

A Quantitative Study on the Psychological Capital Among Academics at Private Higher Educational Institutions (PHEIs) in East Malaysia

Fung Lan Yong^{1*}, Florence Chuah², Norizan Tan³, Frederick Chen Tshung Chong⁴, Stanley Missun⁵, Loreta Ling Ling Uie⁶, Ming Ha Lee⁷

¹Postgraduate Studies, Jesselton University College, 88300 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Email: fungyong@jesselton.edu.my

²Inclusive GEMS Consultancy, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: florencecsy@gmail.com

³Head of Department, Business, Design and Communication, Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus, 93350 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

Email: NTan@swinburne.edu.my

⁴Open University Malaysia, 88200 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Email: fredct@oum.edu.my

⁵PPD Tuaran, Ministry of Education, Sabah, Malaysia

Email: crstanley360@gmail.com

⁶Business Studies, Jesselton University College, 88300 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Email: loretaling8383@gmail.com

⁷Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Science, Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus, 93350 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

Email: mhlee@swinburne.edu.my

CORRESPONDING

AUTHOR (*):

Fung Lan Yong

(fungyong@jesselton.edu.my)

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ABSTRACT

Psychological capital is an individual's positive state of mental development, defined by four core resources, including hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. It acts as an internal reserve of psychological wealth that can be assessed, managed, and actively developed to improve performance and wellbeing. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the psychological capital among academics at private higher educational institutions (PHEIs) in East Malaysia. The sample consisted of 67 academics from four PHEIs (two in Sabah, one in Sarawak), who completed the Positive Psychological Capital Questionnaire on Google Forms. Data were transferred onto a spreadsheet and subsequently analyzed using SPSS 29.0. First, percentages of agreement (agree/strongly agree) on perceived psychological capital were collapsed to gain an overall view of the construct. Second, Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in relation to age and job experience, while Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were any significant differences in terms of gender. Third, Wilcoxon signed rank test was conducted to determine if any of the items significantly differed from the hypothesized value of 3.5. Findings revealed that (1) a low proportion (58.2 to 68.7 percent) of academics tend to strongly agree/agree on seven of the statements, (2) an average proportion (71.7 to 79.1 percent) of academics tend to strongly agree/agree on 14 of the statements, and an above average proportion (83.6

to 85.1 percent) of academics tend to strongly agree/agree on only three of the items. Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed no significant differences in perceived psychological capital by way of age and job experience, while Mann-Whitney U test showed no significant differences in terms of gender. Wilcoxon signed rank test based on a hypothesized value of 3.5 revealed that 18 of the items were significant at $p < .001$, showing that their medians significantly differed from the hypothesized value and were likely to indicate strong disagreement. The other six items were significant at $p < .05$, showing that their medians significantly differed from the hypothesized value and were likely to indicate strong disagreement. Current findings imply that a majority of academics tend to demonstrate average to above average levels of psychological capital. In light of the findings, recommendations are made on ways to enhance the psychological capital among academics in East Malaysia.

1. Introduction

Psychological capital builds upon the positive psychology movement and positive organizational behavior. It consists of four psychological resources, comprising hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism that can be measured, managed, and actively developed over time. In the context of education, hope refers to educators' drive to set goals and the ability to find multiple pathways to reach them in spite of obstacles, while self-efficacy reflects the confidence in their own skills and competence to successfully execute tasks, manage classrooms, and influence student learning. On the other hand, resilience equips educators with the capacity to bounce back and recover quickly from setbacks, stressful classrooms, or difficult administrative demands, while optimism reflects their positive outlook and realistic expectations about future events and positive results. In the context of teaching, psychological capital is important because teachers often experience high stress involving heavy workloads, challenging student behaviors, and emotional exhaustion. They need high psychological capital as a protective psychological shield. Moreover, it helps reduce burnout and stress amongst teachers by mitigating stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. It also improves teachers' job satisfaction and performance because it fosters positive emotions and greater enthusiasm, engagement, and commitment to the teaching profession, while helping them manage classrooms more effectively and maintain better collaborative relationships with colleagues and students (Luthans, 2002; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

According to Coffey (2020), educational leaders should enhance staff's hope, optimism, resilience, and efficacy because high psychological capital (1) lowers emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, shielding staff from severe occupational burnout, (2) enhances the quality of work life by making staff feel more enthusiastic, fulfilled, and engaged, leading to better overall job satisfaction, (3) improves classroom culture since confident and resilient staff foster stronger relationships with students and colleagues, while cultivating supportive, collaborative, and positive learning environments, (4) is developable since it can be actively instilled, cultivated, and managed through targeted professional interventions and group activities.

1.1 Factors Influencing Psychological Capital

Factors influencing the psychological capital among teachers were assessed by Akyavuz (2021). Findings indicated several factors tend to significantly influence perceived positive psychological capital, including administrators, teaching profession, parents, colleagues, students, institutions, and teachers themselves. They imply that perceived psychological capital is adversely affected by (1) administrators who undermine teachers' autonomy and efficacy through strict bureaucratic control, rigid managerial approaches, and constant interference, (2) poor public reputation and low societal prestige of teaching that diminish teachers' professional pride and optimism, (3) negative parents' attitudes and strained parent-teacher relationships that create external emotional friction, (4) toxic colleagues who generate workplace negativity, destructive peer behaviors, and disgruntled staff interactions that reduce resilience and job motivation, (5) problematic students who cause classroom management difficulties, behavioral issues, and indiscipline, (6) institutional variables, including inadequate facilities, poor physical working conditions, and heavy workloads that limit environmental mastery, and (7) teachers who exhibit poor self-management, inadequate coping strategies, and undesirable personal experiences that lower internal hope and self-efficacy.

In their study, Çimen and Özgan (2018) examined the factors influencing teachers' psychological capital. Findings indicated that factors that tend to significantly influence teachers' psychological capital include a supportive organizational climate, collaboration, communication, physical conditions, parental engagement, professional characteristics, and positive experiences. These elements act together to build teachers' hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Findings imply that (1) a positive school culture helps teachers feel safe and valued, (2) working well with others helps reduce stress and build a strong team spirit among teachers, (3) leaders' clear and authentic communication keeps everyone informed and connected, (4) safe, clean, and well-equipped classrooms facilitate teachers' daily work, (5) supportive parents boost teacher morale and create a united front for students, (6) teachers' personal skills and a strong sense of purpose enhance their confidence, and (7) positive moments in the classroom reinforce a sense of achievement and joy in teaching amongst teachers.

On the other hand, Chen et al. (2019) explored the cognitive and affective factors influencing the psychological capital among primary school teachers. Findings showed that both cognitive and affective factors tend to be significantly and positively related to psychological capital. They imply that teachers with high psychological capital are characterized by a growth mindset; viewing abilities as malleable, they demonstrate positive beliefs about effort and persistence through setbacks, directly driving their psychological resources. Their high psychological capital also results in affective wellbeing, equipping them with the emotional balance and favorable affective states that broaden their cognitive and emotional strengths.

Factors influencing the psychological capital and psychological wellbeing among rural teachers were determined by Kour (2022). Findings revealed significant differences in teachers' psychological wellbeing and psychological capital by way of gender and marital status. They imply that gender and marital status tend to affect rural teachers' mental strength and happiness. Men and women, or single and married teachers, often face different levels of stress and support in rural areas. In brief, teachers' psychological capital and wellbeing are influenced by gender roles, with male and female teachers

often managing work and home duties differently. Moreover, rural teachers' psychological wellbeing is often adversely affected by shortages of basic teaching materials, up-to-date technology, and stable funding. These material gaps, together with geographic isolation and heavy workloads, tend to diminish teachers' hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience, which leads to burnout and high staff turnover. To raise rural teachers' psychological capital and wellbeing, state or national grants are needed to improve school supplies and building repairs, provide digital tools for remote classrooms, and build regional mentorship networks and mobile training teams for continuous educator support.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Research on psychological capital, which includes self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience has historically been scarce in Malaysia, though recent studies are beginning to explore its impact across various local sectors, including higher education (Alias et al., 2020). Such scarcity is related to Malaysians' tendency to focus on tangible results; Malaysian workplaces often prioritize physical output, financial metrics, and daily tasks over internal emotional health. Additionally, standard survey tools from Western countries often lack local validation; careful cross-cultural adaptation and psychometric testing are essential before administering them to Malaysian respondents. Without this process, questions may cause confusion, alter intended meanings, or fail to capture the concept of psychological capital due to differences in work values, social hierarchy, and privacy norms between Western and Malaysian higher educational settings. Moreover, sectoral gaps often hinder psychological capital research in Malaysia since the nation's research focus on positive psychology is gradual to reach such vital local groups as higher education leaders and academics.

1.3 Significance of the Study

While broader occupational stress and burnout are widely studied among Malaysian educators, specific investigations into the four dimensions of psychological capital are sparse and often pigeonholed into specific niches (e.g., elementary ESL or civil servants) rather than the private higher education context. A study on the psychological capital among Malaysian academics is vital for improving their job performance and supporting their mental wellbeing. It would provide a framework for higher educational institutions to boost productivity, work engagement, and adaptive performance among academics facing the rapid changes in the global educational landscape. It would also highlight the personal, psychological, and social resources needed to help academics manage high emotional labor and chronic stress. The purpose of the study was to examine the perceived psychological capital among academics at private higher educational institutions (PHEIs) in East Malaysia.

1.4 Research Questions

Three research questions are formulated to (1) provide direction, acting as a roadmap that keeps the study focused on investigating the psychological capital among academics, (2) guide methodology, informing how the researchers design the study, collect data, and choose the appropriate analytical tools, (3) define the scope of the study to prevent it from becoming too broad by setting clear boundaries for the investigation, (4) support the literature review by helping them identify relevant past studies and pinpoint gaps in current knowledge, and (5) ensure measurable outcomes,

allowing them to translate the abstract construct into answerable, concrete objectives. The three research questions are as follows:

- i. What are the percentages of agreement on academics' perceived psychological capital in East Malaysia, and what do they imply?
- ii. Are there any significant differences in perceived psychological capital among academics at PHEIs in relation to age, gender, and job experience?
- iii. Are any of the psychological capital items significantly different from the hypothesized value of 3.5?

2. Review of Literature

The literature review allows the researchers to critically survey existing scholarly work that establishes the foundation, context, and credibility for new study. It enables them to contextualize the problem by providing background information, while showing how psychological capital fits into the broader field of higher education. Further, it enables the researchers to identify knowledge gaps by uncovering missing pieces, unanswered questions, or weak spots in previous psychological capital studies. Besides, the literature review provides a framework for them to select the relevant theories and concepts to guide the study, while allowing them to evaluate previous methods, learn from mistakes, and choose an effective tool for their own design. Lastly, it ensures that the researchers do not repeat work that has already been done on academics' psychological capital, while showing that they know the key authors, debates, and standards in the topic of study.

2.1 Impact on Teachers' Efficacy, Performance, and Student-Centeredness

In a study, Emmanuel (2020) examined the impact of psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, optimism) on teaching effectiveness. Findings showed that self-efficacy, hope, and optimism tend to significantly predict teaching effectiveness. The three variables also tend to have a significant impact on teachers' enthusiasm, expectations, and task orientation, respectively. They imply that teachers who (1) have high self-efficacy believe in their skills and trust in their daily classroom plans, (2) demonstrate hope often set clear goals and find novel ways to teach, helping students overcome learning blocks, and (3) display optimism by staying positive in the face of difficulties. Teachers with high self-efficacy, hope, and optimism build better bonds with students, create a calm and safe classroom space, and raise student test scores and learning motivation, while mitigating occupational burnout. On the other hand, self-efficacy, hope, and optimism enhance teacher enthusiasm, expectations, and task orientation. Self-efficacy makes teachers believe in their own skills, fuels their daily energy and work passion, and helps them manage classroom stress. On the other hand, hope inspires teachers to focus on future success, create plans to reach student goals, remain motivated during hard times. Lastly, optimism allows them to perceive positive outcomes as likely, focus steadily on their daily duties, and turn problems into fair challenges.

An investigation by Kobra, Kiomars, & Maryam (2023) explored the impact of psychological capital on teachers' professional performance. Findings revealed that psychological capital tends to have a significant impact on teachers' job performance. They imply that psychological capital acts as a vital internal resource that boosts motivation, helps teachers manage heavy workloads, and buffers against workplace stress and burnout. Teachers with high psychological capital exhibit (1) self-efficacy that

gives them the confidence in their ability to succeed at difficult tasks, (2) hope that increases their perseverance to pursue goals and ability to redirect paths to success, (3) optimism that allows them to make positive attributions about present and future success, and (4) resilience that enables them to bounce back and adapt when beset by problems or adversity. On the other hand, elevated psychological capital (1) enhances teachers' job performance and wellbeing, allowing them to demonstrate better task, contextual, and adaptive performance, (2) reduces burnout by protecting teachers from emotional exhaustion and chronic stress, and (3) instills positive psychological states that foster greater work engagement, job satisfaction, and professional commitment among teachers.

The impact of psychological capital on the adoption of student-centered teaching among university lecturers in Malaysia was measured by Chew (2025). Findings revealed that psychological capital tends to significantly predict the adoption of student-centered teaching among lecturers. Further, positive and negative emotions in teaching tend to significantly mediate the relationship between psychological capital and the adoption of student-centered teaching. Findings imply that lecturers with higher mental strength and positive mindsets tend to employ interactive teaching methods, while their daily emotions explain how and why this happens. The feelings that they experience, both positive and negative, act as the bridge between their inner mental strength and their actual classroom choices. Lecturers with high psychological capital feel more capable and resilient, making them brave enough to try innovative, student-focused teaching styles. Their high psychological capital also creates more joy and excitement in teaching, which motivates them to engage students more deeply.

In their study, Dev et al. (2025) explored the influence of psychological capital on faculty members' job satisfaction, task performance, and embeddedness. Findings revealed a significant relationship between psychological capital, job embeddedness, job satisfaction, and task performance among faculty members. They imply that psychological capital positively drives job embeddedness, satisfaction, and performance among faculty members by acting as an internal resource that helps them manage workplace stress and organizational challenges. Additionally, higher psychological capital increases faculty members' connection to their institution, which lowers turnover intentions. It increases job satisfaction by acting as a bridge that translates faculty members' mental resilience and positive outlook into elevated morale and daily motivation. It augments job performance by equipping them with robust psychological resources to handle administrative and teaching demands better, leading to favorable overall performance metrics. Therefore, HEIs should (1) evaluate faculty members' developmental psychological strengths rather than focusing on rigid metrics such as publication counts and (2) provide support systems to promote institutional support and peer networks that reinforce resilience among faculty members who are navigating diverse or high-pressure academic situations.

The impact of psychological capital in the context of academia was assessed by Kugler et al. (2025) in two separate studies. In Study 1, they examined academics' psychological capital in relation to in- and extra-role performance, while in Study 2, the impact of a psychological capital training program was evaluated. Findings of the first study revealed a significant and positive relationship between psychological capital and role performance, with self-efficacy significantly related to in-role performance, and resilience to extra-role performance. Findings of the second study indicated that the experimental group tends to demonstrate significantly higher self-efficacy, resilience,

and hope, compared to passive control group. Findings imply that experimental intervention in psychological capital can successfully improve academics' (1) self-efficacy, reinforcing their belief in their own ability to succeed and reach goals, (2) resilience, helping them to bounce back after facing difficulty academic situations, and (3) hope, equipping them with a positive outlook and a strong belief in a better future.

2.2 Impact on Teachers' Work Engagement and Innovativeness

The association between work engagement and positive psychological capital among EFL educators was studied by Xu (2023). Findings showed a significant and positive relationship between the two variables. They imply that higher psychological capital (i.e., hope, self-efficacy, resilience, optimism) equips educators with the internal resources for boosting dedication and energy in their roles. Hope enables them to set goals and find ways to achieve them, while self-efficacy reinforces their belief in their own ability to succeed. While resilience enables them to bounce back from daily work stress, optimism allows them to maintain a positive outlook on challenges. Psychological capital impacts educators' work engagement because it (1) increases their energy levels (vigor), (2) makes them feel more connected and involved (dedication), and equips them with better coping strategies to do a better job (performance).

In their investigation, Fang and Cheong (2025) examined the influence of psychological capital on the work engagement among in-service teachers at public universities. Findings revealed that psychological capital (hope, self-efficacy, resilience, optimism) tends to have a significant impact on in-service teachers work engagement. They imply that psychological capital strongly boosts work engagement, reflecting the inner strength that makes in-service teachers stay more motivated, handle stress more effectively, and feel more deeply connected to their teaching duties. Self-efficacy instills faith among in-service teachers, making them feel confident in their own skills to plan lessons and manage classrooms, while hope enables them to find new paths to reach goals in the face of challenges. On the other hand, optimism encourages in-service teachers to look at the bright side and expect good outcomes, while resilience allows them to bounce back fast during difficult times. Overall, besides lowering lowers stress, psychological capital encourages in-service teachers to continue their professional pursuits, while putting more energy and care into their work.

A study by Sung and Lee (2025) explored the impact of psychological capital on digital education innovation behavior among preschool teachers. Findings indicated that preschool teachers with higher psychological capital tend to exhibit increased innovation behavior toward digital education, with the relationship moderated by higher effort expectancy. They imply that higher psychological capital, characterized by higher personal resources (i.e., hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism) motivate preschool teachers to adopt modern digital tools. Effort expectancy makes them perceive that digital technology is beneficial and easy to use, thus strengthening the push from psychological capital to actual classroom innovation. Lastly, teachers' behavioral intention serves as a vital amplifier, ensuring stable and practical use of digital methods at preschools.

The impact of psychological capital and empowering leadership on teachers' innovative behavior at an international school was scrutinized Su and Abd Rani (2025). Findings showed that empowering leadership tends to have a significant and positive impact on teachers' innovative behavior, with psychological capital acting as a significant mediator.

They imply that empowering leaders who give teachers freedom, trust, and a voice make them feel more confident and resourceful, which motivates them to try innovative teaching methods (i.e., fresh ideas, creative lessons, new classroom tools). Overall, empowering leadership and psychological capital together can foster a supportive, innovative teaching culture in cross-cultural educational environments, offering practical insights for school administrators in international settings.

2.3 Impact on Teachers' Burnout and Wellbeing

In their investigation, Anjum, Shehzad, and Jalal (2021) explored the impact of psychological capital on teachers' burnout. Findings showed that psychological capital tends to be significantly and negatively related to burnout. They imply that psychological capital acts as a powerful personal buffer against burnout by lowering emotional exhaustion, while leading to greater job satisfaction among teachers. Teachers with elevated psychological capital possess (1) self-efficacy that gives them the confidence to handle difficult classroom behaviors and manage demanding instructional scenarios, (2) hope that drives them to set meaningful professional goals and follow pathways to achieve them, (3) optimism that encourages them to adopt positive causal attributions and proactive problem-solving when facing school hurdles, (4) resilience that provides them the mental capacity to rebound and recover from professional adversities. Additionally, psychological capital ameliorates burnout through (1) direct buffering that diminishes physical fatigue, cognitive weariness, and emotional exhaustion among teachers and (2) adaptive coping that enables teachers to practice effective problem-solving and seek social support rather than relying on avoidance or self-criticism.

A study by Feni (2022) determined the impact of psychological capital and organizational support on teachers' psychological wellbeing. Findings indicated that psychological capital (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism) tends to have a significant relationship with psychological wellbeing. They imply that developing teachers' psychological capital can yield key organizational benefits, including job satisfaction and retention. Teachers who demonstrate high psychological capital possess the psychological resources (i.e., self-efficacy, optimism, hope, resilience) often experience better personal wellbeing, higher job satisfaction, and reduced stress. Lastly, organizational support helps teachers cope with job demands more effectively, enhancing their mental health, and subsequently, job commitment.

In their investigation, Chan and Abdul Halim (2025) determined the impact of psychological capital on the psychological wellbeing, self-compassion, emotional intelligence, and mindfulness among academic staff at Malaysian public research universities. Findings showed that psychological capital tends to be significantly and positively influenced by self-compassion and emotional intelligence, besides positively influencing psychological wellbeing. They imply that academic staff who are kind to themselves and understand their own emotions possess the inner mental strength needed to lead a happier and healthier life. Besides treating themselves with kindness when they make mistakes, they are able to recognize, comprehend, and manage their own emotions, while interacting positively with others. Academic staff who practice self-compassion and use emotional intelligence ultimately increase their own psychological capital. In turn, high psychological capital makes it easier for them to handle stress and setbacks, leading directly to better psychological wellbeing.

2.4 Impact on Teachers' Perceived Stress

The impact of psychological capital on elementary school teachers' stress and workplace affect was analyzed by Casad (2015). Findings revealed a significant relationship between psychological capital and job satisfaction, commitment, stress, and intention to leave. They imply that psychological capital mitigates (1) role overload by acting as a buffer mechanism that absorbs excessive administrative and teaching strain, lowering stress perception, (2) role conflict by diminishing the strain caused by incompatible demands from multiple stakeholders (e.g., parents, administration, policymakers), and (3) role ambiguity by promoting adaptive coping and problem-solving to navigate poorly-defined job expectations or ambiguous duties. Additionally, psychological capital positively impacts teachers' attitudes and retention because it (1) elevates their job satisfaction by mitigating emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and occupational burnout, (2) strengthens their organizational dedication by fostering deeper affective ties and professional commitment to the school community, and (3) lowers turnover intention by acting as a psychological buffer against demanding work conditions, while reducing thoughts of leaving the profession.

In their study, Bidi et al. (2024) evaluated the impact of psychological capital and coping mechanisms on teachers' perceived stress. Findings revealed that teachers tend to experience multifarious challenges and stressors that negatively impact their occupational wellbeing. Psychological capital tends to significantly moderate the relationship between stress and occupational wellbeing, while coping strategies tend to partially mediate the relationship between psychological capital and occupational wellbeing. Findings imply that psychological capital acts as a partial bridge between job stress and wellbeing, as internal resources (hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism) help absorb stress. In contrast, perceived stress not only reduces teachers' occupational wellbeing, but it also diminishes their psychological capital, which lowers their overall job satisfaction and health. Overall, high psychological capital has a buffering effect, allowing teachers to view their high-stress work environment as challenges rather than direct threats.

Similarly, Cabahug and Pañares (2024) examined the impact of the psychological capital on teachers' stress levels and work attitudes. Findings revealed that teachers tend to possess high psychological capital and positive work attitudes, albeit experiencing slight to manageable work stress. They imply that psychological capital acts as a key buffer against external work pressures and aligns with a positive professional outlook and dedication to the teaching profession. Acting as a personal shield against stress and job burnout, psychological capital equips teachers with strength, positivity, and deep commitment to their roles despite challenges. It is an effective stress buffer that (1) prevents heavy workloads from causing emotional exhaustion among teachers, (2) generates energy by keeping teachers excited and proud of their daily work, and (3) promotes staff retention by inspiring teachers to continue their teaching career.

The impact of psychological capital on college teachers' stress levels and work attitudes was analyzed by Guzman (2026). Findings revealed that college teachers tend to exhibit high psychological capital and positive work attitudes although they experience high levels of stress. Further, a moderately significant relationship tends to exist between psychological capital and stress, indicating that higher psychological capital helps reduce stress. A very strong positive relationship also tends to exist between psychological capital and work attitudes, suggesting that teachers with higher

psychological capital tend to exhibit more positive work behaviors. Finding imply that an inverse, negative relationship tends to exist between psychological capital and stress; as teachers' psychological capital increases, their levels of perceived stress, psychological distress, and anxiety tend to decrease. Psychological capital acts as a psychological resource that helps teachers counteract or buffer the negative impact of adverse and stressful conditions. On the other hand, psychological capital influences teachers' work attitudes in terms of (1) job satisfaction associated with more favorable perceptions of daily work duties, (2) organizational commitment that makes teachers feel a deeper dedication to educational goals, and (3) reduced turnover since it equips teachers with robust psychological resources that diminish that intentions to leave the teaching profession.

2.5 Impact on Students

In their study, Chua et al. (2018) examined the impact of psychological capital on collectivistic university students in Malaysia. Findings showed that high academic eustress (good stress) tends to predict high academic performance. Moreover, psychological capital tends to mitigate the influence of academic distress on students' academic performance. They imply that academic eustress acts as a positive motivator that directly predicts better grades, while psychological capital helps students buffer the negative effects of academic distress. Eustress is a healthy, exciting level of stress that gives students focus, energy, and drive to finish their academic tasks. It impacts students' performance by driving them forward and helping them achieve their academic targets, while psychological capital acts as a shield. When high performing students experience academic distress that causes anxiety or burnout, their strong psychological capital prevents that stress from affecting their grades.

The mediating influence of psychological capital on the link between academic performance and proactivity among undergraduates was analyzed by Ng et al. (2024). Findings revealed that proactivity tends to explain a significant proportion of the variance in psychological capital, while psychological capital tends to partially mediate the relationship between proactivity and academic performance. Findings imply that psychological capital acts as a partial bridge connecting a student's proactivity to their academic success. A proactive personality strongly predicts and explains a large amount of difference in students' psychological capital. On the other hand, psychological capital partly explains how proactivity leads to better grades and academic performance; it acts as a personal resource that students can use to perform better. Therefore, higher educational institutions should implement specific activities to leverage undergraduate students' proactivity and psychological capital, thereby raising their learning motivation and academic achievement.

In their study, Alismail et al. (2025) examined the impact of academic major satisfaction on the academic achievement motivation among tourism and hospitality students, with psychological capital as mediator. Findings indicated that academic major satisfaction tends to positively predicts both psychological capital and achievement motivation. Further, psychological capital tends to be significantly and positively related to achievement motivation, while partially mediating the relationship between academic major satisfaction and achievement motivation. Findings imply that psychological capital acts as an internal bridge that helps turn students' satisfaction with their major into a stronger drive to succeed. Students who appreciate their major naturally feel more hopeful and confident, which boosts their achievement motivation. Although

psychological capital does not fully explain the relationship between academic major satisfaction and achievement motivation, it reflects part of the connection. Appreciating their major helps build students' confidence and resilience (psychological capital), while those inner strengths actively drive them to study harder and successfully achieve their academic goals.

The impact of psychological capital and organizational citizenship behavior on the wellbeing among public elementary school teachers was assessed by Empimo and Lomarda (2025). Findings revealed that significant relationships tend to exist among psychological capital, organizational citizenship behavior, and wellbeing. They imply that psychological capital, organizational citizenship behavior, and wellbeing share a strong, positive link in the workplace. High psychological capital, characterized by hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, boosts teachers' personal wellbeing and drives them to perform helpful organizational citizenship behaviors beyond formal job duties. Psychological capital together with wellbeing results in (1) hope and optimism that instil positive emotions, (2) resilience that helps teachers cope with daily stress, and (3) self-efficacy that improves their overall life and job satisfaction. On the other hand, teachers with positive organizational citizenship behavior (1) engage in helpful extra-role tasks that create supportive team cultures, (2) render help to others that increases their sense of purpose, and (3) establish strong social bonds that elevate collective happiness.

In a study, Pratiwi and Parahyanti (2025) explored the impact of psychological capital on high school teachers' readiness for change. Findings showed that psychological capital tends to have a significant and positive impact on teachers' readiness for change. They imply that teachers with high psychological capital often (1) display confidence and diligence in undertaking challenging tasks, (2) demonstrate positive attribution toward events, focusing on growth and solutions, (3) persevere toward challenging goals and redirect paths to success, and (4) recover quickly from difficult conditions, setbacks, or failures. Lastly, schools can enhance teachers' psychological capital through (1) internal resources that focus on stress management, optimism, and resilience, (2) collaborative and peer interventions that establish structured peer support systems to encourage collaborative learning and mutual emotional reinforcement, and (3) strengths-based training and group activities that foster shared problem-solving.

The impact of psychological capital on university teachers' work performance was analyzed by Samina, Sadia, and Khan (2025). Findings revealed that psychological capital tends to have a significant and positive relationship with work performance. They imply that higher psychological capital gives university teachers the tools to manage work stress and deal with curricular changes. Encompassing hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, psychological capital helps teachers stay strong and positive during tough times. It augments teachers' (1) stress control, reducing their vulnerability to burnout and daily pressure, (2) coping skills, allowing them to bounce back fast when problems occur, (3) job satisfaction, making them feel good about their work and stay motivated, and (4) adaptation, motivating them to accept new rules and changes with a clear mind.

In their study, Huang and Wang (2026) explored the impact of rural and urban teachers' psychological capital (efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism) on teaching for creativity. Findings revealed that optimism tends to be significantly related to teaching for creativity among rural teachers. On the other hand, hope tends to be significantly related

to teaching for creativity among urban teachers. Lastly, resilience and efficacy tend to be significantly related to teaching for creativity among both groups of teachers. Findings imply that, in the urban context, hope is significantly linked to teaching for creativity, reflecting a need for structured pathways and goal-directed motivation in city schools. In contrast, in the rural context, optimism is significantly linked to teaching for creativity, highlighting the role of generalized positive expectations in resource-constrained or community-driven settings. Lastly, efficacy and resilience are shared factors that are significantly associated with teaching for creativity, regardless of school location.

The impact of psychological capital on the emotional management (i.e., cognitive appraisal, coping resources, behavioral performance) among elementary teachers was assessed by Kao, Tsou, and Lu (2026). Findings indicated that emotional management tends to be negatively related to perceived work stress, while a significant interaction tends to exist between emotional management and psychological capital on perceived work stress. Findings imply that effective emotional management and regulation act as vital buffers against occupational pressure; teachers with greater ability in handling or regulating personal feelings tend to have lower levels of perceived job stress and burnout. Their cognitive appraisal equips them with better emotion control, helping them reframe difficult workplace situations instead of triggering automatic reactive responses. Their coping resources allow them to regulate their internal states and preserve their mental energy, while reducing vulnerability to work overload and emotional exhaustion. Lastly, their behavioral performance in terms of constructive expression lowers their interpersonal tension with leaders and colleagues.

In their investigation, Sukenti and Tambak (2026) probed the impact of psychological capital, professional identity, and emotional intelligence on the learning assessment among high school teachers. Findings revealed that psychological capital, professional identity, and emotional intelligence tend to have a direct impact on teachers' learning assessment. Additionally, emotional intelligence tends to mediate the relationship between professional identity and psychological capital on learning assessment. Findings imply that psychological capital, professional identity, and emotional intelligence enable teachers to adequately evaluate student learning at the end of a unit/term/course by comparing performance against set standards to assign grades, report achievement, and certify mastery. Psychological capital equips teachers with the hope and self-confidence to stay positive during tough grading tasks, while professional identity allows them to define their roles and duties and employ fair standards in student evaluation. Lastly, emotional intelligence enables them to provide feedback to students with empathy.

2.6 Relationships Among Psychological Capital, Burnout, Stress, and Wellbeing

The relationship between teachers' psychological capital and stress, anxiety, burnout, task involvement, and job satisfaction was determined by Demir (2018). Findings showed that teachers' psychological capital tends to be significantly related to job satisfaction and decreased stress. It tends to reduce stress directly and ease anxiety, burnout, and over-exertion through specific mediating effects. Findings imply that psychological capital lowers stress and eases anxiety, burnout, and over-exertion through specific mental paths as a bridge. This bridge, comprising inner personal strengths (i.e., hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism), change how teachers perceive and handle challenging tasks. Hope helps teachers ameliorate daily pressure from turning

into heavy stress, while confidence and belief in their plans reduce their fear of the unknown. On the other hand, resilience acts as a burnout guard by helping teachers recharge their energy to avoid being totally drained. Lastly, job involvement balance prevents teachers from over-exertion, while helping them stay attached to their profession in a healthy way.

In their study, Ferradás et al. (2019) analyzed the relationship between psychological capital and burnout among non-university teachers. Findings revealed that teachers with low psychological capital tend to exhibit significantly higher levels of burnout. They imply that teachers with low personal resources (i.e., hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism) experience work stress more deeply, leading to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low sense of personal accomplishment. In other words, low psychological capital reduces teachers' ability to cope with daily work stress, while diminishing their hope and optimism, which makes classroom challenges feel harder to resolve. Additionally, teachers with low psychological capital possess weakened self-efficacy, which lowers their confidence in teaching and classroom management. Lastly, their fading resilience makes it more difficult for them to recover from difficult student behavior and other setbacks.

The relationship between psychological capital and burnout among teachers, with flourishing as a mediator was determined by Freire et al. (2020). Findings showed that flourishing tends to partially mediate the negative impact of psychological capital on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and the lack of professional accomplishment. They imply that flourishing acts as a partial bridge that helps explain how psychological capital lowers burnout symptoms (e.g., tiredness, coldness at work, low self-worth). Flourishing allows teachers to live with deep purpose, strong relationships, and self-respect, while psychological capital equips them with such inner strengths as hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. While psychological capital lowers depersonalization (harsh or cold attitudes), flourishing helps reduce this drain even more, besides supporting a caring mindset. While psychological capital promotes professional accomplishment by boosting teachers' work pride, flourishing enables them to build a stronger sense of success by living at their highest level of mental, social, and emotional wellbeing, characterized by deep fulfillment, personal growth, and resilience.

On the other hand, Liu and Du (2024) examined the relationships among psychological capital, burnout, mindfulness, and burnout among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. Findings revealed a significant and negative relationship between psychological capital and burnout, with mindfulness acting as a significant mediator in the relationship between the two variables. They imply that psychological capital directly lowers burnout, with mindfulness bridging the psychological capital and burnout. Psychological capital enhances teachers' inner resources, helping them become more mindful. While psychological capital gives teachers hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, their mindfulness grows when they use their inner resources to stay focused and aware in the present. Lastly, mindfulness (i.e., present-moment awareness, non-judgmental acceptance, emotional attention) enables them to dispel negative thoughts, making their minds feel rested and calm instead of being overworked or tense.

2.7 Relationships Among Psychological Capital, Stress, and Wellbeing

In their study, Rosco, Yuayan, and Pilonco (2021) determined the relationships among psychological capital, stress, and emotional labor among public school teachers. Findings

revealed that psychological capital tends to have a significant relationship with stress index and emotional labor. They imply that psychological capital (i.e., hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) directly influence how teachers handle emotional labor and face stress. Teachers with high psychological capital are more capable of managing tough emotional demands at work, while also reducing their overall stress levels. Teachers with high psychological capital (1) prefer surface acting, relying less on fake feelings, (2) engage in deep acting, making it easier for them to change their actual inner feelings to match job rules, and (3) possess strong mental resources to avoid being emotionally drained after long working hours. On the other hand, psychological capital acts as an internal personal buffer that significantly reduces stress by allowing teachers to reframe negative challenges, lower anxiety, and manage demands effectively. Further, hope drives goal-directed energy, helping teachers find alternative pathways when blocked, while self-efficacy increases their confidence to execute tasks and control outcomes. Lastly, resilience enables them to rapidly recover and adapt after facing severe setbacks, while optimism encourages them to hold positive attributions for present and future successes, while reducing negative rumination.

The relationship between psychological capital and teacher wellbeing in relation to stress coping among public university teachers was explored by Zewude and Hercz (2021). Findings revealed that university teachers with high psychological capital use active, problem-focused coping strategies, while facing challenges with confidence and bouncing back quickly from tough events. They demonstrate (1) hope by making a clear plan to reach their goals and changing paths when obstacles appear, (2) self-efficacy, trusting their own skills to tackle challenging tasks and succeed, (3) resilience by bouncing back fast when negative things happen to them, and (4) optimism, expecting good things to happen in their future. Additionally, their high psychological capital enables them to adequately cope with stress. Through active coping, they deal with the root cause of the problem instead of hiding from it. Through positive framing, they see hard times as a chance to grow instead of a disaster. Lastly, they are less vulnerable to burnout because they have the ability to (1) create strong personal boundaries, (2) control over their work choices, and (3) adopt regular habits that rest their mind and body. Lastly, psychological capital promotes teachers' wellbeing by allowing them to (1) directly improve their health outcomes without any intermediary steps, (2) leverage active coping mechanisms (e.g., acceptance and change), while lowering negative withdrawal behaviors, and (3) buffer strain by utilizing personal psychological resources to help counteract daily occupational pressures and burnout.

The relationship between psychological capital and workplace wellbeing among elementary public school teachers was measured by Silandote (2024). Findings indicated that both psychological capital and workplace wellbeing tend to be significantly related. They imply that higher levels of psychological capital (i.e., hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism) enable teachers to better handle professional demands, mitigate burnout, and sustain greater job satisfaction. Self-efficacy equips teachers with the confidence to execute tasks and manage tough challenges, while perseverance motivates them to strive toward goals, redirecting their paths when needed. On the other hand, resilience enables teachers to bounce back from adversity, failure, or strain, while optimism encourages them to practice positive attribution toward present and future outcomes. Overall, teachers with robust psychological resources experience lower chances of burnout or emotional exhaustion, while enhancing their performance through greater engagement, motivation, and effectiveness.

2.8 Relationships Among Psychological Capital, Job Satisfaction, and Resilience

The relationships among the psychological capital, job satisfaction, and prosocial behaviors among public school teachers were studied by Sünbül and Gördesli (2021). Findings showed that psychological capital (i.e., self-efficacy, resilience, optimism) tends to have a significant and positive relationship with prosocial behaviors, with job satisfaction being significantly and positively related to prosocial behaviors. Findings imply that higher levels of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism yield greater happiness, engagement, and fulfillment among teachers. Teachers with high psychological capital often enjoy greater job satisfaction because of their (1) ability to handle heavy workloads and demanding rules much better, (2) positive thinking that gives them a better mood at work, (3) confidence that enables them to find more meaning and value in daily tasks, and (4) resilience that helps ameliorate burnout, making them less likely to leave their profession.

A study by Sun et al. (2022) investigated the relationships among teachers' psychological capital, work-meaning cognition, and ego-resiliency. Findings indicated (1) work-meaning cognition tends to mediate the relationship between teachers' psychological capital and workplace wellbeing, (2) teachers' psychological capital tends to positively predict workplace wellbeing, and (3) ego-resiliency tends to moderate the impact of the relationship between teachers' psychological capital and workplace wellbeing. Findings imply that teachers' work-meaning cognition acts as a mental bridge, allowing them to use their inner strengths (e.g., personal skills, values) to help them feel good at their job by connecting who they are with what they do. On their other hand, teachers' ego-resiliency equips them with the ability to adjust their level of control to fit changing situations, which acts as a buffer that changes how strong the link is between their personal coping tools and their mental health. Teachers with high ego-resiliency (1) demonstrate flexible control, which helps them change from high control to low control based on what is happening around them, (2) possess a coping bridge that links their inner psychological tools to positive life outcomes, and (3) display outcome strength through higher resilience, which strengthens the positive impact of their resources.

On the other hand, Mikus and Teoh (2022) investigated the relationships among teachers' psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism), future-oriented coping (proactive and preventive coping), and occupational wellbeing (job satisfaction and work engagement). Findings indicated that hope tends to significantly predict preventive coping, while self-efficacy and optimism tend to significantly predict proactive coping. Moreover, optimism, hope, and proactive coping tend to significantly predict work engagement, while optimism, hope, and resilience tend to have a significant influence on job satisfaction. Findings imply that optimism and self-efficacy enable teachers to take action to solve problems before they get worse. While optimism gives teachers hope for a good future, self-efficacy makes them believe in their own power to successfully perform tasks. Together, they prompt teachers to face problems proactively, create strong plans for action, turn stress into useful energy, and lead a happier daily life. On the other hand, hope, optimism, and resilience make teachers feel much happier at their jobs. Hope enables teachers to set clear goals, find innovative ways to solve problems, and keep their motivation high. Optimism prompts them to look at the good side of work, turn bad days into lessons, and lower their daily stress and worry. Lastly, resilience enables them to bounce back fast and make big changes feel easy, while preventing them from feeling stressed and emotionally exhausted.

2.9 Relationships Among Psychological Capital, Digital Literacy, and Work Life

The relationships among psychological capital, digital literacy, and knowledge management on the instructional quality among junior and high school teachers were assessed by Damanik and Widodo (2025). Findings indicated that instructional quality tends to be significantly related to psychological capital, digital literacy, and knowledge management, through the mediating role of teaching creativity. They imply that psychological capital enhances teachers' hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism to handle classroom stress, while digital literacy equips them with the technical skills to utilize technological platforms effectively. On the other hand, knowledge management enables teachers to organize and share information resources to streamline lesson planning and delivery, while teaching creativity acts as the vital bridge that converts psychological capital, digital literacy, and knowledge management into high-quality instruction. Teachers with high psychological capital, digital literacy, and knowledge management (1) promote innovative problem-solving in the face of unexpected learning hurdles, (2) are willing to adapt their lessons during educational reforms, and (3) promote student engagement through innovative pedagogical practices.

A study by Erden (2025) investigated the relationships among psychological capital, quality of work life, and positive emotions among teachers and school administrators. Findings showed that higher psychological capital tends to directly improve work engagement, motivation, and the overall quality of work life among teachers and school administrators. Moreover, positive emotions act as a crucial bridge, helping them translate personal psychological strengths into better daily work experiences. They imply that higher psychological capital directly boosts work engagement, motivation, and job quality, while positive emotions turn personal psychological strengths into better daily work experiences. Teachers and school administrators with high psychological capital (1) feel more focused and energetic on tasks, (2) drive themselves to reach goals, and (3) demonstrate overall job satisfaction that significantly enhances outcomes. Lastly, their positive emotions link their internal strengths to daily actions, while joy and optimism make their routine tasks feel lighter and more rewarding.

2.10 Relationships Among Psychological Capital, Openness, and Leadership

The relationships among psychological capital, openness to experience, and teacher effectiveness were explored by Fathima and Anaparti (2025). Findings showed that a significant relationship tends to exist between psychological capital (i.e., self-efficacy and hope) and teacher effectiveness. Conversely, openness to experience tends to have a nonsignificant relationship with teacher effectiveness, suggesting that personality traits alone do not yield teacher effectiveness. Findings imply that self-efficacy equips teachers with the confidence and belief in their ability to succeed and handle classroom challenges, while hope enables them to set clear goals and strive to reach them despite obstacles. On the other hand, effective teachers boost student learning, engagement, and positive behavior. Overall, confident and hopeful teachers feel less stressed and tired and bounce back faster when problems occur, while their high engagement motivates them to try innovative ideas, thus boosting students' learning enthusiasm.

An investigation by Mısırcı and Bozbayındır (2026) examined the relationships among positive psychological capital, learning-centered leadership, and teacher leadership among teachers. Findings showed that positive psychological capital, learning-centered leadership, and teacher leadership tend to be significantly and positively related.

Moreover, positive psychological capital tends to partially mediate the relationship between learning-centered leadership and teacher leadership. They imply that learning-centered leadership has a direct connection to teacher leadership, and an indirect connection, through positive psychological capital. Positive psychological capital acts as a psychological bridge; good leadership can improve teachers' internal resources (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience), which then boosts their own leadership actions. Therefore, school leaders should support professional learning, while building an environment that nurtures teachers' confidence and resilience.

2.11 Impact of Psychological Capital Interventions

In their research, Harty et al. (2015) appraised a 10-week group intervention program that aimed to increase working teams' positive psychological capital. Findings revealed that the program tends to raise levels of positive emotions, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction among working teams, with most positive changes lasting for six months after intervention. They imply that program impact tends to be stronger in the group that has received direct reinforcement of workplace resources and positive environmental aspects. Psychological capital tends to have a much stronger impact on performance and wellbeing when teams work in a supportive environment. An organization that directly reinforces workplace resources (e.g., training, autonomy, feedback) and positive environmental aspects (e.g., supportive leadership, a healthy culture) creates a compounding effect. The impact is stronger because of the (1) resource caravan effect, whereby external resources (environmental support) can accelerate and multiply internal resources or psychological capital and (2) validation of effort, whereby teams with high psychological capital are naturally motivated, (3) positive environment that validates motivation, indicating that hope and optimism can be realistically grounded via training, and (4) buffering effect, whereby psychological capital helps employees survive stressful environments, thus amplifying their performance in favorable work environments where tools and support are readily available.

The effects of a research-based intervention on the psychological capital among preservice and in-service teachers were investigated by Crescentini et al. (2022). Findings indicated that the training project tends to have a positive impact on teachers' psychological capital, with significant gains in self-efficacy and confidence for classroom roles, besides fostering better self-reflection and coping skills against daily setbacks. They imply that psychological capital training can promote wellbeing among teachers in relation to self-efficacy, confidence, self-reflection, and coping skills. Teachers with high self-efficacy and confidence feel more capable of managing their daily tasks, while trusting their skills to effectively manage the classroom. On the other hand, self-reflection enables teachers to examine their work and find ways to grow, while coping skills enable them to bounce back fast when tough days occur. It is important to provide psychological capital training to teachers because it (1) enhances their mental strength, which motivates them to continue their career, (2) makes them feel happy, which prompts them to create better learning spaces for students, and (3) reinforces their coping tools, which helps prevent stress from turning into burnout.

In their research, Shi and Sin (2024) examined the effects of a web-based intervention on the psychological capital among inclusive education teachers. Findings revealed that the training program tends to significantly increase teachers' psychological capital scores. Moreover, higher levels of psychological capital tend to exert a positive impact

on teachers' emotional stability and supportive behavior in class. Findings imply that psychological capital training can enhance teachers' positivity and benefit students receiving inclusive education. Psychological capital training instills hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, which augments teachers' positivity, while creating a better and more supportive classroom environment for students in inclusive education programs. Teachers with high psychological capital (1) feel more capable of managing diverse classrooms, (2) have better stress control, bouncing back faster from daily challenges, and (3) display greater optimism, keeping a hopeful outlook on student progress.

The effects of an online intervention to increase psychological capital and wellbeing among ageing employees were analyzed by Mockało, Stachura-Krzyształowicz, and Kapica (2025). Findings indicated that the intervention tends to significantly increase ageing employees' level of psychological capital, affective balance, life satisfaction, besides decreasing their depressive symptoms. They imply that a specific mental or workplace program can successfully improve overall wellbeing and reduce sadness among older employees. It enhances older employees' psychological capital by making them feel more hopeful, resilient, confident, and optimistic about their jobs. Moreover, it enhances their affective balance by fostering more positive daily emotions than negative ones. Lastly, the program tends to increase older employees' life satisfaction by making them feel happier with their overall lives, while reducing their signs of sadness, low mood, and hopelessness.

A study by Vuori (2025) evaluated the effects of a psychological capital intervention among student teachers. Findings indicated that the program tends to significantly increase the scores among the participants, with sustained effects at follow-up. Finding imply that psychological capital can be boosted through quick, impactful group sessions via Zoom. First, to enhance their hope and optimism, student teachers can (1) use a future self-vision board to paste images of personal and group goals, (2) practice best possible self-share by taking turns to describe an ideal future where everything goes right, and (3) reframe optimism by voting on the top three positive lessons learned from a previous team challenge. Second, to enhance their self-efficacy and confidence, student teachers can (1) practice micro-win celebrations by going around the room naming one small task that they have finished well that week, (2) adopt strength spotting by telling their partners one strong talent that they see in them, and (3) showcase skills by teaching a tiny, fun skill to the group. Third, to enhance their resilience and wellbeing, student teachers can (1) tell a bounce-back story by sharing a brief story of overcoming a hard time using a specific tool or technique, (2) utilize gratitude popcorn by rapidly describing a positive thing that has happened in ten seconds or less, and (3) practice guided mindful breathing by leading a two-minute breathing break to lower group stress.

The effects of a brief, structured intervention aimed at developing psychological capital to enhance staff's job satisfaction and reduce their turnover intention were measured by Sjöberg and Söderfjäll (2026). Findings revealed that the intervention group tend to show significantly greater increases in psychological capital and job satisfaction, besides a greater decrease in intention to leave. They imply that the intervention tends to improve staff's mental strength and happiness, while lowering their turnover. Staff who have joined the intervention program feel much better about their jobs and themselves, with fewer in the program seeking a new job or resigning. Overall, psychological capital

provides the middle ground, as it is stable enough to be a core part of whom staff are, but flexible enough that they can actively develop it to become stronger.

Finally, Neuwirth and Dewi (2025) assessed the effects of an intervention program (communication skills, social competencies, conflict management) on students' psychological capital, flourishing, and life satisfaction. Findings revealed that the training program tends to significantly improve students' psychological capital, flourishing, and life satisfaction. They imply that students can improve their psychological capital by joining a training program that underscores effective communication, social interaction skills, and conflict management. Students' psychological capital increases when they improve their interpersonal communication and the verbal or non-verbal tools needed to communicate, build relationships, and interact effectively with others. Moreover, targeted skill training can enhance their quality of life by helping them achieve measurable gains in life satisfaction and daily flourishing. Lastly, social and communication competencies often act as independent drivers that nurture and strengthen students' psychological capital.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design, Approach, and Locations

A quantitative design was adopted to serve as a structured master plan for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting numerical data in response to three research questions on perceived psychological capital among academics in East Malaysia. First, results were expressed using frequencies, percentages, and statistical metrics rather than text or subjective descriptions. Second, the current study followed a predesigned framework with a standardized instrument that measures perceived psychological capital. Third, objectivity and neutrality were upheld by maintaining a detached, unbiased stance, utilizing a valid and reliable questionnaire to minimize personal or procedural bias. Fourth, a representative sample of academics was recruited to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the wider population. Lastly, replicability was ensured by using standardized procedures and closed-ended metrics that allow other researchers to repeat the study under similar conditions to verify outcomes. The research locations were two PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu and another one in Kuching. Kota Kinabalu is the state capital of Sabah, Malaysia, located on the northwest coast of Borneo facing the South China Sea. On the other hand, Kuching is the capital city of Sarawak, Malaysia, also located on the island of Borneo. Lastly, a majority of the PHEIs in both states are concentrated in the two capital cities.

3.2 Sample and Justification

The sample consisted of 67 academics ($n = 67$) from two PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu and another one in Kuching. Subjects possess at least a Master's degree and teach full-time at their institutions. Initially, administrators of 10 randomly selected PHEIs were invited to participate in the study via email and phone, but eventually, only three agreed to share the survey link with their staff. The sampling strategy was based on convenience, specifically leaning into convenient access and voluntary participation; in brief, academics were readily available, easily accessible, and willing to participate in the study. Additionally, the current study relied on proximity, direct availability, and an existing channel, that is, emailing a link to an internal list of academics in accessible PHEIs to collect data quickly with less effort. Since participation relied heavily on

academics choosing to opt-in, ethical requirements for informed consent and voluntariness were ensured.

The sample was recruited from two cities populated by people from many different backgrounds, heritages, and native languages. Its size was justified according to the central limit theorem, which stipulates that a minimum of 30 respondents is enough to ensure statistical power and generalizability for basic survey research (Roscoe, 1975; RUBIKTOP, 2023). Therefore, the current sample size meets the minimum requirement for quantitative research in the social sciences, particularly in terms of academics' perceived psychological capital, while ensuring a reasonable margin of error and sufficient power to identify modest effects in the nonparametric tests that were used to interpret data in the present study.

The sample consisted of 41.8 percent males and 58.2 percent females. Age-wise, 13.4 percent are 22 to 32 years old, 38.8 percent are 33 to 43 years old, 40.3 percent are 44 to 54 years old, and 7.5 are 55 and above. In terms of job experience, 11.9 percent have taught one to five years, 16.4 percent have taught six to 11 years, 32.8 percent have taught 12 to 17 years, and 38.8 percent have taught 18 or more years (see Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Sample ($n = 67$)

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	28	41.8
	Female	39	58.2
Age	22-32	9	13.4
	33-43	26	38.8
	44-54	27	40.3
	55 and above	5	7.5
Job experience (years)	1-5	8	11.9
	6-11	11	16.4
	12-17	22	32.8
	18 and above	26	38.8

3.3 Instrument

The Positive Psychological Capital Questionnaire (Luthans, 2002; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017) was adapted to collect data. It consists of 24 items to which academics rate their agreement on a Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

The instrument measures an individual's positive psychological state of development across four core dimensions, including (1) hope or perseverance toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals in order to succeed, (2) efficacy or confidence to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks, (3) resilience or ability to sustain and bounce back when beset by problems and adversity to attain success, and (4) optimism or positive attribution about succeeding now and in the future. Psychometric properties of the questionnaire reflect the (1) higher-order factor structure of psychological capital, which has been confirmed across several studies as a higher-order core latent factor and (2) combined construct that predicts performance and job satisfaction better than any individual subscale alone. The questionnaire also demonstrates strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from 0.70 to above 0.90 across diverse global populations (Ooh, Seok, & Maakip, 2020).

To determine its suitability for the study, it was pilot-tested on 20 lecturers and SPSS 29.0 was used to calculate its reliability. Results showed that its Cronbach's alpha is 0.902, indicating strong internal consistency among the items. In brief, there is high confidence that the questionnaire will measure perceived psychological capital in a coherent, rigorous, and methodical manner.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Academics were required to complete the Positive Psychological Capital Questionnaire on Google Forms. Informed consent in educational research was emphasized as the ethical process of ensuring that academics fully understood the purpose of the study, risks, and voluntary nature before agreeing to participate. First, clear explanations of what participants would do and why the research was being conducted were succinctly stated. Second, explicit statements that participation was completely voluntary and individuals could withdraw at any time without penalty were provided. Third, full disclosure of any potential physical, psychological, or academic discomforts and anticipated benefits were clearly stated in the research ethics clearance form. Lastly, confidentiality measures were adopted by providing detailed descriptions of how data would be stored, coded, and anonymized.

Data were transferred onto a spreadsheet and subsequently analyzed using SPSS 29.0. First, percentages of agreement (strongly agree/agree) on perceived psychological capital were collapsed to gain an overall view of the construct. Second, Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in relation to age and job experience, while Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were any significant differences in terms of gender. Third, Wilcoxon signed rank test was conducted to determine if any of the psychological capital items significantly differed from the hypothesized value of 3.5.

4. Findings

4.1 Percentages of Agreement

Percentages of agreement (agree/strongly agree) on perceived psychological capital were combined to gain an overall view of the construct. First, a low proportion (58.2 to 68.7 percent) of academics tend to strongly agree/agree that they (1) almost always expect things to turn out the way they wanted, (2) are always optimistic about the future, (3) like to try different paths to get to familiar places, (4) usually know what to do in embarrassing situations, (5) can cope with unexpected situations due to their ingenuity, (6) are more curious about different things than most people, and (7) can usually make a favorable impression on others (see Table 2).

Second, an average proportion (71.7 to 79.1 percent) of academics tend to strongly agree/agree that they (1) usually expect a successful solution when things are difficult, (2) can stay calm in difficult situations because they know they can rely on my ability to deal with them, (3) are convinced that in unexpected situations they are able to cope successfully, (4) are always able to solve difficult problems if they try hard enough, (5) can solve most problems if they put enough effort into it, (6) often hope that something good will happen to them, (7) are going to succeed if they are going to succeed, (8) overall, they expect more good than bad to happen to them, (9) are eagerly

implementing their ideas, (10) achieve the goals that they set themselves, (11) people see them as an energetic person, (12) know that they can find a solution to the problem even when others give up, (13) like to taste new dishes that they have not tried before, and (14) their life experience has prepared them well for the challenges of the future (see Table 2).

Third, an above average proportion (83.6 to 85.1 percent) of academics tend to strongly agree/agree on only three of the items. They tend to strongly agree/agree that they (1) can consider many opportunities for achieving the goals which they care about the most, (2) can consider many options for solving problems, and (3) generous to their friends (see Table 2).

Table 2: Percentages of agreement on Perceived Psychological Capital

Items	1	2	3	4	5	4+5 (collapsed)
I am convinced that in unexpected situations I am able to cope successfully	0	6	19.4	49.3	25.4	74.7
I can stay calm in difficult situations because I know I can rely on my ability to deal with them	0	6	20.9	52.2	20.9	73.1
I usually know what to do in embarrassing situations	0	6	29.9	43.3	20.9	64.2
Thanks to my ingenuity, I can cope with unexpected situations	0	3	31.3	37.3	28.4	65.7
I can solve most problems if I put enough effort into it	0	4.5	16.4	43.3	35.8	79.1
I am always able to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	0	6	19.4	43.3	31.3	74.6
I can consider many options for solving problems	1.5	3	10.4	55.2	29.9	85.1
I am eagerly implementing my ideas	0	4.5	19.4	52.2	23.9	76.1
I can consider many opportunities for achieving the goals which I care about the most	0	4.5	11.9	43.3	40.3	83.6
My life experience has prepared me well for the challenges of the future	0	4.5	16.4	43.3	35.8	79.1
Even when others give up, I know that I can find a solution to the problem	0	1.5	22.4	46.3	29.9	76.2
I achieve the goals I set myself	0	7.5	17.9	43.3	31.3	74.6
I am generous to my friends	0	0	14.9	49.3	35.8	85.1
I like to taste new dishes that I have not tried before	3	3	14.9	53.7	25.4	79.1
People see me as an energetic person	1.5	9	13.4	52.2	23.9	76.1
When things are difficult, I usually expect a successful solution	0	3	25.4	47.8	23.9	71.7
If I'm going to succeed, I'm going to succeed	0	3	20.9	41.8	34.3	76.1
I almost always expect things to turn out the way I wanted	1.5	7.5	32.8	37.3	20.9	58.2
I am always optimistic about the future	1.5	4.5	25.4	44.8	17.9	62.7
I often hope that something good will happen to me	0	1.5	14.9	38.8	38.8	77.6
Overall, I expect more good than bad to happen to me	0	3	14.9	38.8	37.3	76.1

I like to try different paths to get to familiar places	3	9	17.9	41.8	22.4	64.2
I can usually make a favorable impression on others	0	6	19.4	43.3	25.4	68.7
I'm more curious about different things than most people	0	3	23.9	41.8	25.4	67.2

Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly agree = 5

4.2 Nonparametric Test Results

Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed no significant differences in perceived psychological capital

by way of age and job experience, while Mann-Whitney U test showed no significant differences in terms of gender (see Table 3).

Table 3: Kruskal-Wallis H and Mann-Whitney U Test Results

Variable	Non-parametric test	p-value
Age	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.621
Gender	Mann-Whitney U test	0.432
Job experience	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.426

4.3 Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

Wilcoxon signed rank test based on a hypothesized value of 3.5 revealed that 18 of the items were significant at $p < .001$, showing that their medians significantly differed from the hypothesized value of 3.5 and were likely to indicate strong disagreement. The other six items were significant at $p < .05$, showing that their medians significantly differed from the hypothesized value of 3.5 and were likely to indicate strong disagreement (see Table 3).

Table 4: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

Item	p-value	Conclusion
I am convinced that in unexpected situations I am able to cope successfully	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I can stay calm in difficult situations because I know I can rely on my ability to deal with them	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I usually know what to do in embarrassing situations	<0.021*	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Thanks to my ingenuity, I can cope with unexpected situations	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I can solve most problems if I put enough effort into it	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I am always able to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I can consider many options for solving problems	<0.003*	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I am eagerly implementing my ideas	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I can consider many	<0.011*	Median significantly differed from the test

opportunities for achieving the goals which I care about the most		value indicating strong disagreement
My life experience has prepared me well for the challenges of the future	<0.032*	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Even when others give up, I know that I can find a solution to the problem	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I achieve the goals I set myself	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I am generous to my friends	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I like to taste new dishes that I have not tried before	<0.014*	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
People see me as an energetic person	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
When things are difficult, I usually expect a successful solution	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
If I'm going to succeed, I'm going to succeed	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I almost always expect things to turn out the way I wanted	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I am always optimistic about the future	<0.015*	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I often hope that something good will happen to me	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Overall, I expect more good than bad to happen to me	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I like to try different paths to get to familiar places	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I can usually make a favorable impression on others	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
I'm more curious about different things than most people	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement

** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

5. Discussion

The discussion section comprises implications of current findings as well as recommendations on ways to enhance academics' psychological capital in East Malaysia.

5.1 Implications

Current findings imply that a majority of academics tend to demonstrate average to above average levels of psychological capital. Chan and Abdul Halim (2025) postulated that PHEI academics in Malaysia often face systemic pressures that can deplete their psychological capital. Due to high job demands, academics are compelled to navigate strict key performance indicators (KPIs), heavy teaching workloads, and pressure to secure research publications with limited institutional resources. They often face resource constraints, as PHEIs offer less institutional autonomy, fewer peer support networks, and tighter operational budgets compared to their public counterparts. Unmitigated demands significantly drain academics' mental and physical energy, leading directly to emotional exhaustion and reduced professional efficacy.

Similarly, Seong and Abdul Halim (2025) found that PHEI academic and administrative personnel in Malaysia often experience low work engagement, emotional exhaustion, and burnout driven by external demands, rules, and norms from their organization and social systems that push academics to behave in specific ways that adversely affect their psychological capital. As aforementioned, PHEI staff tend to face rigorous KPIs, extensive administrative tasks, and pressure to meet institutional targets. Rigorous KPIs, extensive administrative tasks, and high target pressure often converge to create severe organizational risks among academics. First, academics often end up spending a disproportionate amount of time on administrative tasks that do not add direct value. Compelled to satisfy stringent performance targets while drowning in paperwork, they also experience chronic stress, leading to high turnover and decreased motivation. Second, a measure that becomes a target often ceases to be a good measure. Under intense institutional pressure, academics may begin gaming the system by focusing strictly on what can be measured by a KPI rather than doing quality work, leading to an overreliance on narrow metrics at the expense of long-term success (Rosalinde, Woolthuis, & de Jong, 2017; Sakyi et al., 2022)

Along the same vein, Chew (2025) postulated that academic staff at Malaysian PHEIs face high workplace demands that often drain their psychological capital. They juggle long teaching hours, grading, and extra administrative tasks. They also experience high performance pressure, as private institutions often demand high student satisfaction and strict targets. Their heavy teaching loads, administrative tasks, and strict key performance indicators form a triad of systemic stressors that are increasingly driving staff burnout, diminishing job satisfaction, and eroding the overall quality of education. When combined, these factors compress the time available for meaningful student engagement, shifting an educator's role from holistic teaching to mere compliance management. First, beyond standard classroom instruction, academics face ballooning class sizes, a wider variety of course preparations, and a shift toward complex 21st century teaching methods, which greatly increases the time needed for lesson planning, grading, and direct student support. Second, academics are routinely buried under non-instructional requirements, which include tracking student records, managing departmental budgets, navigating frequent educational policy shifts, coordinating extracurricular activities, and offering community service. Third, educational performance metrics often overemphasize standardized test scores, rigid performance appraisals, and complex digital logging systems, whereby academics are frequently evaluated strictly according to numbers, compelling them to adopt a teaching to the test mentality (Gonzales, Guimary, & Gabunilas, 2022). Because PHEIs operate largely on tuition fees rather than state funding, they view students as consumers who expect a high return on their investment. Since student retention acts as a revenue metric, PHEI staff are often pushed to implement assertive early-intervention strategies to keep students enrolled. Moreover, they often feel pressured to adjust grading standards or workloads to maintain high student evaluation scores, which are frequently tied to contract renewals (Chew, 2025).

Lastly, Yusof, Panatik, and Shahrin (2026) revealed that emotional issues amongst Malaysian academics are often ignored, which adversely affects their psychological capital. Emotional issues and mental health conditions among Malaysian academics are a severe, but frequently marginalized crisis. Previous research confirms that academics across Malaysia routinely report high levels of stress, depression, anxiety, and burnout. Because university cultures often prize continuous output and competitive mindsets, the

emotional exhaustion experienced by academics is routinely overlooked, creating a silent culture of presenteeism, where faculty members attend work, while suffering from intense physical or psychological distress. Several major systemic and personal themes severely damage the mental health among Malaysian educators, which include (1) publishing pressures, heavy administrative burdens, and extensive teaching commitments that leave faculty chronically overworked, (2) the blurring of lines between professional demands and personal lives that prevents adequate recovery time, and (3) poor relationships with coworkers, toxic management dynamics, and dealing with student misbehavior that compound daily emotional strain. Additionally, the systemic neglect of academic wellbeing in Malaysia stems from deep-rooted cultural and institutional barriers, which include (1) stigma and professional risk that leads many academics to deliberately conceal their struggles; there is a pervasive fear that admitting to a mental health issue will invite professional judgment, stall promotions, or be labelled as unfit for leadership. Many academics also report having inadequate knowledge of the mental health resources available to them through their institutions (Aris & Othman, 2022; Munusamy, Ramasamy, & Sukir, 2024).

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Human-centric Framework

According to Brannigan (2020), organizations can augment their psychological capital using a human-centric framework that aligns their talent needs with their long-term goals. First, in terms of hope, organizations should underscore goal setting. PHEIs can instill hope among academics by regarding them as unique individuals, allowing them to autonomously set their own goals (rather than issuing strict top-down mandates), besides recognizing and rewarding unique and creative ways of achieving them. Setting specific, small, and manageable goals builds hope amongst academics by activating their brain's problem-solving and motivational pathways. It is a learnable cognitive skill grounded on three parts, namely, goals, pathways (the plan), and agency (the willpower to succeed). While large goals often overwhelm and hinder progress, smaller steps increase the chances of winning. Academics should set small, specific goals by breaking big targets down. Moreover, they should focus on mastery by choosing learning and personal growth over rigid results, which keeps their energy up when life changes. They should also make their goals concrete by writing down clear, actionable targets instead of vague wishes. Second, academics should build multiple pathways by planning more than one route rather than relying on just one way to reach their goal. If the initial plan fails, alternative paths will keep them moving. Additionally, they should anticipate roadblocks by listing what might get in their way before it happens. They should also visualize success by picturing themselves overcoming those specific walls so that they feel ready to push through. Third, academics should enhance their agency by celebrating tiny wins; acknowledging small progress shows their brain that they can succeed. Moreover, they should connect to their values by reminding themselves why the goal matters to their deeper life vision. Lastly, they should find support by sharing their targets with optimistic, positive individuals to boost their daily motivation.

Second, in terms of efficacy, organizations should help drive goal-focused performance amongst staff (Brannigan, 2020). PHEIs should acknowledge and celebrate academics' successes in achieving goals, while recognizing personal achievements to build individual efficacy. They should also ensure that academics engage in strengths-based goal setting, aligning their objectives with core competencies. Additionally, PHEIs should

emphasize vicarious learning among academics through (1) peer modeling by encouraging them to observe colleagues of a similar professional level handle challenges, (2) shadowing by encouraging them to directly follow high functioning colleagues to observe their daily problem-solving techniques, and (3) reflective modeling by encouraging them to observing others' strategies, and then evaluating how to apply those strategies to their own career.

Besides vicarious learning, social persuasion and constructive feedback can be applied to raise educators' efficacy and confidence (Brannigan, 2020). PHEI academics need to know that significant others (e.g., top management) have confidence in them, besides offering them actionable feedback. Moreover, PHEIs should provide social recognition and uplifting responses that highlight academics' strengths, desirable behavior, or strong performance to encourage them to continue their good performance. For example, they can employ 'Mad Props' to publicly share praise via an in-the-moment feedback app. Further, academics need psychological stimulation and wellbeing to develop efficacy; hence, PHEIs should encourage academics to work through self-limiting beliefs to promote a more optimistic outlook on individual abilities through cognitive-behavioral coaching, which enables academics to reframe their thinking to enhance confidence.

Third, in terms of fostering resilience amongst staff, organizations can adopt two approaches, namely, asset-focused strategies and risk-focused strategies (Brannigan, 2020). Through asset-focused strategies, PHEIs can enhance the perceived and actual resources available to academics when dealing with challenges. This can be done by encouraging academics to increase their social capital (goodwill, favor, community trust), human capital (expertise, competencies, talent), and overall psychological capital. PHEIs can augment academics' social capital through group learning and sharing, besides relationship-strengthening forums, which serve as resilience-affirming communities during challenging times. Further, they can emphasize professional training, team-based learning, and mentoring to enhance academics' human capital. Besides asset-focused strategies, PHEIs can also adopt risk-focused strategies to foster resilience among academics; for example, by helping them interpret and frame potential risks more positively as opportunities for growth. This approach is particularly effective when continuous feedback and ongoing mentorship conversations are provided.

Fourth, in terms of optimism, organizations can inspire it during performance management conversations (Brannigan, 2020). PHEIs should set realistic expectations and goals to propagate an environment where academics can seamlessly integrate and excel. Moreover, they should frame how they support academics, for instance, by instilling a sense of leniency for the past. Since academic environments are notoriously punishing regarding past failures, rejected journal papers, or unmet grant deadlines, PHEIs should encourage academics to reframe these setbacks not as permanent reflections of capability, but as necessary data points in research. Further, PHEIs should normalize failure by destigmatizing rejected manuscripts and unsuccessful grant applications, treating them as standard milestones rather than career-ending flaws. They should forgive academics' early missteps by providing grace for initial learning curves, especially for early-career researchers or those transitioning into new methodologies, to reduce imposter syndrome and burnout. Lastly, they should underscore cognitive reframing among academics, encouraging them to regard previous mistakes with self-compassion that permits them to extract valuable lessons without regret.

5.2.2 HERO Enhancement

Woods (2018) proposed several ways to increase hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO) among individuals. In the context of higher education, hope is often linked to increased resiliency and improved performance effectiveness in times of uncertainty or challenge, as well as improved job satisfaction and retention. PHEIs can instill hope among academics by leveraging its cognitive components (goals and pathways thinking). They should encourage academics to set realistic goals, which provides the direction for hope. Goals can be short-term or long-term, but they must be attainable yet challenging enough to require effort. Further, they should encourage academics to practice pathways thinking to generate workable routes to desired goals, which requires them to create a mental map and produce alternative strategies if the initial route is blocked. Besides cognitive components, PHEIs should emphasize the motivational components of hope (agency thinking and self-efficacy) among academics. They should propel academics along their chosen pathways, allowing them to reflect the perceived capacity to initiate and sustain movement toward their goals via self-talk ("I can achieve this"). Besides agency thinking, PHEIs should enhance academics' self-efficacy by instilling a belief in their capability to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments.

Second, in the context of higher education, optimism is an attributional style of explaining positive events through internal, stable, and global causes, and negative events through external, unstable (temporary), and specific causes (Woods, 2018). To instill optimism among academics, PHEIs should emphasize the key dimensions of this attribution style through (1) personalization, encouraging them to believe that positive outcomes stem from their own traits or actions, while attributing setbacks to external circumstances, other people, or luck, (2) a sense of permanence, encouraging them to perceive favorable events as permanent or enduring (i.e., "it will last"), while viewing negative events as temporary or fleeting (i.e., "this too shall pass"), and (3) a sense of pervasiveness, encouraging them to believe that a success elevates all aspects of life, while viewing a failure as isolated to a single, narrow situation.

Third, in the context of higher education, resilience refers to individuals' ability to bounce back from adversity and emerge stronger from having overcome negative events (Woods, 2018). Academics often need to bounce back from potentially overwhelming events (e.g., greatly increased responsibility and accountability). Nevertheless, they can increase their levels of resiliency; it is not how often they fail that is important, but they should wipe the slate clean and commence again with renewed focus each time, while attaining insight from setbacks and absorbing experience through failure. PHEIs can foster academics' resiliency are by (1) fostering supportive environments (colleagues, coordinators, deans) where academics know that significant others genuinely care, (2) cultivating an ethical, transparent, and inclusive organizational culture where operational excellence aligns with integrity, and (3) prioritizing professional development to enhance academic productivity within a collaborative, supportive, and community-driven work environment.

Fourth, self-efficacy is concerned with people's belief in their abilities to successfully achieve what they set out to, basically demonstrating their confidence in accomplishing specific tasks (Woods, 2018). High self-efficacy has a significant impact on academics' intention to assume challenging goals and commit to putting in the effort to achieve them. Those who really believe that they will get the desired promotion, fulfil the

demanding key performance indicators (KPIs), or create a truly innovative solution often have the mentally focus when the going gets tough. High self-efficacy enables academics to delve deep into their motivational reserves, achieving high performance that they did not expect. PHEIs can strengthen academics' self-efficacy via four approaches. First, they should encourage academics to highlight their previous successes, ideally those similar in nature to their current challenge; they should increase their awareness of personal success stories and appreciate them rather than focusing on negative events. Second, they should encourage academics to acknowledge others' success in spite of barriers, which fosters academics' self-belief in their own ability. Importantly, the more academics can identify with the role model, the stronger their sense of personal confidence will be. Third, PHEIs can underscore social persuasion to create conditions for academics to experience small successes, while helping them avoid the likelihood of early failures in more complex tasks. Fourth, they should help academics understand and reframe their physical and emotional responses in stressful situations; rather than perceiving anxiety as a sign that they would deliver a poor presentation, academics should interpret the same feeling as energizing.

5.2.3 SMART Goals, Conviction, Fortitude, and Positivity

First, to instill hope among staff, organizational leaders should help them set goals that move them toward desired outcomes (Coffey, 2020). PHEI leaders should ensure that the goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based (SMART) grounded on metrics (e.g., percentages, target dates), which allows academics to act on evidence of practice and not merely on memory. Further, academics should break down goals into smaller, more manageable steps. Those who have achieved a sub-step each time tend to have greater enthusiasm and motivation to continue. For each goal, they should formulate a second action plan and put as much energy into it as the first. Lastly, PHEI leaders should communicate high expectations for all academics, as high standards tend to raise the achievement standard for all.

Second, to increase the efficacy among staff, leaders should raise each individual's conviction about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute specific tasks (Coffey, 2020). PHEI leaders can improve academics' efficacy by encouraging them to put forth extensive effort; academics are likely to work toward goals that they are confident in fulfilling, thereby enhancing their job performance. To demonstrate efficacy, academics should refer to previous positive outcomes. While the present crisis is unlike anything they have experienced before, each academic has overcome obstacles in the past. They should outline the factors and traits that led to those past successes and find a way to celebrate them, even amid a big crisis. They can do this with video by attributing positive feedback to the moments that have yielded positive outcomes. Further, leaders should ensure that academics can openly discuss ideas and concerns without fear of repercussions, which encourages academics to request what they need to succeed. Besides, top management should spur leadership and ownership among academics by encouraging them to develop and align curriculum, problem-solve, and participate in peer observations without worrying that their authority will diminish as others' solidify. They should also highlight those of similar stances that have achieved the desired outcomes; academics who observe others' success will strengthen their own belief in their ability to achieve that same success. Lastly, leaders should demonstrate positivity by engaging in appropriate social persuasion and using positive language (e.g., I believe in you).

Third, to enhance resilience among staff, leaders should augment their fortitude or the capacity to make a comeback from adversity and grow stronger from overcoming negative events (Coffey, 2020). Academics need to enhance their ability to overcome negative events that are common in today's ever-evolving higher education landscape. PHEI leaders should emphasize that real change takes time; academics should expect things to improve gradually without sugar-coating issues or problems. They should demonstrate openness about the evolving nature of predicaments characterized by uncertainty. Further, academics can quickly sense deception, jeopardizing a leader's credibility, and diminishing trust within the organization. Therefore, PHEI leaders should succinctly state what information they have, what information they lack, and what steps that they are taking to gain more information. Lastly, they should underscore the core values of the institution in any way possible; reminding academics of the deeper meaning that will inspire them to become more resilient, besides increasing their desire to be supportive as team members. Overall, PHEI leaders should provide the scaffolding that academics need, as it provides the foundation for resilience to sprout, become established, and flourish.

Fourth, to promote optimism among staff, leaders should encourage them to reinforce the mental habit of focusing on the positive aspects of a situation and expecting favorable outcomes (Coffey, 2020). PHEI leaders should encourage academics to expect positive things to happen in the future, see a glass as half-full instead of half-empty, and treat hard times as solvable problems. They should help academics develop a strong belief in their ability to boost student success, trusting that students and parents will cooperate, while maintaining a high focus on learning. Moreover, they should ensure that academics trust their own professional skills to make a real difference in student performance, while believing in the good intentions and engagement of both students and parents, while driving genuine academic achievement. Additionally, PHEI leaders should encourage academics to be more specific about troubles (e.g., "I found this class particularly difficult to manage"), instead of making sweeping generalizations (e.g., "I'm just unable to deal with problematic students"). Moreover, they should allow academics to utilize reiterative, constant communication (e.g., email, instant messages, one-on-one conversations) or get more creative on their favorite communication software, which will project resilience into the future. Additionally, PHEI leaders should stay consistent with messaging during recovery from a crisis, not only amid the crisis itself. They should make decisions before they gather all of the information. While academics do not expect perfection, they do anticipate a course of action and decisiveness from their leaders. Instead of awaiting all the resources required, PHEI leaders should choose an option and course-correct as new knowledge appears, which will decrease anxiety among the academics as they wait for a verdict.

5.2.4 Online Leadership Training Program

In their study, Round et al. (2024) assessed the impact of an online leadership program on emerging leaders' psychological capital over six months. Training activities comprise (1) experiential learning to enhance resilience and efficacy, (2) alternative leadership role models to reduce identity tensions to enhance hope and optimism, and (3) support networks and peer mentoring to reinforce resilience and efficacy. PHEIs can implement these activities to enhance academics' psychological capital, focusing on developing their self-efficacy, resilience, hope, and optimism. First, to promote experiential learning among academics, PHEIs should (1) acknowledge the importance of equipping emerging leaders with the necessary skills for leadership, skills building, and experiential learning,

which is the cornerstone of the training program. PHEIs need to make decisions in terms of which skills are the most useful within their own context and prioritize them in skill building. They should decide their priorities holistically by considering the organizational context and challenges; for example, a PHEI undergoing a high degree of change may choose to reinforce academics with resilience and the skills required for motivating others. The most important leadership skills at PHEIs include (1) effective communication, (2) self-awareness, (3) effective team building, (4) resilience, (5) empowering and delegating, (6) creative problem solving, (7) conflict management, (8) motivating others, and (9) gaining power and influence. Skills building includes a session that revolves around knowledge building behaviors, personal skill assessments for reflection that reinforces experiential learning, and behavioral examples for modelling.

Second, alternative leadership role models can be employed to reduce identity tensions, while developing hope and optimism (Round et al., 2024). Mismatch between emerging leaders' perceptions of themselves and the overarching narrative of what a leader is can negatively affect their hope and optimism. Therefore, PHEIs need to provide positive (often alternative) role models who share some of the characteristics of the academics, for example, by focusing on the shared characteristics of gender and multicultural experience. Alternative leadership role models should act as guest speakers who can share these commonalities with a cohort of academics. While guest speakers often have some variation in terms of backgrounds, roles, and levels of experience, they should have experience across multiple cultural and geographic regions. Overall, guest speakers and their shared experiences should help academics to persevere toward their leadership development goals, and when necessary, redirecting their paths to achieve those goals to succeed (i.e., sustaining and growing hope). Employing alternative leadership role models helps academics make a positive attribution about succeeding as a leader now and in the future, which reflects optimism.

Third, support networks and peer mentoring are essential in enhancing resilience and efficacy (Round et al., 2024). PHEIs should connect academics within a supportive network of likeminded peers to help them proactively deal with the identity work struggles that leaders often experience, which helps them increase their resilience and efficacy. Creating a supportive network provides academics with the opportunities to articulate their unique challenges in a supportive environment, which helps them in overcoming challenges, while developing resilience. To encourage the development of a supportive network, academics should be divided into smaller, mixed discussion groups to allow them to connect more deeply with other leaders who may be experiencing similar challenges. Academics should be encouraged to meet virtually at least once a month to question and reflect on how leadership can be constructed in a way that is more closely aligned within the group. For example, they can discuss or reflect on (1) who inspire them as a leader and the reasons why they are inspiring to them, (2) the characteristics of a leader who have inspired to lead, and (3) the previous few weeks in which ways they have stepped into a leadership role. These reflection questions are fundamentally beneficial in allowing academics to understand their own leadership efficacy, while also encouraging them to describe the strategies on ways to develop their efficacy and resilience.

Fourth, program effectiveness should be assessed by tracking the extent to which trainees engage in their key leadership roles (Round et al., 2024). PHEIs should evaluate academics' psychological capital, including the extent to which they have efficacy, hope,

resilience, and optimism before and after the program. These measures provide an in-depth understanding of how the program relates to specific psychological capital dimensions. For example, a leadership intervention may be quite effective in raising academics' levels of self-efficacy or hope, which is key to persevering towards goals, but be less effective in raising other dimensions. Academics can be asked to complete a post-program survey to compare with the results of the pre-program survey. The surveys should have a quantitative section with closed-ended questions in which academics can rate on a scale for each question, besides a qualitative part with open-ended questions whereby they can provide comments in text. In the quantitative portion, questions related to leadership self-efficacy, motivation to lead, and leadership identity should be included to allow academics to rate the extent to which they feel confident and motivated about leading a team and, also, the extent to which they identify themselves as a leader based on established measurement scales. In the post-program survey, academics should also provide program feedback based on the engagement level with different content delivery modes (e.g., live sessions, recordings of live sessions, peer-mentoring sessions), besides different kinds of content (e.g., virtual skills workshops, guest speakers' sessions, peer-mentoring sessions). On the other hand, in the qualitative part of the pre-program survey, academics should outline their expectations for the leadership program, besides sharing the information in the peer-mentoring sessions. Articulating what they hope to achieve in a leadership development program not only encourages reflection on where they are in terms of their journey, but it also encourages them to take responsibility for the program outcomes. Lastly, in the post-program survey, academics should be asked to reflect on what is useful about the program in terms of psychological capital enhancement and how it can be improved.

5.2.5 Process-focused Strategies

Process-focused strategies can be adopted to help individuals interpret events and experiences with confidence, resilience, and self-efficacy. Employees who have confidence in performing their job well (i.e., have high efficacy) tend to have higher resilience. Self-efficacy development includes mastery and success experiences, vicarious learning and/or modeling, persuasion and/or positive feedback, and psychological and/or physiological arousal and wellbeing (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). Organizations can incorporate efficacy development into in-service training and mentoring relationships to increase self-efficacy, which can result in enhanced, proactive resiliency amongst staff. They can adopt reactive approaches to developing resilience by finding ways to be flexible as a reaction to adverse events (i.e., positive emotion, self-enhancement, attribution, hardiness).

First, individuals can increase their self-efficacy and resilience by focusing on positive emotions, grounded on Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). PHEIs can use this positive psychology framework that leverages positive emotions to augment academics' momentary thought-action repertoires, while developing enduring personal resources over time. The broadening effect increases academics' awareness that joy, interest, and contentment can open their minds to new ideas and possibilities. While joy sparks their urge to play, interest prompts them to explore and appreciate their surroundings. The broadening effect also enables academics to see the big picture; positivity helps them process global configurations rather than focusing only on narrow, localized details. On the other hand, the building effect enables academics to accumulate resources; fleeting moments of good feelings compound into lasting intellectual, psychological, social, and physical resources.

It fosters resilience by helping academics develop the resources that act as a buffer against stress, helping them bounce back from adversity. Lastly, it creates an upward spiral; enhanced resources promote more frequent positive emotions amongst academics, leading to continuous personal growth and flourishing.

Second, self-enhancement is another reactive approach to developing resilience; self-enhancing individuals are adaptive and generally better able to cope with stressful events, as they are confident in almost any situation, believing that they will almost always find a way to succeed (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). Self-enhancement strategies for academics involve active cognitive regulation, structured goal-setting, and effective time management to boost performance and personal growth. Academics can (1) set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals, for example, by defining targets for each research milestone, (2) practice active learning, concept mapping, or teaching concepts in their own words rather than passive re-reading, (3) manage time deliberately by structuring their schedule using the Pomodoro technique (25 minutes of focused work followed by a 5-minute break) to maintain mental freshness, (4) increase metacognitive awareness by monitoring their own cognitive processing, recognizing mental fatigue, and taking planned breaks to avoid cognitive overload, and (5) prioritize recovery by protecting time for physical health, adequate sleep, and mental recovery to sustain long-term academic resilience.

Third, individuals can use optimistic attribution strategies to augment their self-efficacy and resilience, which allows them to move past unpleasant events (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). Positive attribution increases academics' resilience by helping them develop an internal locus of control or the belief that they have control over the environment. Internality enables academics to emotionally dissociate from stressful situations, allowing them to adapt. To develop an internal locus of control, academics need to shift their focus from what happens to them toward the actions and responses that they can personally manage. They can (1) modify their language by using positive phrases (e.g., "I can" or "I have an alternative"), (2) employ empowering words (e.g., "I choose to" or "I decide to") to reclaim personal accountability, (3) focus on what they can control by separating controllable elements from external forces, such as other people's behavior or the weather, for example, by asking themselves what they can do about a situation right then instead of assigning blame or feeling like a victim, (4) solve small problems actively by tackling everyday issues step-by-step (e.g., improving their sleep routine or organizing a messy workspace), (5) acknowledge and crediting their own effort when positive results occur to reinforce their sense of agency, and (6) embrace and reframe failure by viewing setbacks as temporary learning curves rather than permanent damage, besides analyzing what went wrong and identifying one thing that they can improve next time.

Fourth, individuals can increase their psychological resilience by dedicating themselves to discovering a sense of purpose, trusting in their capacity to shape their environment and life circumstances, and maintaining that they can develop and evolve through both constructive and adverse life events (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). To increase academics' resilience to withstand stress, overcome obstacles, and stay committed to their goals, PHEIs should encourage them to (1) find personal value and deep interest in their subjects to maintain daily motivation (commitment), (2) believe that their actions directly influence their success rather than leaving results to chance (control), (3) view setbacks and difficult material as normal opportunities to grow rather than reasons to stop, (4) practice active recall by testing their memory and solving practice questions

instead of passively re-reading notes, which builds crucial mental toughness and retention, (5) reframe obstacles by training their brain to analyze roadblocks as puzzles to solve rather than personal failures, (6) build support networks by connecting with research partners, peers, and mentors to avoid isolation and share academic pressure, (7) manage time with discipline by breaking large projects into tiny, manageable daily tasks to prevent stress and burnout, and (8) prioritize recovery by scheduling regular physical rest, healthy meals, and mental breaks to sustain long-term energy.

5.2.6 Self-talk, Positive Tonality, and Growth Mindset

According to Tomasulo (2023), individuals can strengthen their psychological capital through self-talk, positive tonality, and a growth mindset. First, academics should engage in constructive self-talk by maintaining a positive internal dialogue and fostering self-belief during challenging periods. This practice can include daily affirmations, such as reminding themselves of their capacity to reach their objectives or maintaining focus on their immediate priorities. Besides, positive self-talk can be corrective statements/inner narrations made when something has gone wrong, which allows academics to challenge their perceptions and give them another way to scrutinize the situation. When applying positive self-talk, academics should avoid judging themselves. Instead of saying “that was an awful mistake,” they should say, “I know I can perform better next time,” which removes the sting of self-judgment. Overall, positive self-talk help instill empowerment and confidence among academics, while reminding them that they have the power to influence their own wellbeing. Second, academics can strengthen their mind by modifying their tonality when they speak or write. Volume, speed, or pitch can influence how a message is received; using positive tonality by speaking slower or with an upbeat inflection is more persuasive than speaking in a negative manner. Third, academics should develop a growth mindset to cultivate optimism and thrive on challenges by viewing failures as learning opportunities rather than as personal shortcomings or setbacks. Having a flexible mindset without rigidly adhering to a particular view of a situation helps them develop greater resilience during challenging times.

5.2.7 Psychological Capital Among Leaders

Psychological capital acts as the fuel for leaders to navigate disruption (Center for Creative Leadership, 2026). Leadership development at PHEIs should do more than just building skills amid persistent disruption. It can, and should, provide the psychological fuel that leaders need to remain effective when the environment is ambiguous, demanding, or fast-changing. Psychological capital is that energy that can be strengthened through leadership development, and it only grows when leaders experience the right mix of boosted self-awareness, meaningful challenge, and supportive conditions that help them turn insight into action. This growth is not always linear because it often includes a temporary dip as leaders internalize difficult feedback. However, with the right support, that setback becomes a turning point where leaders regain the agency, clarity, and confidence to act in new ways. Psychological capital is not just an individual phenomenon. While leadership sets the tone, organizational culture amplifies it. PHEIs should promote a culture that supports psychological capital by normalizing feedback, celebrating progress, and supporting recovery as much as performance, which multiplies the impact. High-performing PHEIs create environments where hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and realistic optimism gain momentum, flowing from leaders to their teams and beyond. However, developing psychological capital is

not about asking academics to muscle through unhealthy workloads or toxic cultures. Leadership resilience and optimism can only reach their full potential when they are paired with systemic support, psychological safety at work, and thoughtful boundaries. It is not the primary goal for PHEIs to create leaders who can endure anything, but to cultivate the inner resources that leaders need to face hard realities, identify authentic solutions, and inspire a future that benefits everyone.

Psychological capital among leaders can be developed through coaching, small interventions, while regarding it as a psychological fuel (Center for Creative Leadership, 2026). First, coaching is an effective way for PHEI leaders to get intentional support, offering a personalized way for them to address their challenges and engage in goal-achieving behaviors. Even highly experienced leaders who engage in executive coaching services report positive improvements in psychological capital. Coaching helps PHEI leaders develop the self-awareness and internal work required for more effective leadership, while replenishing their energy to constantly practice effective leadership behaviors. Moreover, bite-sized interventions can enhance leaders' psychological capital, which is not only influenced by lengthy, immersive in-person leadership development. PHEI leaders' psychological capital can be strengthened through short, targeted online leadership training experiences, especially when the learning is tied to real work challenges. An online training course can be especially helpful when built around key leadership challenges, which allows PHEI leaders to anchor their personalized reflections and opportunities for practice in the real world. Importantly, PHEI leaders bring into their roles different strengths and needs related to their own psychological resources, which underscores the importance of establishing the essential psychological conditions for all leaders to sustain their impact.

5.3 Final Thought

The current study reflects a realistic context trade-off. While the data collection method provides a highly contextualized snapshot of an accessible group of academics in East Malaysia, it inherently introduces sampling and selection bias. Academics who are most accessible or most passionate about psychological capital will be overrepresented; therefore, generalizability of findings to a broader population is limited. To reduce sampling and selection bias, future research should use a random sampling method, besides carefully defining the target population before data collection begins. For example, every member of the target population should be given an equal, independent chance of selection using a random number generator. Convenience sampling should be avoided because it selects participants simply because they are easy to reach, which excludes hard-to-access groups in rural areas. Further, the sample size of underrepresented groups should be increased; subsequently, statistical weights should be used to match their true population proportions. Lastly, to improve response rates, the questionnaire should be more precise and accessible to prevent non-response bias, while reminders should be sent to capture opinions from busy or reluctant participants.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study has strictly adhered to all ethical procedures involving the use of human subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents who were ascertained of their anonymity, with their responses kept strictly confidential. They were also

informed that the study was of low risk and that they could stop participating any time without any repercussions.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no potential conflict of interest regarding this study in terms of the research or publication of this article.

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