

The Relationship between HRM Practices and Academic Staff Job Engagement: The Role of Leader-Member Exchange as Moderator

Hubungan antara Amalan Pengurusan Sumber Manusia dengan Penglibatan Kerja Staf Akademik: Peranan Pertukaran Ketua-Ahli sebagai Moderator

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ABSTRAK

Increasingly demanding global economic environment and transformation of the Malaysian Higher Education system, HEI's performance and reputation are crucial. The meaning that academic work has shifted due to these challenges and the academic staff is carrying out more complex work and fulfilling the university's goals. It has to be highlighted that the combination of the high workloads and the requirement to fulfil the university's goals put a lot of pressure on the academic staff as the core workforce at HEIs and who are not satisfied display less engagement with their job. Past studies have shown that human resource management practices (HRM practices) and leader-member exchange impact job engagement. However, it is still unclear what the causative factors explain the relationship, especially in the education sector in Malaysia. Hence, this study investigates the relationship between HRM practices, leader-member exchange, and job engagement of academic staff in Malaysian private universities. This study also examines the role of leader-member exchange as a moderator in the relationship between HRM practices and job engagement. The online survey was conducted at two private universities with 196 full-time academic staff as the study respondents, and the hypotheses were tested using regression analysis. Results showed a significant relationship between HRM practices, leader-member exchange, and job engagement. Other findings showed that leader-member exchange significantly moderated the relationship between HRM practices and job engagement of academic staff. This study contributes immensely to the current literature on the influence of HRM practices and leader-member exchange on employee engagement, particularly in the Malaysian context. These findings will be valuable

to human resource personnel and university management in planning employee engagement initiatives.

Kata kunci:

penglibatan kerja;
amalan
pengurusan
sumber manusia;
pertukaran
pemimpin-ahli;
kakitangan
akademik;
institusi pengajian
tinggi.

ABSTRAK

Persekitaran ekonomi global yang semakin meningkat permintaannya dan transformasi sistem Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia melibatkan prestasi dan reputasi Institusi Pengajian Tinggi (IPT) adalah penting. Ini bermaksud bidang kerja akademik telah beralih disebabkan oleh cabaran ini, dan staf akademik menjalankan kerja yang lebih kompleks bagi memenuhi matlamat universiti. Perlu diketengahkan bahawa gabungan beban kerja yang tinggi dan keperluan untuk memenuhi matlamat universiti memberi banyak tekanan kepada staf akademik sebagai tenaga kerja teras di IPT dan bagi yang tidak berpuas hati akan menunjukkan kurang penglibatan dengan tugas mereka. Kajian lepas menunjukkan bahawa amalan pengurusan sumber manusia (PSM) dan pertukaran pemimpin-ahli memberi kesan kepada penglibatan kerja. Namun, masih tidak jelas apakah faktor penyebab yang menjelaskan hubungan tersebut terutama dalam sektor pendidikan di Malaysia. Oleh itu, kajian ini menyiasat hubungan antara amalan PSM, pertukaran pemimpin-ahli, dan penglibatan kerja staf akademik di universiti swasta Malaysia. Kajian ini juga menyiasat peranan pertukaran pemimpin-ahli sebagai moderator dalam hubungan antara amalan PSM dan penglibatan kerja. Tinjauan dalam talian telah dijalankan di dua universiti swasta dengan 196 kakitangan akademik sepenuh masa sebagai responden kajian, dan hipotesis telah diuji menggunakan analisis regresi. Keputusan menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan antara amalan PSM, pertukaran pemimpin-ahli, dan penglibatan kerja. Penemuan lain menunjukkan bahawa pertukaran pemimpin-ahli menyederhanakan secara signifikan hubungan antara amalan PSM dan penglibatan kerja staf akademik. Kajian ini memberi sumbangan yang besar kepada literatur semasa tentang pengaruh amalan PSM dan pertukaran pemimpin-ahli terhadap penglibatan pekerja, khususnya dalam konteks Malaysia. Penemuan ini akan menjadi berharga kepada kakitangan sumber manusia dan pengurusan universiti dalam merancang inisiatif penglibatan pekerja.

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INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is becoming a centre of educational excellence in the region, and for the past decade, the higher education sector in Malaysia has grown tremendously. Positive developments in

Malaysia's higher education institution (HEI) sector have proven its role as catalysts for its economic sector. To ensure that educational institutions can meet the increasing demands from the local and foreign markets, the performance and reputation of HEI are very important. Due to the globalization of higher education, universities worldwide have widened their influence in recent years through classifications such as world university rankings, global university rankings using bibliometrics, and international university rankings using web metrics (Hertig, 2016). This global competition has made it necessary for HEIs to be relevant at the national level and compete in the international higher education economy. As the number of universities grows, academic staff may experience additional difficulties in their jobs due to the increased competitive pressure from other institutions. As a result, university academic staff may share a great deal of stress in meeting their professional responsibilities.

Nowadays, the academic staff performs more complex work in an increasingly demanding environment. Many universities are increasingly establishing new objectives to compete with other institutions. As a result, the academic staff is becoming more involved in the overall goals. According to Yousefi & Abdullah (2019), Malaysian universities focus on the dual-core functions of knowledge creation and transmission. As the delivery standard of Malaysian higher education grows in response to globalization's demands, so do academic staff's commitments (Basarudin *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, the career as an academic staff today is challenging and puts pressure on this group because of the increasing workload and not only focused on teaching but also involved in research and administrative matters. Increased workload has been identified as a critical source of stress, mainly when physical work goes unnoticed (Chin & Rasdi, 2014). Other researchers observed that academic staff who report excessive workloads have difficulty performing problem-solving skills and personal motivation (Melin *et al.*, 2014). In addition, the academic staff realizes that their job satisfaction has fallen as their workload and pressure have increased (Jameel & Ahmad, 2020), and demotivation and poor work performance set in (Kenny, 2018).

It must be highlighted that the combination of the high workloads and the requirement to fulfill the university's goals put a lot of pressure on the academic staff as a core workforce at HEIs. Academic staffs who are not satisfied with their jobs display low engagement, less commitment, and low performance and stay at a higher risk of leaving the occupation. The factors that influence the level of engagement of academic staff in HEIs are an increased workload, a low level of autonomy, little support from the leader, and poorly implemented HRM. According to Dorenkamp & Ruhle (2019), academic staff has expressed concern over declining university career dedication due to increased demands and loads. Although research has shown that academic staff is more engaged than workforces in other industries, several factors may influence their engagement level. Therefore, to maximize academic staff job engagement, it is crucial for the management of HEIs to systematically evaluate the effects of organization systems such as HRM practices and leader-member exchange.

In a previous study conducted by Li *et al.* (2012), it was discovered that leader-member exchange impacted job performance through work engagement. The study consistency in HRM

communications encouraged employees to respond to favorable leader-member exchange relations by increasing their job engagement and overall performance. A high-quality relationship with a leader fosters trust in employees and allows them to express themselves more effectively in their work roles. As a result, followers are more engaged and perform better, most likely due to their leaders' support of their abilities and trust that their leaders will not punish them when they make mistakes (Macey *et al.*, 2009; de Villiers & Stander, 2011). Another factor affecting academic job engagement is HRM practices. When employees receive economic or socio-economic resources through HRM practices, they feel bound to return them, and one option is through greater engagement (Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015). Hence, the research gap for this study; although past studies have shown that HRM practices and LMX impact job engagement, it is still unclear what the causative factors explain the relationship. This study aims to understand better the concept of HRM practices and leader-member exchange as challenging predictors of job engagement. The researcher also investigated the role of leader-member exchange moderates the relationship between HRM practices and job engagement among academic staff.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leader-member Exchange

Leader-member exchange is the essence of the relationship between leaders and each subordinate. Leader-member exchange theory assumes that leaders and followers are involved in an exchange relationship. It is the extent to which one likes, is loyal to, respects, and is willing to help others (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Followers adhere to leaders because they have received something from them, and in turn, leaders lead as they get something from followers (Messick, 2004; Winkler, 2010). The quality of relationships between supervisors and subordinates is often studied via Leader-member Exchange Theory. Leader-member Exchange Theory was introduced by Dansereau, Graen, & colleagues during the 1970s and was initially referred to as the Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) approach (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). VDL model suggested that a critical outcome of leaders' differentiated relationships with followers is the development of an "in-group" and an "out-group" among followers concerning the leader (Dansereau, F. 1995).

According to the Leader-member Exchange Theory, when interactions between leader and follower result in high-quality, negotiated, reciprocal relationships in which the follower takes on tasks beyond the job description, they are referred to as "in-group" partnerships. When interactions result in a one-way, "by the book," "That is not part of my job description" relationship, this is referred to as an "out-group" relationship. In Yukl's (2010) view, the dyadic relationship is likely to advance through a series of ups and downs, which are likely to change the attitudes and behaviors of the involved parties. High-quality leader-member exchange relationships improve the predictability of the attitudes and behaviors of the manager and the subordinate – thus allowing the individuals to understand each other better (Gerstner & Day, 1997). In the initial stage of a leader-member exchange process, when liking and respect have been established, a manager can assign a subordinate to a subordinate to test their capability, contribution, and loyalty (Liden *et al.*, 1997). When satisfied with the subordinate's qualities,

the manager becomes more confident and involves the subordinate in more important organizational activities (Leana, 1986; Liden *et al.*, 1997). The subordinate may interpret this as special treatment from the manager, and they may feel indebted. The norm of reciprocity (Bauer & Green, 1996) makes the subordinate feel obliged to reciprocate by applying an extra effort for better performance (Bauer & Green, 1996; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001; Ahmed *et al.*, 2014).

HRM Practices

Human resources management can be defined as "*all activities associated with managing people in firms*" (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, p.1). These activities are commonly referred to as HRM practices (e.g., recruitment and selection, employee training and development, reward, job analysis, recruitment and selection, employee relationship, employee empowerment, and social support. Onder & Dogan (2013) argue that HRM plays a vital role in an organization's long-term interest by restructuring and reducing salary expenses without losing valuable employees, acting firmly without damaging the trust and loyalty of employees, and motivating employees in a crisis. According to Bowen & Ostroff (2004), HRM practices operate as communications from employers to employees. HRM practices are designed to help firms acquire and develop employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and motivations to support the implementation of organizational strategies.

Tayeb (1997) distributed HRM practices into four categories: employee selection and development, job design, reward system, and employee participation. Van De Voorde *et al.* (2012) presented three categories of HRM practices: enhancing employee ability, employee motivation, and the opportunity to perform. There are seven types of HRM practices put forward by Pfeffer (1998). There was employment security, selective hiring, self-managed teams, decentralized decision-making, comparatively high compensation, extensive training, the reduced status of distinctions and barriers, and extensive sharing of information.

i) Recruitment and Selection

As an important HRM practice, recruitment is a process of sourcing and acquiring suitable candidates for an organization. Essentially, recruitment and selection involve seeking and attracting qualified candidates using various potential recruitment methods (Tong, 2009). Recruitment involves those activities and practices carried out by the organization to identify and attract potential candidates of workers (Breugh, 2008; Dhamija, 2012). Recruitment identifies and encourages potential applicants with needed skills to fill vacant positions in an organization. At the same time, selection is a technique for narrowing down and selecting the best candidate from a pool of candidates with relevant credentials (Herbert, Heneman & Judge, 2019).

ii) Training and Development.

Training and development provide the employee with the required knowledge, skills, abilities, and others for doing the job effectively, skilfully, and qualitatively. Jiang *et al.* (2012) refer to HRM practices designed to ensure that employees have the appropriate KSA level for their roles within the organization as skill-enhancing practices. According to Nagasangari (2018),

continuous professional development among academicians is highly encouraged and enhanced with compulsory training on updated approaches to teaching and learning. Harris (2015) reported a need to focus on improving teaching and learning as it is the primary driver in enhancing student success.

iii) *Participation and Communication*

Bowen & Ostroff (2004) stated that HRM practices operate as communications from employers to employees. Sukirno & Siengthai (2011) discovered that lecturers' involvement in decision-making had a substantial impact on their work performance in teaching, research, publication, social work, and consulting.

iv) *Compensation and Benefits*

Compensation and benefits are another essential human resource function that helps organizations distribute intrinsic and extrinsic rewards based on individual contributions to the organizational output. According to McNamara (2008), compensation includes issues regarding wage or salary programs and structures accruing from job descriptions, merit-based programs, bonus-based programs, commission-based programs, etc. While benefits typically refer to retirement plans, health life insurance, disability insurance, vacation, employee stock ownership plan, etc. Gomez – Mejia *et al.* (2006) view employee compensation as comprising base pay and fringe benefits. Benjamin & Ahmad (2012) stated that financial reward is the primary incentive that motivates employees to stay in an organization in today's financial world.

v) *Job Security*

Job security can be defined as a persistent certainty about the jobs and income of an employee. According to Sweet (2006), job security is when employees lack assurance in their work to remain stable from day to day, week to week and year to year. Larco & colleagues (2012) argued that job security has a positive impact on the well-being of one's life. Job insecurity occurs only in the case of loss of employment without consent. Job insecurity exists when an employee's perceived future career will become unstable and at risk. Job security in the context of academic staff's careers is regarding their respective expectations of future job continuity within HEIs. It is the assurance (or lack of it) that an academic staff has about the continuity of gainful employment for their work life. The management needs to find ways to enhance job security experience so it can hinder the well-being of workers in the workplace (Daud.N., 2017).

Job engagement

Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) defined job engagement as a "*positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.*" They refer to vigor 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 is more of being deeply involved in one's work and experiencing feelings of importance, passion, motivation, and challenge. Dedicated employees would be happily involved in their

work and feel that their work is essential, meaningful, and challenging. Lastly, absorption is described as being content and total concentration on one's work. Saks (2006) defines job engagement as "*a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioral components associated with individual role performance.*" According to some scholars, engagement is the opposite of job burnout (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

According to May *et al.* (2004), the definition of job engagement was quite similar to what has been previously defined by Kahn (1990). They believed that job engagement consists of three components: *physical* – the energy used to perform a job, *emotional* – putting one's heart in one's career, and *cognitive* – being engrossed in a job. Kahn (1990) argued that when people are engaged, they are physically involved in their work, but they also are cognitively alert and emotionally connected to others at the moment of engagement. However, the level of work engagement varies across individuals as the amount of energy and dedication they contribute to their job is different. Employees who are highly engaged with their work are typically more committed to their organizations and work harder (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Past studies found that those employees have a higher propensity to engage with their jobs and positively perceive their organization and managers (Rai *et al.*, 2017).

The Relationship between HRM Practices and Job Engagement.

According to Van De Voorde & Beijer (2015), if employees receive economic or socio-economic resources directly from HRM practices, they think it's necessary to repay the institution or organization due to their relationship with the employer. Song *et al.* (2014) asserted that one of the ways for an employee to repay their organization is through a higher level of engagement. In the past study, Alima & Fauzuniah (2018) found that HRM practices such as career advancement, employee participation, job security, performance feedback, rewards and recognition, training, and development are the significant predictors of job engagement for employees in 30 private commercial banks in Bangladesh.

Armstrong & Taylor (2013) stipulated that work engagement occurs when people are committed to their work and the organization and are motivated to achieve high-performance levels. For example, previous empirical research found HRM practices such as training have a positive association with the psychological health of employees (Luthans *et al.*, 2008), and better psychological health of employees can lead to an increasing level of employee engagement (Gruman & Saks, 2011). Abdul Khalid *et al.* (2014) studied and aimed to check the impact of employee compensation on employee job engagement. The result of the study confirmed the proposed hypothesis that employee compensation has a positive effect on employee job engagement. Another survey from Anitha (2014) identified the key determinants of employee engagement: working environment, leadership, team and co-worker relationship, training and career development, compensation program, policies and procedures, and workplace well-being. Therefore, the study's findings show that 67.2 percent of the variance in employee engagement is influenced by all those determinants that reflect the organization's social impact.

Through her study, Nor Arpizah (2016) examined whether organizational culture and HRM practices influence employee engagement among academic staff in one public university in Malaysia. The result showed that corporate culture and HRM practices influence employee engagement among academic staff. Among all five independent variables, training in HRM practices is the most significant variable in influencing employee engagement among academic staff of the university. Based on the discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a significant relationship between HRM practices and job engagement.

The Relationship between HRM Leader-Member Exchange and Job Engagement.

The degree of engagement depends on an employee's perception of the quality of leader-member exchange behaviors. Organizations can never force employees to engage while only facilitating by providing an excellent and trustworthy relationship with their employers. Therefore, employees with higher quality LMX relationships (in-group members) are more motivated and less stressed (Lagace, Castleberry, and Ridnour, 1993) and are positively related to job satisfaction (Grestner and Day, 1997; Graen, Novak and Sommerkamp, 1982). Furthermore, Social exchange theory (Saks, 2004; Andrew & Sofian, 2011) can better explain this variation in the degree of engagement through the quality of exchange behaviors, which states that when individuals receive economic and socio-economic resources from their organization, they feel obligated to respond in kind and repay the organization by their level of engagement (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Leadership behaviors have a strong influence on employee and organizational outcomes (Chen & Silverthorne, 2005), including work engagement and turnover intention (Mendes & Stander, 2011). Furthermore, the quality of leader-member exchange not only improves the performance, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior but also decides the level of engagement and reduces the turnover intention (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011; Truckenbrodt, 2000; Cheung & Wu, 2012). The quality of exchanges between employees and their immediate supervisor influences engagement (Upasna A. *et al.*, 2012). Based on the discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: There is a significant relationship between leader-member exchange and job engagement.

The Moderating Role of Leader-member Exchange in the Relationship between HRM Practices and Job Engagement.

In the study by K. Alfes *et al.* (2013) on 297 employees in a service sector organization in the U.K., the result showed that perceived HRM practices on both outcome variables are mediated by levels of employee engagement, while the relationship between employee engagement and both outcome variables is moderated by the leader-member exchange. Past studies also found that those employees have a higher propensity to engage with their jobs and have a positive perception of their organization and managers (Rai *et al.*, 2017).

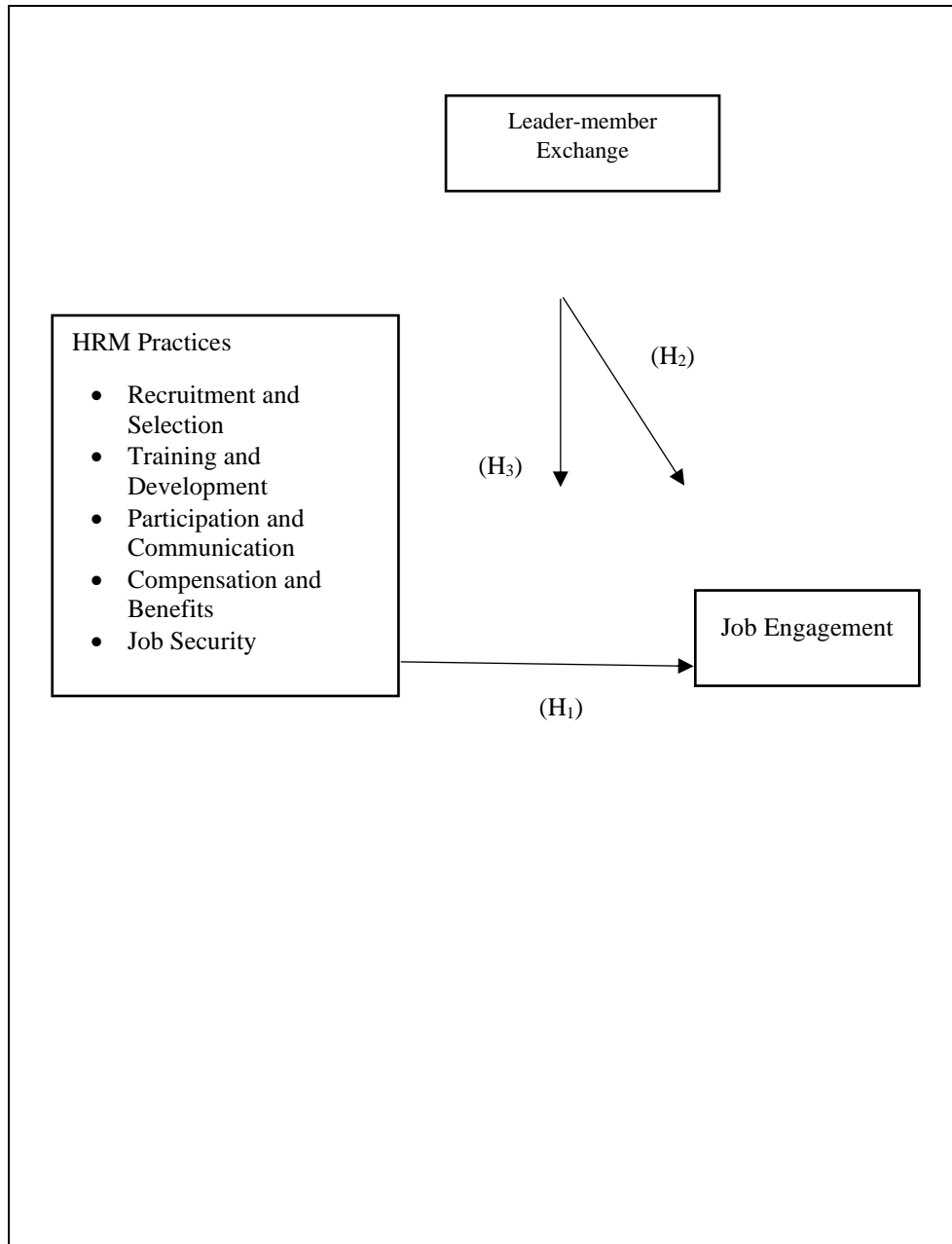
A previous study by Konermann (2012) showed that HRM practices are positively related to work engagement. The result of the study also found that leader-member exchange moderated the relationship between work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior. As a previous study, leader-member exchange modifies the relationship between personality and behavior (e.g., Kamder & Van Dyne, 2007). The impact of high-performance HRM practices on employee engagement was strengthened by leader-member exchange (He *et al.*, 2021). In line with this, we expected that HRM practices could influence the level of job engagement moderated by the leader-member exchange. Based on the discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Leader-member exchange moderates the relationship between HRM practices and job engagement.

The Research Framework

Based on the proposed hypotheses, Figure 1 shows the research framework of this study. The research framework consists of HRM practices as the independent variable, job engagement as the dependent variable, and leader-member exchange as the moderator. The study hypothesizes a significant relationship between HRM practices and job engagement and between leader-member exchange and job engagement. In addition, the study hypothesizes that leader-member exchange moderates the relationship between HRM practices and job engagement. The HRM practices consist of recruitment and selection, training and development, participation and communication, compensation and benefits, and job security. The research framework is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Research Framework



METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedures

The researcher anonymously surveyed a sample of 196 academic staff from two private universities. These universities are located in Selangor and Terengganu, Malaysia. The study samples were selected from the cluster of university colleges that gained Tier 4 (very good) in the Rating System for Malaysian Higher Education (SETARA) 2017. The data of this study were collected through an online survey and were mailed to the participants. Before assembling the primary survey data, full ethical approval was received, and a pilot study was conducted to improve questionnaire design and to test the robustness of the validity and reliability measurement model.

Measures

Questionnaires were used as the tool for data collection. The questionnaires were composed of four parts; one to collect demographical information and the other three to collect data for variables under investigation. Job engagement was measured by the 8-items scale of Lee *et al.* (2014) and Min-Seong & Dong-Woo (2017). Saks (2006) has validated the scale in his research. The reliability of the scale was 0.89. An example of sample items of scale is "I really "throw" myself into my job" and "I am highly engaged in this job." 21-items measured HRM practices by Wei *et al.* (2010). The measurement consists of recruitment and selection, training and development, participation and communication, incentive compensation, and employment security items. The reliability of the scale was 0.88. An example of sample items of scale is "My organization offers employees diverse training programs for different training needs" and "My organization offers compensation (e.g., salary, benefits, incentives) based on employees' competencies (competency-based system)." The Leader-member exchange was measured using the 7-item scale of Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995). Altinay *et al.* (2019) further applied and validated this scale. The reliability of the scale was 0.93. Examples of sample scale items are "My manager understands my problems and needs" and "My working relationship with my manager is effective." SPSS version 25 was used to run descriptive and regression analysis for data analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondent's Profile

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n= 196)

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	69	35
	Female	127	65
Age	21 – 30 Years	9	4
	31 – 40 Years	80	41
	41 – 50 Years	94	48
	Over 50 Years	13	7
Marital Status	Married	169	86

	Single	24	12
	Divorced	3	2
Level of Education	Bachelor's Degree	17	9
	Master's Degree	126	64
	Ph.D. or Equivalent	53	27
Job Position	Junior Lecturer	12	6
	Lecturer/ Tutor	139	71
	Senior Lecturer	43	22
	Associate Professor	2	1
	Professor	0	0

As presented in Table 1, most of the respondents who participated in the survey were females, constituting 127 respondents representing 65%, while the remaining 69 respondents indicated that 35% were males. Regarding the age group, nine (9) respondents representing 4% of the participants, were between 21-30 years, followed by the age group between 31-40 years with 80 respondents, which accounted for 41% of the total sample. Also, the age group between 41-50 years occupied 94 respondents, representing 48% of the respondent. Similarly, in the age group over 50 years, only 13 respondents participated in the survey, representing 7%. Again, regarding marital status, married people occupied the most significant number, 169 respondents representing 86%. In comparison, single represented 24 respondents, which accounted for 12%, and divorced respondents shared the lowest number of responses, with 3 representing 2%, respectively.

Furthermore, most of the respondents were master's degree holders, constituting 126 respondents representing 64%, followed by qualification of Ph.D. or equivalent with 53, which accounted for 27% of the total respondents. Also, qualifications from degree levels occupied 17 respondents, representing 9% of the sample. Job position category also considered as demographic characteristics with lecturer taking the highest numbers with 139 respondents representing 71%. In contrast, the senior lecturer constitutes 43 participants representing 22% of the sample, and the junior lecturer comprises 12 participants representing 6% of the total participants. In the associate professor's last position, only two (2) persons responded, representing 1%, and no response from the professor position.

Result

H1: There is a significant relationship between HRM practices and job engagement.

H2: There is a significant relationship between leader-member exchange and job engagement.

The results of correlation analysis found that HRM practices and job engagement were significantly related with a value of $r = 0.326$, $p < 0.01$. While HRM practices and leader-member exchange were significantly related with an r value = 0.701 , $p < 0.01$. This study found that leader-member exchange and job engagement were also significantly correlated with $r =$

0.322, $p < 0.01$. Overall, all the variables have a significant relationship and are explained in Table 2.

Table 2: Relationships between Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1 HRM Practice	-		
2 Leader-Member Exchange	0.701**	-	
3 Job Engagement	0.326**	0.322**	-

Significant level $p < 0.01$

H3: Leader-member exchange moderates the relationship between HRM practices and job engagement.

The third hypothesis was tested using linear regression analysis. Findings in Table 3 show that the value of R^2 obtained for model 1 is 0.123, which is 12.3% of the variance that contributes to job engagement, while the value of R^2 obtained by model 2 is 0.163, which is 16.3% of the variance that contributes to the job engagement of the study respondents. The difference in R^2 between model 1 and model 2 was 0.04 (4%). This result is supported by ANOVA test with the F value obtained for model 1 is $F = 13.574$, $p < 0.05$ (0.000), while the F value obtained for model 2 is $F = 12.496$, $p < 0.05$ (0.000).

For model 1, HRM practices are a significant predictor variable for job engagement [$t = 2.094$, $p < 0.05$ (0.000)], with the value of β obtained being 0.198, which contributes to job engagement. For model 2, HRM practices are a significant predictor variable for job engagement: $t = 1.988$, $p < 0.05$ (0.051), with the value of β obtained, is 0.187. Leader-member exchange is a significant predictor of job engagement that is the value of $t = 2.966$, $p < 0.05$ (0.003) with a value of β obtained only 0.296. Leader-member exchange is a significant moderator variable in the relationship between HRM practices and job engagement: t value = 3.031, $p < 0.05$ (0.003) with a β value obtained of 0.221. In conclusion, the leader-member exchange is a significant moderating variable in the relationship between HRM practices and job engagement.

Table 3: Results of Leader-Member Exchange as a Moderator in the Relationship between HRM Practices and Job Engagement

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1 (Constant)	24.471	1.724		14.196	0.000
HRMP	0.320	0.153	0.198	2.094	0.038
LMX	0.155	0.080	0.183	1.935	0.054
2 (Constant)	22.308	1.833		12.170	0.000
HRMP	0.269	0.151	0.187	1.988	0.051
LMX	0.250	0.084	0.296	2.966	0.003
Moderator	0.762	0.251	0.221	3.031	0.003

The findings of the study indicate a significant relationship between HRM practices and job engagement among academic staff in private HEIs. The result of the study is supported and in line with studies that have been conducted by Alima & Fauzuniah (2018) and Anitha (2014), who found a link between HRM practices and job engagement. HRM practices will increase employee involvement in their jobs and engagement with the organization. Academic staff satisfied with HRM practice and have a good relationship with the employer will always be committed and indirectly exhibit a willingness to work longer at private HEIs.

The study results also found that leader-member exchange and job engagement have had a significant relationship among academic staff in private HEIs. A positive working relationship with the supervisor, whether it is the immediate supervisor or the management, will assist the academic staff in completing their tasks as educators and increase their involvement in the position. The findings of this study are supported by Upasna A. *et al.* (2012) and Cheung & Wu (2012). They found that Employee engagement in their employment is positively associated with the exchange of relationships between leaders and organization members. In a positive leader-member exchange relationship, the employee develops a sense of duty and loyalty to their organization while performing a task. In the end, it will help to improve job quality and productivity.

A human resource management system needs to be implemented to improve academic staff job engagement. However, apart from a well-established technique, a good relationship between academic staff and supervisors will help engage their job. If the academic staff's relationship with the supervisor is disrupted, it will affect the employee's duties and engagement with the employer. Konermann (2012) also shows that leader-member exchange

moderates the relationship between HRM practices and job engagement. In addition, the findings of this study also supported by He *et al.* (2021) that leader-member exchange was strengthened high-performance HRM practices on employee engagement.

Employees passionate about their jobs are more dedicated to their employers and work harder. Academic staff engaging with their employer represents an employee's enthusiasm, passion, and commitment to their work and the institution. They are willing to invest in themselves and expand their discretionary effort to help the employer succeed. Employee engagement is used as an attitude as well as behavior. Macey *et al.* (2009) suggest various steps organizations can take to build a culture of engagement to yield a competitive advantage. The measures include treating people fairly and creating a trusted environment with management and immediate supervisors. Furthermore, it strengthens recruitment and socialization by attracting people to do well and communicating engagement culture through an on-boarding process. Effective engagement undertaken by managers across the organization should be shared and rewarded openly to institutionalize a culture of engagement.

CONCLUSION

The complete study results revealed that the factors under investigation had a statistically significant association. Good human resource management strategies can help academic staff improve their job engagement and carry out their everyday responsibilities more effectively. HRM practices and work engagement in higher education institutions will help motivate the academicians and enable them to deliver effective work outputs, resulting in a good performance, increased productivity, less turnover, and subsequently, good business outcomes. Similarly, with the high level of leader-member exchange, the academic staff possesses, their propensity for job engagement is more elevated. This study found that HRM practices had a significant relationship to the job engagement exhibited when leader-member exchange played its role as a moderating variable. However, further studies need to look at the job engagement aspect as an essential element in contributing to healthy behavior among employees. It becomes a culture that is always practiced in an organization. The study's implication indicates the importance of HRM practices and leader-member exchange relationships in influencing academic staff engagement and organization effectiveness.

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