and two mediators (work engagement and personality) were tested against job performance.

Respondents of this study were the Malaysian academic staff at the Islamic University Colleges that participated in SETARA 2019 and achieved Tier Four (4) and Tier Three (3). There are three Islamic University Colleges that meet these requirements, namely as Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka (KUIM) and Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis (KUIPs). The Islamic University Colleges are chosen as the setting for this study as there are continuous debates about academic staff job performance that had been reported in several past studies (e.g., Tengah, Mohamad Husin & Mohamad Zan, 2022).

The study adopted a quantitative approach, where the data were collected through the distribution of an online questionnaire to the respondents. A cross-sectional study was employed, which involved data collection at one point in time. The data collected were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling AMOS. This statistical software is suitable for dealing with complex models that involve many variables.

## **1.7 Definition of Key Terms**

### **1.7.1 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia.**

In this study, the Higher Education Institutions refer to Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka (KUIM) and Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis (KUIPs). These three Islamic University Colleges have been registered with and approved by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. These three Islamic University Colleges must abide with the Parliament Acts, such as the Private Higher Educational Institutional Act 1996 and the Education Act 1996 ([studymalaysia.com](http://studymalaysia.com)).

### **1.7.2 University Colleges**

The institutions that do not have the full university status are often considered to be on the same level as the more prominent university, mainly offering pre-university and diploma programmes. They can provide degrees in specialised fields and disciplines. University colleges have the power to award degrees at the undergraduate level that are held in the same regard as those awarded by universities.

### **1.7.3 Academic Staff**

The academic staff is a member of the faculty. A similar word for academic staff is lecturer. A lecturer is a person who gives a lecture or teaches at a university or college (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries Online). Specifically, the study will be limited to the full time academic staff at three Islamic University Colleges, namely as Kolej Universiti Islam

Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka (KUIM) and Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis (KUIPs).

#### **1.7.4 Job Performance**

Job performance in this study refers to job performance of the academic staff at higher education institutions in Malaysia. Specifically, the job performance in this study was assessed through three indicators, namely: teaching, research and publication performance (Mawoli & Babandako, 2011).

#### **1.7.5 HRM practices**

Human resources management can be defined as all activities associated with the management of people in organisations (Snell & Bohlander, 2013). In this study, the HRM practices refers four practices proposed by Presbitero and colleagues (2016). The practices are remuneration and rewards, training and development, career development, and work-life balance.

##### **1.7.5.1 Remuneration and Rewards**

Gomez -Mejia et al. (2006) view employee compensation as comprising base pay and fringe benefits. Base pay or cash pay is the direct pay provided by employers for work performed, including salary, overtime pay, shift allowance, uniform allowances and pay contingent on performance like merit awards, incentive pay, bonuses and gain sharing. Fringe compensating includes required programs such as social security, health benefits, pension plans, paid time off, tuition reimbursement, foreign service premiums, etc.

### **1.7.5.2 Training and Development**

Training and development provide the required knowledge, skills, abilities, and others to the employee for doing the job effectively, skillfully and with quality. It is also the formal activity designed by the HEI (organisation) to help academic staff members acquire the necessary skill and knowledge to perform current and future jobs (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Babakus et al., 2003; Rogg et al., 2001).

### **1.7.5.3 Career Development**

According to Kirk & colleagues (2000), career development can be described as achieving specific employee and organisation goals, including providing career information, helping employees identify advancement opportunities, promoting job satisfaction, and improving employee productivity. There are many different types of career development, both formal and informal, including employee assessment (Bolt, 1989; Hinrichs & Hollenbeck, 1991), on-the-job experiences (McCall et al., 1988), formal courses and programs (Tansky & Cohen, 2001), and mentoring relationships (Chao et al., 1992).

### **1.7.5.4 Work-life Balance**

The definition of work-life balance is generally associated with equilibrium between the amount of time and effort somebody devotes to work and personal activities, to maintain an overall sense of harmony in life (Clarke, et al., 2004)

### **1.7.6 Leader-member Exchange (LMX)**

LMX is the essence of the relationship between leaders and each subordinate. It is the extent to which one likes, is loyal to, respects and is willing to help the other (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). The basic principle of LMX is that leaders develop different types of exchange relationships with their followers, and the quality of these relationships affects leader and member attitudes and behaviours (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liden et al., 1997; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997; Illies, 2007).

### **1.7.7 Work Engagement**

Work engagement in this study is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). They refer to vigour as high levels of energy and mental resilience related to work experience and one's eagerness to invest effort in work and persist even when faced with problems. Employees will feel motivated, eager, and excited about their work even when faced with setbacks, limitations, or challenges. Dedication involves being deeply involved in one's work and experiencing feelings of importance, passion, motivation, and challenge. Dedicated employees would happily be involved in their work and feel important, meaningful, and challenging. Lastly, absorption is described as contentment and total concentration on one's work.

### **1.7.8 Personality**

Churchill and colleagues (1985) defined personality characteristics as psychological characteristics that enhance a person's ability to perform. McCrae (2001) would call it the Big Five Factors Theory: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. Extraversion is responsible for sociability, assertiveness, talkativeness, and excitability. Agreeableness is a personality factor corresponding to trust, affection, altruism, and affection. Conscientiousness refers to a high set of thoughts and good impulse control. Neuroticism is another personality trait that refers to emotional stability, moodiness, sadness, irritability, and anxiety. Openness refers to the sphere of the imaginative.

### **1.8 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis comprises three main parts:

#### **PART 1:**

**Chapter 1-**The introduction of the chapter provides a synopsis of the thesis that includes the research context, research aims and objectives, and significance of the study.

**Chapter 2-** This chapter provides a critical overview of existing literature and summarises some of the most salient points that emerged in the literature review. The literature of the study covers underpinning theories, academic staff members in the context of Malaysian Higher Education Institutions, the definition and concept of every variable, the linking between variables, and at the end of the chapter the research framework will be summarised.

**PART 2:**

**Chapter 3-** This chapter discusses issues related to research philosophy and evaluates different paradigms of analysis; providing an overview and justification of the research design, methodology, and instruments used. The sections in the chapter include: research paradigm, research design and approach, population and sampling, data collection method, and research credibility.

**PART 3:**

**Chapter 4-** This chapter provides an analysis of secondary and primary data respectively.

**Chapter 5-** This chapter discusses a comprehensive discussion of findings and concludes the thesis by identifying its unique contribution to the body of knowledge and lastly the directions for future research.

**Table 1.1:** Structure of the Thesis

PART 1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	}]	Chapter 1- Introduction Chapter 2 – Literature Review Understanding of the research topic from a theoretical and conceptual point of view. Development of the conceptual framework.
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PART 2 METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	]E	Chapter 3 – Research Methodology Development and execution of the research plan.
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PART 3 ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION, AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION	]E	Chapter 4- Data Analysis and findings Chapter 5- Conclusion and Recommendations. Analysis, presentation, and discussion of results. Developing and validating the final framework. The chapter is the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

## 1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a discussion about the background of the study, statement of the research problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and scope of the study. Finally, the chapter explains the operational definition for each variable included in this study. The next chapter two will discuss the literature review that is related to this study.

