

# THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP SUPPORT AND JOB SATISFACTION ON MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

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**ABSTRACT :** *The issue of the mental health of teachers has become a pressing concern in Malaysia because of the growing workload and administrative pressures, as well as changes in education reforms. This research is inspired by the increasing cases of teacher stress and burnout, which explore classroom leadership support and job satisfaction on the mental health of Malaysian secondary school teachers, with self-efficacy being the mediating variable. The overall aim is to explain the interaction of organizational and psychological variables in determining the outcomes of well-being of teachers. The quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, with 475 teachers of secondary schools in Penang being the respondents of the study that were sampled using structured questionnaires. Leadership support, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and mental well-being were measured using validated instruments and analyzed using SPSS through exploratory factor analysis, multiple regression, and mediation tests. The findings show that teacher mental well-being and self-efficacy can be predicted by the leadership support and job satisfaction. Self-efficacy demonstrates the significant positive effect on mental well-being and partially mediates the associations of leadership support and job satisfaction with mental well-being. These results indicate the primary importance of self-efficacy in the conversion of organizational support into psychological outcomes. Based on the study, the authors find that self-efficacy and mental well-being can be improved by enhancing the quality of school leadership practices and improving the job conditions of teachers. The policy recommendations involve the leadership training of principals, the systematic initiatives to enhance job satisfaction, and the school-based programs to develop the self-efficacy of the teachers to facilitate sustainable educator well-being.*

**Keywords:** leadership support; job satisfaction; self-efficacy; mental well-being; secondary school teachers

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The health of the mind of teachers has become one of the top policy consideration issues since the well-being of the education system depends on the health and morale of the people delivering the education. Evidence around the world indicates that education professionals are faced with pressure like never before. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) score of education workers in the United Kingdom dropped to 43.42, the lowest since 2019, and more than a third of employees were at risk of likely clinical depression [3]. According to the same report, 75 percent of the senior leaders and 63 percent of the teachers were highly stressed [3]. Such numbers reflect global trends; UNESCO estimates that the world will require the hiring of approximately 44 million more teachers by 2030 to prevent an education crisis, and the primary school teacher turnover increased twofold, from 4.6 to over 9 percent between 2015 and 2022 [4]. The global discussion of teacher well-being highlights how excessive workload, administrative obligations, and limited professional freedom undermine the morale and lead to burnout [3]. This article adds to this discussion because it looks at the relationship between leadership support and job satisfaction and the effect on the mental wellness of teachers and whether self-efficacy is a mediating variable.

Although the statistics presented in the world are frightening, the crisis of teacher well-being has its especially acute manifestations in developing countries. Similar studies conducted in Nepal have found that 60.2 percent of teachers display psychological distress, and 51.1 percent of them reported occupational stress [8]. In Malaysia, survey reports that were conducted in Selangor showed that 62.3 percent of teachers had moderate and high levels of depersonalization and 23.5 percent were emotionally exhausted, which

confirmed that teaching is one of the most stressful careers [6]. One more report has mentioned that the state had around 27 214 secondary and 35 018 primary teachers [7]; however, fatigue and anxiety were widespread, which led to the conclusion that staffing is not the only factor that safeguards well-being. Included among the reasons teachers always use to justify why they are exhausted are the size of classes, the need to achieve performance quotas, social and behavioral issues among students, and the heavy administrative workload [16]. In the context of the working environment where the leadership does not support and provide enough resources, these stressors turn into burnout and attrition [16]. Thus, it is important to know the organizational conditions that promote or impede well-being.

Mental well-being is not just the lack of psychiatric disorder. According to the World Health Organization, positive mental health is a condition where individuals will achieve their potentials, manage the daily stress normally, work in a productive and fruitful way, and benefit their communities [1]. This definition aligns with the studies of well-being of a teacher that focus on life satisfaction, self-confidence, self-esteem, meaningful relationships, ongoing learning, and self-actualization [16]. The WEMWBS is constructed to represent these hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of mental well-being and is the measure of optimism, clear thinking, energy, personal development, and interpersonal relations [1]. The emphasis on positive functioning is in contrast to much of the occupational health literature, which is more likely to record distress symptoms. One of the strengths of this study is that it uses a positive approach to psychology by evaluating mental well-being as opposed to ill health.

To precondition the current study, one will need to describe the factors that are thought to influence the mental well-being of the teachers. Leadership support is defined as the degree to

which the principals and senior managers can offer transparent communication to teachers, equitable and equitable policies, access to resources at the right time, professional growth, and emotional appreciation [16]. Job satisfaction indicates evaluative judgment of teachers regarding their work, and these evaluations may be intrinsic motivations like recognition, advancement, and autonomy or extrinsic motivations like remuneration and working conditions. Herzberg's theory of motivation assumes that satisfaction is motivated by factors (achievement, recognition, responsibility) and that dissatisfaction is avoided by hygiene factors (salary, policies, supervision) [10]. Self-efficacy, in its turn, refers to the ability of teachers to believe in their possibilities in order to plan and implement the tasks; it affects the goal setting, perseverance, and stress resilience [13]. Self-efficacy is a powerful predictor of intrinsic motivation and buffers stress, but low self-efficacy can trigger inadequacy [16]. Even though each construct has been independently researched, the processes of their association with mental well-being are not completely clear.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptualising Mental Well-Being**

The historical understanding of mental well-being has been changing, which is based on the emphasis on the pathology of positive functioning. According to the World Health Organization, positive mental health is the basis of well-being and good functioning at both individual and communal levels [1]. It is a condition where people become aware of their potentials, manage easy stresses, work effectively, and serve their society [1]. This holism is both hedonic well-being (happiness and life satisfaction) and eudaimonic well-being (self-realisation, purpose, and optimal functioning) [1]. Mental well-being enables teachers in learning institutions to remain energised, have optimistic attitudes, and interact positively with the students as well as accommodate change [16]. On the contrary, poor mental well-being is linked to emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and less personal accomplishment [6].

There are a number of scales that assess positive mental well-being. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) is a 14-item scale with a positively worded questionnaire that addresses optimism, relaxation, clear thinking, personal development, energy, and positive relationships [1]. It was created to overcome the shortcomings of other scales like the Affectometer 2 and the PANAS, which combine positive and negative items and hence confound well-being and ill-being [1]. WEMWBS has good psychometrics and has been tested across different cultures [1]. WEMWBS is also applied in this study to determine the mental well-being of teachers since it is consistent with the focus on positive functioning and has been used in previous studies among educators [3].

### **2.2 Leadership Support and Mental Well-Being**

Leadership support is the perception of teachers that school leaders provide resources, direction, freedom, and acknowledgement. Researchers rely on the social exchange theory and Leader Member Exchange (LMX) theory to elaborate on how positive relationships with supervisors can promote employee well-being. According to the LMX theory,

the quality of exchange, which is high and is defined by trust, respect, and mutual obligation, produces a positive result of job satisfaction and organisational commitment [16]. Principals who are supportive assist teachers in negotiating complicated curricula, dealing with disciplinary matters, and juggling between the administrative responsibilities and teaching tasks [16]. This type of support is able to alleviate the stress by helping people understand what is expected of them, lessening the role conflict, and providing emotional support [16]. In its turn, the absence of leadership support leads to the development of isolation, low morale, and burnout [16].

Empirical studies associate the leadership support with teacher well-being in contexts. In the United Kingdom, researchers in a study of teacher wellbeing, the Teacher Wellbeing Index, discovered that teachers who rated their schools as supportive had lower anxiety and greater life satisfaction [3]. The analysis of TALIS data provided by Education International demonstrated that schools where collaboration and autonomy in decision-making are encouraged have higher teacher retention and well-being [5]. In Malaysia, it has been shown that the leadership behaviours, which include equitable workload allocation, recognition, and participative decision-making, are associated with reduced burnout and increased mental health [16]. Nonetheless, cross-sectional research rarely examines how leadership support affects well-being by testing the mechanisms. The gap that is filled in this study is the consideration of self-efficacy as a possible mediator. Leadership studies have identified various styles that can affect well-being in different ways. Transformational leaders motivate subordinates with the help of a vision, intellectual stimulation, and personalised attention, but transactional leaders use contingent reward and corrective feedback [12]. Transformational leadership has been associated with increased teacher motivation and innovation, whereas transactional methods can ensure compliance but will not generate commitment. The Leader-Member Exchange theory focuses more on the dyadic relationship than on the style in general but assumes that the good quality of exchanges based on mutual trust and respect leads to job satisfaction and psychological well-being [16, [2]. Transformational behaviours and the development of high-quality LMX relationships in the schools by the principals promote collaboration, empower the teachers, and exemplify coping behaviours, thus developing self-efficacy and well-being. In comparison, autocratic or laissez-faire leadership may add stress, especially in environments where there is high demand. The current research places the support of leadership in this theoretical continuum, supposing that the supportive behaviours correspond to transformational and high-LMX ideas.

### **2.3 Job Satisfaction and Mental Well-Being**

Job satisfaction indicates the general assessment of teachers about their work as well as emotional reactions towards work experiences. It involves intrinsic motivators like meaningfulness, recognition, responsibility, and advancement and extrinsic motivators like salary, policies, and working conditions [10]. The two-factor theory of Herzberg states that

intrinsic motivation drives job satisfaction and extrinsic motivation is the hygiene factor that prevents dissatisfaction [10]. The intrinsic motivators in teaching can be the shaping of the life of the students, intellectual stimulation, and professional development; the hygiene factors can be the size of the classes, the amount of administrative work, and the physical facilities. The teachers who are made to feel valued and challenged report higher well-being, and those who are exposed to poor working conditions or lack of growth prospects get frustrated and burnt out [16].

There is empirical evidence of a close relationship between job satisfaction and mental well-being. In a meta-analysis of occupational studies, job satisfaction explained significant variance of positive affect and life satisfaction [3]. When teachers are highly job-satiated, they are more committed, creative, and self-efficacious in an educational setting [13]. They are less likely to quit the profession, and they would tend to develop professionally [5]. On the other hand, discontent with workload, low salaries, or failure to receive recognition is an indicator of psychological distress and absenteeism [6]. Studies have found that workload stresses and fixed performance indicators are the leading causes of dissatisfaction in Malaysia [16]. This research, by considering the two variables of job satisfaction and leadership support, elucidates whether the two variables are independent contributors to mental well-being or the two variables work together as a mechanism.

#### 2.4 Self-Efficacy as Mediator

Perceived ability to achieve a target behaviour is what is called self-efficacy [13]. It is the fundamental unit in the social cognitive theory by Bandura and determines the behaviour in terms of goal setting, perseverance, and resilience [13]. In the case of teachers, self-efficacy refers to attitudes towards classroom management, student engagement, and instruction. Instructors who possess a high level of self-efficacy resort to differentiation of instruction to fit various learners, persist in case students are struggling, and stay calm in stressful circumstances [16]. They also have increased job satisfaction since they find personal accomplishment in good teaching [13].

Self-efficacy and mental well-being are closely correlated. Patients who have increased self-efficacy have reduced levels of stress symptoms, enhanced life satisfaction and improved psychological functioning since they perceive that they are able to regulate the outcomes [13]. In an investigation of Malaysian teachers, teachers who had high self-efficacy had lower burnout and well-being scores [16]. External conditions can also mediate between self-efficacy and well-being: supportive leaders, and satisfying work conditions may be used to increase self-efficacy, through the provision of mastery experiences, through the modelling of effective behaviour and verbal encouragement [13]. On the other hand, self-efficacy can be undermined by the absence of support and recognition, which can result in reduced motivation and well-being. However, the mediating effect of self-efficacy on the correlation between the leadership support, job satisfaction and mental well-being has not been comprehensively examined in a Malaysian setting. In this research, the gap is filled through mediation analysis.

There are a number of gaps identified in the literature review. To begin with, the majority of the studies concentrate on leadership support, or job satisfaction, but seldom consider them as the two in combination in terms of mental wellness. Second, although self-efficacy has been found to mediate between leadership support or job satisfaction and mental well-being, mediating effects of self-efficacy between these two variables and mental well-being have not been extensively studied [16]. Third, current measures of these constructs tend to be created in the Western world setting and might not reflect cultural specificities; studies have recommended their validation in Malaysia [16]. Fourth, the majority of empirical studies employ generic measures of mental health as opposed to positive well-being measures like WEMWBS. In order to fill these gaps, this study hypothesizes three hypotheses (H1) The leadership support and job satisfaction have a positive relationship with the mental well-being of teachers (H2) self-efficacy mediates the relationship between leadership support and mental well being (H3) self-efficacy mediates the relationship between job satisfaction and mental well being. The quantitative survey and mediation analysis are used to test these hypotheses.

#### 3 Methodology

The design used in this study was cross-sectional and quantitative correlational design that was used to explore the relationship between leadership support, job satisfaction, self-efficacy and mental well-being. The survey was a self-administered questionnaire that was used to gather information among secondary school teachers in Penang, Malaysia. The design enables analyzing associations and mediation effects at one time, but considering the fact that no causality can be established. Validated scales and structured questionnaires are used which makes them reliable and comparable [16]. The population targeted was all the teachers in secondary schools in Penang. The Department of Education states that there were 79 secondary schools in Penang with nearly 5000 teachers, of whom 1042 were men and 3958 women [16]. Multi-stage cluster sampling was employed in this study: schools were stratified in terms of district and type (urban vs rural), and randomly chosen. The teachers were invited to join in each of the selected schools. One hundred and twenty-five responses were found to be valid, which gave a response rate of approximately 60. The demographic profile of respondents is summarised in Table 1. The sample was mainly female (82.7 percent) and Malay (60.6 percent), most of them married (75.4 percent). The greatest number was teachers who had an experience of 1120 years of experience (32 percent). The majority of the respondents were graduates of a bachelors degree (79.4%), 18.3% were master degree graduates and 1.5% were PhD graduates.

A panel of experts including university scholars and seasoned school administrators determined the content validity. Each item was rated on relevance, clarity and cultural appropriateness by the experts; those items with item-content validity index (I -C VI ) less than 0.80 were revised or dropped [16]. The construct validity was measured by use of exploratory factor analysis which ensured that the factor

structure expected in each scale was achieved. The piloting on 50 teachers gave Cronbach alpha coefficients greater than 0.70 on all scales, which is evidence of internal consistency [16]. The convergent validity was looked into through the correlation of each construct with variables that were theoretically related. The reliability of the translation was guaranteed through back translation and checked by the bilingual experts [16]. Data was gathered using online and paper questionnaires that were administered during the period between March and June 2024. The participation was on a voluntary basis and anonymity guaranteed. Before the data were collected, the Ministry of Education and the university ethics committee approved the study. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the PROCESS macro was used to analyse data mediation analysis. The demographics were summarised using descriptive statistics. Mental well-being was determined using multiple regression analysis to determine the impact of leadership support and job satisfaction (H1). The second regression was to test the influences of leadership support and job satisfaction on self-efficacy. The third regression was used to determine how self-efficacy impacted mental well-being and held the other variables constant. Lastly, indirect effects and confidence intervals of the mediation were estimated by bootstrapping with 5000 resamples.

#### 4 Estimated Results

The demographic profile of respondents (Table 1) provides important context for interpreting the regression results. Out of 475 respondents, 82.7 % were female and 17.3 % male, reflecting the feminisation of teaching. The largest ethnic group was Malay (60.6 %), followed by Chinese (25.7 %), Indian (11.4 %) and other ethnicities (2.3 %). Most respondents were married (75.4 %), with the remainder single (23.8 %) or divorced/widowed (0.8 %). Regarding teaching experience, 21.5 % had 0–5 years, 24.6 % had 6–10 years, 32.0 % had 11–20 years and 21.9 % had over 20 years. In terms of education, 79.4 % held bachelor's degrees, 18.3 % master's degrees, 1.5 % PhDs and 0.8 % diplomas. The sample thus represented a diverse cross-section of Penang teachers, with a slight over-representation of mid-career educators.

**Table 1 Respondents' demographic profile (n = 475)**

Variable	Category (frequency ; %)
Gender	Female = 393 (82.7 %); Male = 82 (17.3 %)
Ethnicity	Malay = 288 (60.6 %); Chinese = 122 (25.7 %); Indian = 54 (11.4 %); Others = 11 (2.3 %)
Marital status	Single = 113 (23.8 %); Married = 358 (75.4 %); Divorced/Widowed = 4 (0.8 %)
Teaching experience	0–5 years = 102 (21.5 %); 6–10 years = 117 (24.6 %); 11–20 years = 152 (32.0 %); >20 years = 104 (21.9 %)
Education level	Diploma = 4 (0.8 %); Bachelor's degree = 377 (79.4 %); Master's degree = 87 (18.3 %); PhD = 7 (1.5 %)

In the multiple regression, it was tested whether or not leadership support and job satisfaction predict the mental well-being of teachers (H1). Table 2 presents the results. The model accounted 48 percent of the variance in mental well-

being ( $R^2 = 0.48$ ,  $F = 220.7$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). The constant term was 1.172 ( $SE = 0.155$ ). The effect of leadership support on mental well being was positive but non-significant ( $B = 0.051$ ,  $0.070$ ,  $SE = 0.028$ ,  $t = 1.854$ ,  $p = 0.064$ ). The effect of job satisfaction was very strong ( $0.611$ ,  $B = 0.682$ ,  $SE = 0.042$ ,  $t = 16.062$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) [3]. These findings substantiate H1 in relation to job satisfaction but not in leadership support in the presence of job satisfaction indicating that satisfaction might be the mediator of the relationship between leadership support and mental well-being or dominate influence.

**Table 2 Coefficients for the influence of leadership support and job satisfaction on mental well-being (n = 475)**

Predictor	B
Constant	1.172
Leadership support	0.051
Job satisfaction	0.682

The fact that the direct impact of leadership support is slightly non-significant could be due to its overlap with job satisfaction. As teachers begin to feel that their leaders are supportive, they will also tend to be happy with their employment; once they have factored in satisfaction, the distinctive variance of support by the leaders will be reduced. However, the support of a leader can affect mental well-being indirectly via self-efficacy, as discussed below.

The second regression determined the impact of leadership support and job satisfaction on self-efficacy. The model had a 33-percent explanation of the variance of self-efficacy ( $R^2 = 0.33$ ,  $F = 113.5$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as indicated in Table 3. The constant term was 2.194 ( $SE = 0.129$ ). The impact of leadership support was found to be negligible and non-significant ( $B = -.006$ ,  $SE = .023$ ,  $-.011$ ,  $p = .789$ ). The positive effect on job satisfaction was very high ( $= 0.559$ ,  $B = 0.478$ ,  $SE = 0.035$ ,  $p$  less than 0.001). In such a way, job satisfaction became the main predictor of self-efficacy, which contributes to the idea that satisfied teachers experience a sense of ability and confidence [3]. The lack of a substantial leadership impact indicates that, in this regard, supportive leadership might have no direct influence on self-efficacy, taking into account satisfaction.

**Table 3 Coefficients for the influence of leadership support and job satisfaction on self-efficacy (n = 475)**

Predictor	B
Constant	2.194
Leadership support	-.006
Job satisfaction	0.478

The third regression was used to determine the influence of self-efficacy on mental well-being under the control of leadership support and job satisfaction. In Table 4, the self-efficacy had a strong positive impact on the mental well-being ( $\beta = 0.573$ ,  $B = 0.748$ ,  $SE = 0.049$ ,  $t = 15.214$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) [3]. The constant term was 0.945 ( $SE = 0.197$ ). These findings substantiate the hypothesis that educators who are optimistic about their abilities are more mentally well, which coincides with the social cognitive theory [13]. The close relationship highlights the need to promote self-efficacy using professional and supportive settings.

**Table 4 Coefficient for the influence of self-efficacy on mental well-being (n = 475)**

Predictor	B
Constant	0.945
Self-efficacy	0.748

#### 4.5 Mediating Effect of Self-Efficacy

The mediation analysis using bootstrapping was used to test the hypothesis (H2 and H3) of whether self-efficacy mediates the relationship between leadership support and mental well-being and job satisfaction and mental well-being. The results of the mediation are summarised in Table 5. In the case of leadership support, the direct impact on mental well-being was also important in the presence of self-efficacy ( $B = 0.1376$ , 95 % CI = 0.0844-1909). The indirect effect through self-efficacy was 0.0752 (95 percent CI = 0.0331-0.1189) which shows that it has been partially mediated. To have job satisfaction, the direct impact on mental well-being was still meaningful ( $B = 0.5135$ , 95 % CI = 0.42550.6015). The indirect effect through self-efficacy was 0.1970 (95% CI = 0.13422626) which is a significant percentage of the total effect. These results confirm H2 and H3: self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between leadership support and job satisfaction on mental well-being.

**Table 5 Mediating effect of self-efficacy on the influence of leadership support and job satisfaction towards mental well-being (n = 475)**

Path	Effect (B)
Leadership support → mental well-being (direct)	0.1376
Leadership support → self-efficacy → mental well-being (indirect)	0.0752
Job satisfaction → mental well-being (direct)	0.5135
Job satisfaction → self-efficacy → mental well-being (indirect)	0.1970

By using the mediation analysis, it is found that leadership support positively and indirectly improves mental well-being through self-efficacy. Though the leadership support has not been an important predictor of self-efficacy in regression model, bootstrapping also suggests that small yet significant indirect effect. This implies that supportive leadership can promote self-efficacy through mastery experience or modeling of the effective practices, although the impact is small. Conversely, job satisfaction has a direct and indirect impact on self-efficacy and mental well-being. Teachers who are satisfied are more competent and this increased self-efficacy increases their well-being. Thus, when combined with the efforts to develop self-efficacy, the interventions that increase job satisfaction will have more significant positive effects on mental well-being.

#### 5 Conclusion

The current research investigated the relationship between leadership support and job satisfaction and the mental well-being of secondary school teachers in Penang and the mediation of the relationships by self-efficacy. The results add to the literature in various aspects. To begin with, they validate that job satisfaction is a strong predictor of mental well-being. The teachers who feel recognised, rewarded and engaged have greater positive affect and psychological functioning, in line with the Herzberg theory and other studies [10]. Although leadership support is important, it had a marginal direct effect in the control of job satisfaction.

Nevertheless, the mediation analysis showed that leadership support has a positive indirect influence via self-efficacy, which indicates the subtle mechanisms under which leadership has an impact on well-being. Second, the research shows self-efficacy is an effective predictor of mental well-being and moderation between the impact of leadership support and job satisfaction. When teachers have self-confidence that they can do it, they would be in a better position to manage stress, stay positive and find pleasure in their work [13]. This observation emphasizes the significance of professional growth and mentoring programmes that increase the instructional methods, classroom management abilities and confidence of teachers [16]. Third, the findings have policy implications. The education authorities need to focus on job satisfaction by not only focusing on the intrinsic factors but also focusing on the extrinsic factors. This involves proper distribution of workload in an equitable manner, recognition of achievement, provision of career development opportunities as well as remuneration that is competitive. Although financial rewards are vital, findings indicate that non-monetary aspects like recognition, autonomy and professional development are vital in well-being. The leaders of the school are expected to develop positive cultures that are typified by trust, respect and open communication. They ought to engage teachers in decision-making, give constructive feedback and praise achievements.

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