

The Influence of Work-Life Balance on Perceived Stress Among Part-Time Students

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Abstract

Part-time students face stress from juggling work, family, and studies, limited campus involvement, extended graduation time, financial issues, and job stability. Meanwhile, work-life balance is critical for reducing stress. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between work-life balance and perceived stress among part-time students. This study employed a quantitative and cross-sectional design. The results indicated that most students reported low levels of perceived stress, with a strong negative correlation between work-life balance and perceived stress. The results suggest that improving work-life balance can have a significant impact on reducing perceived stress. Furthermore, our regression analysis revealed that perceived stress explained approximately perceived stress, with a strong negative slope indicating that increasing perceived stress is associated with decreasing work-life balance. The findings highlight the importance of work-life balance in mitigating stress among part-time students. The study's implications suggest that educational institutions and employers can promote work-life balance to reduce perceived stress among students, ultimately improving overall well-being.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Part-time students, Stress

Abstrak

Pelajar separuh masa menghadapi tekanan akibat perlu mengimbangi kerja, keluarga, dan pengajian; penglibatan terhad dalam aktiviti kampus; tempoh pengajian yang lebih lama; masalah kewangan; dan kestabilan pekerjaan. Dalam masa yang sama, keseimbangan antara kerja dan kehidupan adalah penting untuk mengurangkan tekanan. Oleh itu, kajian ini dijalankan untuk menyiasat hubungan antara keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan dan tekanan yang dirasakan dalam kalangan pelajar separuh masa. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kuantitatif dan rentas masa. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan pelajar melaporkan tahap tekanan yang rendah, dengan korelasi negatif yang kuat antara keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan dan tekanan yang dirasakan. Dapatan ini mencadangkan bahawa penambahbaikan dalam keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan boleh memberikan impak yang signifikan dalam mengurangkan tekanan yang dirasakan. Selain itu, analisis regresi menunjukkan bahawa tekanan yang dirasakan menerangkan sebahagian besar variasi dalam keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan, dengan cerun negatif yang kuat yang menunjukkan bahawa peningkatan tekanan yang dirasakan berkait rapat dengan penurunan keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan. Penemuan ini menekankan kepentingan keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan dalam mengurangkan tekanan dalam kalangan pelajar separuh masa. Implikasi kajian mencadangkan bahawa institusi pendidikan dan majikan boleh memainkan peranan dalam mempromosikan keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan bagi mengurangkan tekanan yang dirasakan oleh pelajar, seterusnya meningkatkan kesejahteraan keseluruhan.

Kata Kunci: Keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan, Pelajar separuh masa, Tekanan

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Perceived stress is the subjective experience of an individual's response to a situation or event that they perceive as threatening or overwhelming. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), perceived stress is the degree to which an individual perceives situations as demanding their coping resources and jeopardizing their well-being. This feeling of being overwhelmed, anxious, or unable to cope can stem from various factors such as workload, deadlines, finances, or personal responsibilities (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). To manage perceived stress, individuals can use strategies such as time management, communication with employers or professors, seeking advice from colleagues or mentors, and negotiating flexible scheduling options (Kossek & Thompson, 2012; Eby & Allen, 2013). Additionally, self-care practices like exercise, healthy eating, meditation, and therapy (Harris et al., 2006; Hofmann et al., 2010; Cuijpers et al., 2016) can promote physical and mental health. A support network of friends, family, or a support group also found to be effective in overcoming stress (Larson et al., 2018).

Work-life balance (WLB) is a topic that has garnered much attention in recent years, as it is essential for sustaining general well-being and mitigating stress. According to Demerouti & Bakker (2018), work-life balance is the equilibrium between an individual's personal and professional life. Kossek and Thompson (2012) define it as a multidimensional with objective and subjective components. An imbalance between work and personal life can elevate stress levels, decreased job and life satisfaction, and reduced psychological well-being (Wand

& Shi, 2019; Calvo, Galvez & Prado, 2019). Poor work-life balance can result in feelings of overwhelm, exhaustion, and burnout, which can be detrimental to physical and mental health.

Working students are a vulnerable group to stress due to the challenges of balancing job and academic responsibilities, leading to increased workload, time constraints, financial strain, and work-family conflicts (Kwon, 2018). According to a survey conducted by the Malaysian Association of Human Resource (MAHRC) in 2019, 57% of working adults in Malaysia who were pursuing part-time studies reported experiencing stress due to balancing their work and academic commitments. This indicates that managing work and study demands simultaneously might be a considerable source of stress for some Malaysian working students. Despite these challenges, most of the time, individuals work full- or part-time while continuing their studies to improve their job prospects, increase their incomes, or learn new skills. This practice is spreading as people strive to balance their work and academic ambitions. Chen and Huang (2019) define part-time study for employees as taking academic courses while working, emphasizing their dual roles. According to Abada, Hou, and Ram (2019), these people value work-life balance, time management, and self-care, frequently scheduling classes outside of work hours, employing remote learning, and seeking help from family and friends. To alleviate stress and enhance contentment, employment and education must be prioritized, scheduled, and supported. Chen and Chang (2018) underline the importance of higher education institutions in helping these students.

The research gap in this area is that while there is a considerable amount of literature on work-life balance and perceived stress among employees, there is limited research specifically focused on employees who are also pursuing part-time studies. This study seeks to examine the level of perceived stress among part-time students. A study by Chen and Chang (2018) found that workload, job satisfaction, and academic performance were significantly related to perceived stress among part-time working students in Taiwan (Chen & Chang, 2018). However, this study did not examine the influence between work-life balance and perceived stress among these individuals. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by investigating the correlation between work-life balance and perceived stress and analyze the influence of work-life balance on perceived stress among employees who are also pursuing part-time studies. The findings will shed light on the connection between perceived stress levels and work-life balance among part-time students, and to understand whether improving work-life balance can lead to a reduction in stress levels.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived stress refers to an individual's subjective experience of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It highlights the significance of how a person perceives stressors in determining their impact on health and well-being. When individuals perceive stress as overwhelming, they are more likely to experience negative physical and psychological outcomes, such as increased heart rate, blood pressure, obesity, cortisol levels, as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression (Cohen & Janicki-Deverts, 2009; Kamarck et al., 2021). However, individuals with better coping resources are better equipped to manage stress and experience fewer negative health outcomes. Interventions aimed at reducing perceived stress and improving coping resources are effective in improving health outcomes and well-being. As hypothesis in this study, perceived stress and work-life balance are strongly correlated negatively.

Significant changes have occurred in the modern workplace, which has raised expectations and demand on workers. Increased stress and burnout may result from the blurring of the lines between work and personal life. By providing resources and assistance, encouraging a culture of wellness and self-care, and giving flexible work schedules, employers could play a vital role in fostering work-life balance (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). This is critical for both individuals and enterprises because it allows employees to strike a better work-life balance. Employers who promote work-life balance can help lower their workers' perceived stress, resulting in a more positive work environment and better overall well-being. Work-life balance (WLB) is critical to employee well-being and corporate effectiveness. Tang et al., (2021) found that interventions that promote WLB are effective in improving perceived stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In addition, previous study also demonstrated that employees with better WLB experience lower levels of burnout, higher job satisfaction, and better mental health outcomes (Greenhaus et al., 2011). In this context, as hypothesis suggests that perceived stress is strongly influenced by work-life balance among part-time students. This means that students who have better work-life balance experienced lower levels of perceived stress.

The literature suggests that work-life balance has a significant influence on perceived stress among employees with part-time studies. Poor WLB is associated with higher levels of perceived stress, and academic self-efficacy mediates this relationship (Li et al., 2021). Gender also moderates the relationship between WLB and perceived stress, with women being more sensitive to poor WLB than men but benefiting more from good WLB (Zhang et al., 2021).

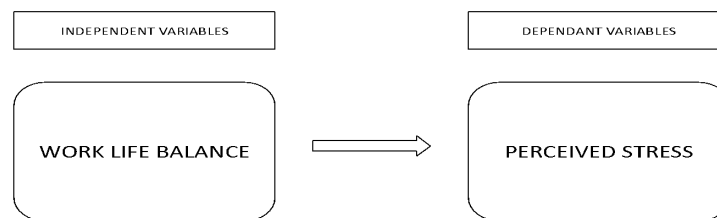


Figure 1 Research framework

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of work-life balance and perceived stress. The arrows from the independent variable to the dependent variable show that work-life balance serves as the predictor for perceived stress.

■3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional design, collecting data at one point in time. It also uses a correlational design to examine the relationship between work-life balance and perceived stress. The study employs a hypothesis-testing approach to measure the influence of work-life balance on perceived stress among part-time students.

3.2 Sampling

The study employed a convenience sampling approach, which Based on Krejcie and Morgan (1974), a well-known article in the field of statistics that provides a formula for determining the sample size required for a study. The formula depends on the population size, the required level of confidence, and the intended margin of error. Using the Krejcie and Morgan table, for a population size of 4861 students, a confidence level of 95%, and an acceptable level of error of 5%, the recommended sample size is 384 part-time students. Hence, 384 part-time students to make sure that the results are representative of the population while still being practical to implement.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Perceived Stress Scale

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a self-report questionnaire that assesses how stressful individuals perceive their life situations. Developed in the 1970s by Dr. Sheldon Cohen, a psychologist at Carnegie Mellon University and it has become a widely used tool in research and clinical practice. The 10-item scale asks respondents to rate how often they experience certain stressful situations, from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). A recent meta-analysis by Smith and Zimmerman (2010) reported a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.84 for the original 10-item version of the PSS, indicating that the items in the scale are highly internally consistent and reliable. The total score ranges from 0 to 50, with higher scores show higher levels of perceived stress. The PSS has been used to assess stress levels in various populations, including those with chronic illnesses, caregivers, and employees in high-stress occupations, and can also be used as an outcome measure in interventions aimed at reducing stress.

3.3.2 Work life balance

The questionnaire used in this study was developed by Vinitha and Rangarajan (2019) to investigate work-life balance among college students with part-time jobs, specifically in arts and science colleges in Chennai. The 21-item questionnaire covered various aspects of work-life balance, including personal time management, academic performance, work-related stress, and support networks. The items were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). Through factor analysis, the 21 items were grouped into 7 key factors that are important for understanding work-life balance among this population. The Cronbach's alpha value for the questionnaire is 0.744, indicating a good degree of internal consistency.

3.4 Procedure

The study will collect data through an online survey using Google Forms and distribute it through WhatsApp, email and social media. Participants will be recruited through convenience sampling and will be asked to provide consent before taking the survey. The survey will take 15-20 minutes to complete and will collect information on work-life balance, perceived stress levels, and demographic data. The data will be analyzed using statistical software and reported in aggregate form to protect individual privacy.

3.5 Data Analysis

The study will use statistical analysis software SPSS version 26.00 to analyze the data. Both descriptive and inferential statistics will be used to examine the results. Descriptive statistics will summarize the characteristics of the data, such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution. Inferential statistics will be used to conclude about the population based on the sample data.

The study utilized descriptive analysis to examine demographic data, including age, academic level, and work-life balance scores, and to describe the distribution of categorical variables among part-time students. Besides, the Spearman correlation was employed to examine the association between work-life balance and reported stress levels. Additionally, regression analysis was used to examine the impact of work-life balance on reported stress levels, controlling for other variables such as age, academic level, and employment status.

■4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Objective 1 – To Examine The Level Of Perceived Stress Among Part-Time Student

The first objective is to identify the level of perceived stress among part-time students. The data collected is computed using descriptive analysis. A majority of students (68.5%) exhibit low levels of perceived stress, as indicated by their scores on the 10-item Perceive Stress Scale (PSS). Also, 31.5% of the students belong to moderate level, and none of them have a high level of perceived stress. Table 1 illustrates level of perceive stress.

Table 1 Level of Perceived Stress

Total Mean Score	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Low	267	68.5
Moderate	123	31.5
High	-	-

4.2 Objective 2 – To Examine The Correlation Between Work-Life Balance And Perceived Stress Among Part-Time Student

The second aims is to investigate the relationship between perceived stress and work-life balance. among part-time students. A Spearman's correlation coefficient was computed to evaluate the relationship between work-life balance and perceived stress. ased on Table 2, there was a strong negative significant relationship between work life balance and perceive stress, $r_s (390 - 2) = -.947$, $P = <.001$. In other words, as work life balance increases, perceive stress decreases.

Table 2 Correlation of Work life balance and Perceived Stress

Variable	Work life balance	
	r	p
Perceived stress	-.947**	.000

Note . *p<.01, **p<.05

Objective 3 - To examine the influence of work-life balance on perceived stress among part-time student

The third objective of this study is to investigate the influence of work-life balance on perceived stress among part-time students. Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate how work life balance could predict the perceived stress. Based on Table 3, a significant regression was .000 found ($F (1, 388) = 1940.39$, $p = .000$). The R^2 was .833, indicating that work-life balance explained approximately 83.3% of the variance in perceived stress. In addition, the results indicated that for each one of the unit increase in work-life balance, the predicted perceived stress decreased by -.950 unit of perceived stress. Confidence intervals indicated that we can be 95% certain that the slope to predict perceived stress from work life balance is between -.993 to -.908.

Table 3 Regression of Work life balance and Perceived Stress

Variable	Work life balance	
	β	p
Perceived stress	-.950	.000*
R	.913	
R^2	.833	
F	1940.39	

Note . *p < .05

■5.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study invite a critical reconsideration of prevailing assumptions about the stress levels of part-time students. Much of the existing literature portrays part-time study as inherently stressful. For example, Simons et al. (2018) reported that part-time students often experience heightened stress due to competing academic and work demands. However, our results suggest a more nuanced reality, raising questions about whether prior studies may have overgeneralized the part-time student population. It is possible that differences in demographic and employment profiles such as full-time workers pursuing part-time studies versus full-time students engaged in part-time work contribute to divergent stress outcomes. This distinction challenges the tendency to treat "part-time students" as a homogeneous category in stress-related research.

From a theoretical standpoint, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) provides a useful interpretive lens. Part-time students navigate multiple microsystems such as workplace, family, and education, which interact to shape psychological outcomes. The extent to which stress is mitigated may depend not only on individual coping skills (Jenkins et al., 2019) but also on structural supports embedded within these systems. This perspective suggests that stress should not be understood solely as an individual-level challenge but as a relational construct influenced by contextual supports and constraints. If stress is produced at the systemic level, then interventions must extend beyond resilience training to include workplace flexibility, family support mechanisms, and institutional policies tailored to adult learners.

The strong negative correlation between work-life balance and perceived stress aligns with established research (Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Nasurdin et al., 2018) and further underscores the structural dimension of this issue. Poor work-life balance has been linked to burnout, dissatisfaction, and mental health challenges (Demerouti et al., 2014). However, framing stress merely as an individual's failure to manage time obscures the role of organizational practices and social expectations. Employers who fail to provide flexible arrangements indirectly intensify stress, while universities that do not adapt teaching delivery methods for part-time learners risk reinforcing inequities. This reframing positions stress not only as a psychological construct but also as a social phenomenon shaped by institutional design.

Cultural context adds another critical dimension. In collectivist societies such as Malaysia, strong familial and community networks may buffer against stress in ways that Western, individualistic contexts do not account for (Nasurdin et al., 2018). Thus, universalizing Western-centric findings risks misrepresenting the lived realities of non-Western students. This highlights the need for more cross-cultural comparative research to disentangle how cultural norms, support systems, and community values interact with individual stress trajectories. Practically, these insights point to important implications for multiple stakeholders. Universities should reframe their role from mere education providers to active facilitators of student well-being by offering flexible coursework delivery, peer-support initiatives, and mental health resources. Employers, meanwhile, must recognize that supporting employees' educational pursuits through job sharing, telecommuting, or wellness initiatives (Kalliath & Brough, 2008) is not only a moral obligation but also a strategic investment in human capital. Policymakers should critically examine whether higher education frameworks adequately reflect the realities of lifelong learners navigating multiple roles.

In summary, this study contributes to a broader theoretical and practical conversation: stress among part-time students is not inevitable but contingent on ecological supports, institutional structures, and cultural context. Future research should move beyond descriptive reporting to critically examine how systemic conditions enable or constrain students' capacity to thrive. Longitudinal designs, policy-focused evaluations, and cross-cultural studies could provide more comprehensive insights into how part-time students manage stress within diverse contexts.

5.1 Limitations and Recommendation

The study has limitations in its scope, design, and methodology. The study only examined the relationship between two variables, work-life balance and perceived stress, which may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between multiple variables that influence perceived stress. Additionally, the study only examined the relationship at a single point in time, rather than examining longitudinal changes over time. The study used convenience sampling, which can lead to biased findings and issues with generalizability. The sample may be skewed towards students who are more easily accessible or available, leading to an overrepresentation of certain subgroups or demographics. Furthermore, the study may have been limited by time constraints, resulting in a superficial analysis of the variables rather than a more in-depth examination of the complex relationships between work-life balance and perceived stress.

To improve the study, researchers can take a more comprehensive approach. By conducting a thorough review of existing literature, they are able to pinpoint potential moderators and confounding factors that could affect the connection between perceived stress and work-life balance. This can help to provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between multiple variables. To improve the sampling design, future researchers are recommended to use methods such as random or stratified sampling to guarantee that the sample accurately reflects the greater number of students who attend classes part-time. Additionally, analyzing the data to identify potential sources of bias and adjusting for these factors can help to increase the validity of the findings. To address time constraints, researchers can plan a longer study duration, collecting data at multiple points in time, to capture changes in work-life balance and perceived stress over time. This can help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these variables change over time and how they are influenced by other factors.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the perceived stress levels of part-time students, as well as the relationship between stress and work-life balance. The findings revealed that, contrary to some earlier research (e.g., Simons et al., 2018), many part-time students reported relatively low levels of perceived stress. Factors such as maturity, age, marital status, and flexible employment arrangements appeared to buffer stress and enhance coping, supporting arguments by Jenkins et al. (2019) that effective time management and prioritization skills can mitigate psychological strain.

At the same time, the study established a strong negative relationship between work-life balance and perceived stress, confirming the propositions of Kalliath and Brough (2008), Nasurdin et al. (2018), and Demerouti et al. (2014). In practical terms, students who achieved a healthier balance between academic, work, and personal responsibilities were less likely to experience stress, while poor balance was linked to higher levels of strain, burnout, and dissatisfaction. This reinforces the view that work-life balance functions as a critical predictor of stress and well-being, particularly among non-traditional student groups.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the individual level. Employers can play an important role in reducing stress among part-time students by introducing flexible work arrangements such as telecommuting, job-sharing, or compressed schedules, while educational institutions can provide flexible course delivery, academic support services, and stress management training. Policymakers should also consider strategies to support lifelong learning by creating structures that facilitate the integration of work, education, and family responsibilities. In line with Luborsky et al. (2020) and Hart et al. (2019), this study underscores that a holistic approach—combining organizational, institutional, and personal supports—is needed to foster resilience and well-being.

Despite these contributions, the study is not without limitations. Its cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, and the findings may not generalize across cultural contexts or student populations. Future research should therefore adopt longitudinal and cross-cultural approaches to better understand how stress and work-life balance interact over time and in different environments.

In conclusion, this study highlights the significance of work-life balance as a determinant of perceived stress among part-time students. By prioritizing policies and interventions that enhance work-life balance, stakeholders can promote not only academic success but also the overall psychological well-being of students who are managing multiple life roles.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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